

Birds and mammals in autumn, 23-30 September 2016
Estonian Nature Tours
Tour report

Kaarel Võhandu

The group arrived in the afternoon with different flights. Once we were all gathered up we headed east to a town named Rakvere. In the end of September it gets dark after 19 o'clock so we did not have time for birding on arrival day.

In the morning of the second day we headed into the forests of Eastern Estonia. A productive morning with two male Black Grouse taking off from the roadside and posing in the tree. A protected patch of forest held a Grey-headed Woodpecker, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker and a Black Woodpecker. We saw our first Long-tailed Tits there and some of us even spotted couple of Hazel Grouse launching across the road. After lunch we headed towards the bear hide. On the way we spotted a Great Grey Shrike sitting on a wire. We also ran into our first Elk and a White-backed Woodpecker. While we waited for bears in the bear hide we were entertained by Sparrowhawk chasing Jays, Crested Tits, Willow Tits, Coal Tits and Nuthatches. At least 6 Raccoon Dogs and 2 Red Foxes were around as well. A big male bear arrived with the last light finishing a great day with style.



In the morning of the third day we left the bear hide. Despite having had little sleep and being tired we drove down some forest roads in search of birds. This paid off in a grand way with 8 male Capercaillie gathering on the road. Largest number I have ever seen in one place at once. After having a nice rest at the hotel we headed to Lake Peipsi where we were met by another Black Woodpecker, Grey-headed Woodpecker and two Great Egrets. After seeing the 4th largest lake in Europe we did some raptor searching in the nearby fields. Sure enough we found a female Hen Harrier patrolling around. After dinner we headed out into forests again to spotlight for mammals. We found a pair of Ural Owls hunting on a clearing before it was dark. Spotighting produced several Woodcocks, Roe Deers and a Raccoon Dog.

On 4th day we visited Lahemaa NP. We added a lot of waterbirds to our list including Bewick and Whooper swans, Tundra Bean Geese and Greater White-fronted Geese. We had excellent views of a flock of Cranes foraging in a field. An Osprey passed overhead. After checking out couple of spots in Lahemaa NP we drove to Central Estonia to Toosikannu Holiday Center. There we had a late evening safari with lots of Red Deer stags running and 4 Elks. While we were watching some Elks a Pygmy Owl was calling nearby.



Next day we tried some spotighting very early but it was quite unsuccessful because of a heavy fog. We translocated to Western Estonia where we stayed at Tuulingu Guesthouse. In the afternoon we headed to the southern side of Matsalu bay for a boat trip. After having picnic dinner on the boat

we started looking for Beavers. Eventually we had a nice close view of 3 Beavers swimming along the river.

On the morning of our penultimate birding day we headed to the NW corner of Estonia to Põõsaspea cape, a renowned seawatching site. Here we saw Brent Geese, Eiders, Long-tailed Ducks, Common and Velvet Scoters, Red- and Black-throated Divers. We had lunch at Haapsalu just as it started raining and it was pouring down all evening. We tried some spotlighting in the evening but did not have much success because of the terrible weather.

In the very early morning hours of our last outdoor day we tried some spotlighting again. This time the conditions were good and our efforts were rewarded with two Elk, one of them a nice male, Roe Deers, Raccoon Dog, Red Fox and some Hares. After having a quick breakfast we went to Puise peninsula where a grand passerine migration was taking place. In 1.5 hours we were passed by 6500 Great Tits, 3300 Coal Tits, 2500 Blue Tits, 2400 Long-tailed Tits and 3000 Jays. Couple of Black Woodpeckers migrating as well and few Sparrowhawks and two Peregrine Falcons flying by. We birded in Matsalu NP for the rest of the day and added Knot, Curlew Sandpiper, Spotted Redshank, Smew, Nutcracker and a young Golden Eagle to our trip list, which by the end of the day grew to 115 species.



The Mammals and Birds trip has been operated in conjunction with Greenwings Holidays & Wildwings