

WILDLIFE TRAVEL

26th April to 3rd May 2020 (1 week)



ESTONIA

Easy birding of the Baltic spring

"very welcoming"

"a success! I enjoyed the abundance of wildlife"

Estonia 2019

A week on the Baltic, during the peak of the north-bound bird migration.

This holiday is timed to catch the best of the north-bound bird migration, through one of the busiest flyways in Europe. Thousands of geese, cranes, sea ducks, waders and passerines head north and east along the Estonian coastline, stopping to feed in the sheltered bays and coastal forests. The summer visitors will be arriving to breed in Estonia's forests and marshes. Birds like Thrush Nightingale, Citrine Wagtail, Common Rosefinch and Icterine Warblers should all be arriving and setting up territories.

As well as the returning and north-bound migrants, we will also be looking for some of the resident bird species of the extensive forests and wetlands of Estonia. All nine species of northern Europe's woodpeckers will be drumming and calling; quietly driving the forest tracks may bring us encounters with Capercaillie and Hazel Grouse; White-tailed Eagles hunt along the coastal wetlands; and we will listen out for calling owls in the evenings. We will visit a Black Grouse lek, and (conditions permitting) spend an evening at the display grounds of Great Snipe, where we will try to catch a glimpse of their bizarre courtship dance at dusk.

We will also be paying attention to the mammals of Estonia: Elk feed on the meadows of Matsalu National Park, where European Beavers are common amongst the wooded waterways, while Grey Seal and Baltic Ringed Seals haul out at favoured spots around Hiiumaa island.

Our holiday ends with a guided tour of the attractive medieval city of Tallinn, a UNESCO World Heritage site.



Price
£1770

Single Room Supplement
£140

Full board

Day 1 flight to Tallinn
Day 2 Põõsaspea
Day 3 Matsalu
Day 4 Hiiumaa Island
Day 5 travel south
Day 6 Soomaa peat bog
Day 7 Pikla fish ponds
Day 8 Tallinn city tour.
return to UK

Leaders
Michael Symes

Group size
min 6, max 14
spring bird migration,
Black Grouse lek

Wildlife and culture holidays



Our profits are donated to the **Wildlife Trusts**



Focus of interest

This is one of our 'Easy birding and wildlife' trips which means that the itinerary is based mainly on birds and/or other animals (rather than plants or general wildlife) and this also reflects the knowledge of the leaders and guides. However, as with all of our trips, the pace is comfortable with time to enjoy other aspects of the natural history, rather than rushing from one place to another for specific species.



ITINERARY

Please note that the itinerary may be changed to suit the weather or other practicalities or at the discretion of the leaders.

Day 1 Our flight takes us to Tallinn from where we travel westwards to the coastal town of Haapsalu and the nearby **Matsalu National Park**, an area of extensive coastal meadows and floodplain forest and wetlands. Depending on what time we arrive, we may pay our first visit to the floodplain meadows of the National Park, where Elk emerge from the woodlands in the evening. o/n Haapsalu

Day 2 An early start will see us visiting a Black Grouse lekking ground: in these open fields, tens of males gather to display and fight for the attention of the females.

Moving on, we will spend the morning visiting the Põõsaspea Peninsula, one of the best spots in Estonia to observe the **migration of Arctic waterfowl**, passerine and raptors as they make their way north up to Finland and Arctic Russia. After lunch, we head to Silma reserve, a complex of coastal meadows, lagoons and reedbeds where Bearded Tits, Slavonian Grebes, Little Gull and Black Tern will be amongst our targets. o/n Haapsalu

Day 3 Today will be spent exploring the meadows and marshes of Matsalu. From the viewing towers, we will watch cranes and geese gather before their last push on to the north, paying particular attention to the goose flocks just in case the rare Lesser White-fronted Goose is present. Wildfowl court in the shallows with north-bound waders in smart breeding plumage feeding along the shore line, including plenty of colourful Ruff.

This evening we will take a boat trip on the Kasari River, where we hope to see both Daubenton's and Pond Bats hawking low over the water and where the antics of the local European Beavers should entertain us before we return for a late dinner. o/n Haapsalu

Day 4 We take a day trip across to Hiiumaa island. From the ferry, we will look out for migrating seaducks: Common and Velvet Scoters and Long-tailed Duck sometimes pass in enormous numbers. These waters are also home to the southernmost population of the otherwise-Arctic-dwelling **Ringed Seal**, and with a little luck we may catch a sight of one bobbing about in the water.

We will visit Käina Bay, with its numerous birdwatching towers. The shallow bay is a great feeding and nesting spot for various wildfowl and waders, which in turn may draw in a passing White-tailed Eagle. o/n Haapsalu



Day 5 We bid farewell to Haapsalu and drive south towards the Soomaa National Park. Along the way we will spend time in good habitats for Lesser Spotted Eagle and Montagu's Harriers. Soomaa includes the largest intact peat bog system in Europe, along with areas of forest, and it is here that we will look for Pygmy and Ural Owls this evening. o/n Soomaa

Day 6 We will spend today exploring the bogs and marshes of Soomaa, home to nesting Wood Sandpiper, Golden Plover, Whimbrel, Whooper Swans and Common Cranes. At our feet we will find Cranberry, Bog Bilberry, Cloudberry and the sweetly smelling Labrador Tea. A system of boardwalks and raised towers take us through this threatened habitat. The forests are home to Hazel Grouse and Capercaillie, Three-toed and White-backed Woodpeckers, and we will spend some time trying to catch up with them all. o/n Soomaa.

Day 7 We will head west a little way today, to visit the area of Pikla. Here we will listen for booming Bitterns, reeling Savi's Warbler and the wooden song of Thrush Nightingale. Penduline Tits nest amongst the reeds and willows, while other migrants in the trees and marshes could include the smart Citrine Wagtail, something of a local speciality.

In the evening, local conditions permitting, we will visit the display grounds of the Great Snipe. These shy birds gather together to lek, the males performing a strange chest-puffing, wing-flapping display and clicking song as dusk falls, and we will do our best to be able to watch and/or listen to the display before it gets too dark. o/n Soomaa.

Day 8 After breakfast we drive back north, to Tallinn for a guided tour of the well-preserved medieval town, on the UNESCO World Heritage list. We will have lunch in the old town, before making our way to the airport for our flight home.

Accommodation, meals, travel and weather

All rooms have en-suite facilities. Meals provided during the stay will have an emphasis on local cuisine. Lunches will be a mixture of picnics and café/restaurants. Requests for special diets can be accommodated.

Transport will be by small bus or smaller 'people carrier'-type vehicles if necessary. The boat trip is by punt-like open, traditional wooden fishing boat.

The weather should be spring like, between 5 and 15 degrees, although significantly colder or warmer conditions are always a possibility, along with rain, wind or even snow.

Health and fitness

On most days, we are out and about for much of the day, albeit walking a relatively slow pace and making several stops each day. It is necessary to walk on rougher ground and up some **slopes**, although **none of the walking is strenuous**. Walking boots are essential.

There are steps at our hotels, with no lift, as well as up/down into the vehicles and boats. One or two early starts and/or late finishes may be necessary, to maximise our chances of seeing the special wildlife that we have come to Estonia to enjoy.



Leaders

Mike Symes is an excellent all-round naturalist and professional ecologist who has worked for Devon Wildlife Trust for over fourteen years. Mike has led two previous Wildlife Travel holidays to Estonia, as well as previous trips to the Serengeti, Danube Delta and his home county of Devon. His enthusiasm for all aspects of natural history and his keenness to share this knowledge with others will help to ensure that you enjoy a wonderful holiday.

Our leader will be joined by local guides from **NatourEst**, and between them, our guides and leader will provide you with an excellent introduction to the wildlife of Estonia and ensure you have a relaxing, enjoyable holiday.

Flights

The group flights are with Easyjet from London Gatwick. Flight times for spring 2020 aren't yet available, but we expect them to be similar to 2019 times, as follows:

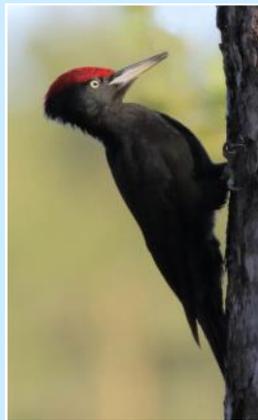
26th April Depart London Gatwick 12.10, arrive Tallinn 17.00
3rd May Depart Tallinn 17.35, arrive London Gatwick 18.35

Estonia is 2 hours ahead of the UK

It is also possible to travel to Tallinn from Manchester, flying with Lufthansa via Frankfurt. Ask us for details and costs.

Passport and visas

You must have a valid passport for this trip (recommended valid for at least 6 months after the end of the holiday). Visas are not required by holders of British and European Union Passports. For holders of other passports it is essential that you check with the Estonian embassy or consulate and obtain the necessary documents prior to travel.



TO BOOK

Contact us to check availability and reserve a place. Complete the Booking Form and send to Sunvil Holidays (CAA-ATOL Licence 808, ABTA V6218), our tour operator, with your deposit. All details about booking are given in the Booking Pack.

DEPOSIT £500 PER PERSON, BALANCE DUE BY 25/01/2020
SEE GENERAL INFORMATION LEAFLET ON HOW TO BOOK

INCLUDED: Return flight to Estonia from Gatwick. Local transport as specified in itinerary, including entry fees. Boat trips to Hiiumaa and Kasari River. 7 nights accommodation, all meals. Services of leaders and guides.

NOT INCLUDED: Refreshments. Gratuities. Insurance. Entry to optional tourist sites.

WILDLIFE TRAVEL

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