

WILDLIFE TRAVEL

22nd to 29th September 2017 (1 week)

ESTONIA

mammals, birds and autumn migration



"impressive landscapes, with knowledgeable leaders..."

huge numbers of migrating birds"

Estonia 2015

A week on the Baltic, during the peak of the south-bound bird migration, with a focus on Estonia's large mammals.

Estonia is home to some of the healthiest populations of large mammals in Europe, with an estimated 700 Brown Bears, 200 Wolves and 600 Eurasian Lynx, 12,000 Elk and the southern-most population of Ringed Seals in the world.

This holiday is timed to catch the best of the south-bound bird migration, with thousands of Common Crane passing through, geese arriving to spend the winter and large number of sea ducks and passerines moving along the coast. As well as the southbound migrants, we will also be looking for some of the resident bird species of the extensive forests and wetlands of Estonia: woodpeckers could include White-backed and Black Woodpecker, quietly driving the forest tracks may bring us encounters with Capercaillie, Black Grouse and Hazel Hen, White-tailed Eagles and Hen Harrier hunt along the coastal wetlands and we will listen out for calling owls in the evenings.

As well as the birds, we will be keeping our eyes and ears peeled for some of the mammals of the country. This is the peak of the Elk rut, with animals gathering at their favoured sites to fight for mates; wolves are out and about teaching their young to hunt, and we will try to hear them howling as night falls; in the forests near the Russian border we will look for bear footprints; and the week includes a boat trip to look for Baltic Ringed Seals as they haul out at their favoured spots around Hiiumaa island.

On our last day, we will pay a visit to the attractive medieval city of Tallinn.



Price
£1675

Single Room Supplement
£130

Full board

- Day 1** flight to Tallinn
- Day 2** Lahemaa.
- Day 3** Käsnu Peninsula
- Day 4** Matsalu
- Day 5** Hiiumaa Island
- Day 6** Spithami. Leidissoo
- Day 7** Marimetsa Bog
- Day 8** Tallinn city tour. return to UK

Leaders
Mike Russell
and local guides

bird migration,
large mammals

Wildlife and culture holidays



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



Focus of interest

The main focus of this holiday will be the birds and larger mammals of northern Europe. As well as the migration of cranes and geese, we will be hoping to find grouse and woodpeckers, listening for owls and looking for tracks and signs of the mammals. We should have a very good chance of some memorable sightings of Elk, Ringed Seal and other mammals. Depending on local conditions, we may also have the chance to go out listening for howling wolves during our trip.

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 Friday 22nd Our flight takes us to Tallinn from where we travel north east to **Lahemaa National Park**, an area of extensive forest and peat bogs, beautiful coastline, scenic rivers and manor parkland. Our base for the next 3 days is Vilhula Manor, an historic estate now converted to a very comfortable hotel, standing in old parkland.

Day 2 Saturday 23rd This morning we will explore the manor parklands at Vilhula and nearby Palmse, where Middle Spotted Woodpecker, Hawfinch and the lovely white-headed form of Long-tailed Tit will be amongst our target species.

After lunch, we will drive to the **Alutaguse** region, the biggest tract of forest in Estonia. Here we will spend some time looking for forest birds, hoping to find Capercaillie at the roadside as well as looking (and listening) for tracks and signs from two of Europe's big predators: Brown Bear and Wolf.

Day 3 Sunday 24th Today we will explore the forests of the Lahemaa and the Käsmu Peninsula, a beautiful coastline of ancient pines and erratic boulders, where we will look for sea duck, White-tailed Eagle and a variety of woodpeckers, as well as tracks and signs of the healthy local populations of European Beaver and Wild Boar. The forests are also home to good numbers of both Red Squirrel and Pine Marten, both of which may cross our path as we quietly walk the forest trails.

We will keep our ears peeled for the dog whistle call of the male Hazel Grouse, as he feeds high in the birch trees, and for the tapping of woodpeckers: both White-backed and Three-toed Woodpecker are present in these forests, although it may take some searching to track them down.

In the evening we will visit the historical ship-building village of **Käsmu** and its eccentric local museum, where we will get an entertaining overview of the area's maritime history, and a superb dinner of barbequed local salmon. o/n Vilhula Manor



Day 4 Monday 25th Today we bid farewell to Lahemaa and drive across to western Estonia and the extensive coastal meadows and floodplain forest and wetlands of **Matsalu National Park**. Here huge flocks of Common Crane and several species of geese gather as they head south for the winter, while this is also the time of **the Elk rut**, with large groups gathering on Matsalu's meadows. Our base will be a hotel in the coastal town of Haapsalu, in the Laine Spa hotel overlooking the bay. o/n Haapsalu

Day 5 Tuesday 26th Today we take a day trip out to Hiiumaa island, from where we will take a boat around a series of islets where the **Ringed Seal**, a usually shy and solitary animal gathers at its favoured haul out sites, the southernmost population of this high Arctic species. We will also keep our eyes peeled for the much larger Grey Seal, as well as a good variety of waterfowl, and the possibility of a passing White-tailed Eagle. o/n Haapsalu

Day 6 Wednesday 27th 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 south from Finland and Arctic Russia. The afternoon will be spent at Leidisoo Bog, where White-fronted and Bean Geese fly in to roost for the evening, and where the surrounding forest is home to Ural and Pygmy Owls, Black Woodpecker and both Black Grouse and Hazel Grouse. o/n Haapsalu

Day 7 Thursday 28th Today will be spent exploring the bogs and meadows of the area, with another chance to look for Elk, geese, grouse and woodpeckers before we return for one last night at Haapsalu.

Day 8 Friday 29th After breakfast we will drive back east, to Tallinn for a guided tour of the attractive old town. Alas, our time will soon be up, and we must head to the airport and our flights home.

Accommodation, meals

The hotels used are of a very good standard and all rooms have en-suite facilities with bath and/or shower. Meals provided during the stay will have an emphasis on local cuisine. We will take picnic lunches each day. Requests for special diets can be accommodated.

Health and fitness

Please see the General Information leaflet for health and fitness requirements. 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. Some early starts and/or late finishes may be necessary, to maximise our chances to see the wildlife.



Leaders

Mike Russell is a Director of Wildlife Travel and worked for Sussex Wildlife Trust from 1985 to 2016, most recently as Head of Adult Learning. With a life-long interest in birds he has sought to encourage and enthuse others to become involved in conservation. Mike has led many wildlife holidays for Wildlife Travel since 2001 to destinations from the Galapagos Islands to the Isle of Mull.

Mike 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 flight is with Easyjet from London Gatwick.

22nd Sept Depart London Gatwick 11.00, arrive Tallinn 15.50

29th Sept Depart Tallinn 16.20, arrive London Gatwick 17.25

Estonia is 2 hours ahead of the UK

Passport and visas, transport and weather

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.

Transport will be by small bus or smaller vehicles if necessary.

The weather should feel distinctly autumnal: we expect it to be cool and dry, between 5 and 15 degrees, although rain (even snow), wind or considerably cooler weather are certainly possible.



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 23/06/2017
SEE GENERAL INFORMATION LEAFLET ON HOW TO BOOK

INCLUDED: Return flight to Estonia from UK. Local transport as specified in itinerary, including entry fees. Ferry to Hiiumaa and boat trip to look for seals. 7 nights accommodation, all meals. Guided tour of Tallinn. Services of leaders and guides.

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

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