

ESTONIA TUESDAY 5TH – WEDNESDAY 13TH APRIL 2011

Tuesday 5th April – a group of 13 met at Edinburgh airport at 05.10 to fly to Tallinn for an 8 day birding trip to Estonia. The group was split with 7 of us flying from Edinburgh to Brussels then to Frankfurt then finally Tallinn. The rest of the group went a completely different route flying Edinburgh to London to Helsinki then to Tallinn. This was the only way we could all get the cheapest economy flights to Tallinn. The whole group arrived in Tallinn within 5 minutes of each other with all the flights being on time. After collecting the luggage we were met at 17.45 by Marika of Estonian Nature Tours, our guide Mati Kose and our driver Aare. We were driving straight to the hotel Vesset in Pärnu but as there was clear skies and sunshine Mati suggested we try for Ural Owl first then drive to the hotel for a late meal.

We were staying at the following hotels:

Villa Wesset - 5th & 6th

Saaremaa Hotel – 7th & 8th

Promenaadi Hotel – 9th, 10th & 11th

Kreutzwald Hotel - 12th

On route from the airport - Hooded Crow, Buzzard, Raven, Sparrowhawk, Lapwing, several White Stork, Mallard, Herring and Black-headed Gull and Roe Deer

We drove to Soometsa Forest about 20 kms past Pärnu and were pleased to hear a Ural Owl calling very close but despite using tapes to get it to show we were not in luck. Two Woodcock were seen roding.

We arrived at the hotel Villa Wesset at c22.30 and went straight into a lovely restaurant for a dinner of salad, chicken, rice, vegetables with a sweet and sour sauce followed by cake and peaches and coffee.

Wednesday 6th April – breakfast was at 7am and we left at 07.45 for Soometsa Forest

On route – Starling, Hooded Crow, Lapwing, Mistle Thrush, Redwing, Meadow Pipit, Chaffinch and Common Crane

Soometsa Forest

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker – seen well in the scopes

White-backed Woodpecker – 2 seen with 1 in the scopes

Black Woodpecker – 1 seen in flight 3 times as it flew overhead

Great Spotted Woodpecker – 1 seen in the scope

Willow Tit – 1 seen well

Common Redpoll – flock

Snipe – 2 in flight

Jay – 2

Common Crane – pair

Northern Long-tailed Tit – a group of 3 were particularly handsome

Hazel Grouse – heard but would not come into view

also seen Wren, Robin, Great Tit, Wood Pigeon, Stock Dove, Song Thrush, Fieldfare, Redwing, Chaffinch, Whooper and Bewick's Swan, Common Gull, Grey Heron, a Mallard flock and a possible Ural Owl seen by a few as it flew across in front of the bus. We also saw a distant Elk. We left the forest at 13.30 to go for lunch which was provided by the Woman's Institute at Häädemeeste village hall. It had been a cold damp morning so we were glad to get in beside the wood fire and have a hearty lunch of salad and pickles, a stew of potatoes, vegetables and meat, scones with herb

butter, raspberry coconut cake and coffee.

We had a walk round the village after lunch and the following birds were seen -

Northern Bullfinch – 1 male

Siskin – small flock

Brambling – 2 males in full summer plumage

Blue and Great Tit

Chaffinch

Flooded area -

White-fronted Goose

Taiga Bean Goose

Greylag Goose

Bewick's Swan – a count of 105 + 25 seen earlier. Two of the swans had satellite neck collars 066E and 090E

Barnacle Goose

Cormorant

Mallard

Pintail

Wigeon

Teal

Gadwall

Goldeneye

Marsh Harrier – female

Herring, Common, Great Black-backed and Lesser Black-backed Gulls

Next stop was Kabli Reserve where we saw -

Goosander - 2 pairs on the frozen sea

Reed Bunting – 1 pair

White Wagtail – 1

next stop was at flooded field at road side -

Common Crane – 17 together in a field

White Stork – 2

Buzzard

Canada Goose

Curlew

Green Sandpiper – 3

Skylark – numerous

Weather: overcast, misty with drizzle am clearing for a spell after lunch when visibility improved then came on heavy rain for the rest of the afternoon.

Thursday 7th April – we left the hotel at 08.50 to drive to the ferry terminal birding on route.

First stop -

Skylark- numerous

Reed Bunting

Fieldfare

Common and Black-headed Gull

Second stop at Audru – a wooden suspension bridge over a river

Middle Spotted Woodpecker – 1
Nuthatch – 2 seen well
Bullfinch – 2 male
Robin, Blackbird and Great Tit

On route -
White Stork
Common Crane – 30 seen 2 very close
Red-breasted Merganser – 1 male
Mallard
Cormorant
Bewick's Swan
Lapwing
White-tailed Sea Eagle

Matsalu National Park – part of the group went into the centre to watch a video of the reserve the rest of us opting for a walk it had been raining heavy but stopped during the walk

Marsh Harrier – 1 male
Yellowhammer, Greenfinch, Chaffinch, Bullfinch, Robin, Blackbird, large numbers of Fieldfare, Redwing, Song Thrush and Mistle Thrush, Hooded Crow, Wood Pigeon, Great Tit and Greylag Goose.

We left for the ferry terminal at 12.30 seeing a Great Grey Shrike on route.

Ferry Port **Virtsu**- the ferry left at 12.55 seen from the ferry -
Scaup
Goldeneye
Goosander
Long-tailed Duck
Common Scoter
Cormorant

The sea was frozen so the ferry had an ice breaker so made for an interesting crossing. We arrived at Mulu at 13.30 and crossed the causeway to Saaremaa Island. Just after the causeway we spotted 4 Mute Swan.

On the river at Nasva we saw -
Coot
Little Grebe
Cormorant

We arrived at the hotel Saaremaa at 14,.40 and had a lunch of chicken, rice and vegetables followed by cake with raspberry sauce and coffee.

After lunch we drove to Undva Cape to look for sea duck -
Stellar's Eider – a group of 30 males and females
Common Eider
Common Scoter
Goosander
Red-breasted Merganser
Goldeneye
Long-tailed Duck

Razorbill
Mute Swan
Cormorant
Red-throated Diver
Herring Gull Baltic race with yellow legs
Snow Bunting – 1 male and 3 female on the rocks below us

Veere Harbour -

Black Redstart – 1 male 1 female
Whinchat – 1 female
Chaffinch
Robin
Velvet Scoter
Long-tailed Duck
Goosander
Red-breasted Merganser

We arrived back at the hotel for dinner at 20.30 which was pork in puff pastry with a mushroom sauce then chocolate mousse.

The hotel had lovely big rooms very comfortable and also had a spa which we never found the time to use.

Friday 8th April – breakfast at 08.00 leaving at 08.45

Walk on the beach beside the hotel -

Scaup – 1 male
Great Crested Grebe
Long-tailed Duck
Goldeneye
Velvet Scoter
Common Scoter
Oystercatcher

on route -

Marsh Harrier – 1 male
Whooper Swan
Raven
Great Grey Shrike

Sõrve Peninsula - Sääre reserve

Hawfinch – 1 male 2 female
Black Redstart – 1 male 2 female feeding on the ground looked great against the snow
Stonechat - 1 male Estonian rarity
Brambling
Chaffinch
Bullfinch
Great Tit
Robin
Wren
Fieldfare
Yellowhammer

Smew – 2 male 4 female
Great White Egret – 1
White-tailed Sea Eagle – 2
Cormorant
Shelduck
Tufted Duck
Mallard
Teal
Wigeon
Gadwall
Common Scoter
Long-tailed Duck
Grey Heron
Common Tern – 1 fishing
Skylark

on route driving for lunch -

Great Grey Shrike – 2
Sparrowhawk – 1
Kestrel – 1
Ringed Plover
Common Crane – 2
Meadow Pipit
Wheatear – 1 male

Vilsandi National Park Loona Manor for lunch arrived at 2pm

Salad, Beef rissoles in mustard sauce, potatoes, beetroot, bread with herb butter then blueberry cake with raspberry cream

High Watch Tower at Viidumäe -

Smew – 3 male 3 female
Coot
Goosander
Greylag Goose
Goldeneye
Mute Swan
Mallard
Great Black-backed Gull
Yellowhammer

It came on snow so we drove back to Loona Manor Visitor Centre for a film show on wildlife.

After leaving the visitor centre we stopped a few times to try for Nutcracker with no success. At about 7 kms from the hotel beside the main road 2 Elk were spotted in the trees they came into the open and were seen well.

Dinner at hotel Saaremaa was at 19.20 chicken and salad, salmon pasta followed by pancakes with raspberry sauce and coffee.

Weather: Clear skies and sunny most of the day with snow and sleet late afternoon.

Saturday 9th April – breakfast at 07.00 then left to drive back to the ferry terminal at 07.30. The

ferry back to the mainland was leaving at 09.40.

On route to ferry terminal -

Cormorant
Little Grebe
Goosander
Red-breasted Merganser
Smew
Long-tailed Duck
Goldeneye
Coot
Black Redstart

We arrived at the ferry terminal at 08.00 from the terminal we saw -

Scaup – about 50
Whooper Swan
Mallard
Goldeneye

The storm and strong winds during the night had lifted the pack ice from the sea and deposited it in huge mound at the ferry terminal quite a strange sight.

Ferry crossing took about 25 minutes we saw Goldeneye, Long-tailed Duck, Common Scoter and Cormorant.

Drive to **Matsalu** Park -

Common Crane – 28
White-tailed Sea Eagle
Hooded Crow
Yellowhammer

We stopped at Nedrema wooded meadow which in summer has 26 species of orchid -

Middle Spotted Woodpecker – pair
Sparrowhawk
Goldfinch

Tuhu Bog -

Golden Eagle – 1 seen very well as it flew overhead
Meadow Pipit
Curlew – 2
Raven – 3

Lunch was at the ecological farm at Komsu. We were given a lovely welcome by the family who had set up tables in their kitchen and living room,. A very nice lunch of pork and fried onions, beetroot, potatoes, home made pumpernickel style bread and cinnamon buns with birch sap, peach juice and coffee to drink.

A Nuthatch was seen in the garden

On the road to **Lihula** and village -

Taiga Bean Goose
White-fronted Goose

Whooper Swan
Bewick's Swan
White Stork – 2 on a nest
Rook
Siskin
Bullfinch
Tree Sparrow

Kloostri watch tower - the path to the hide was flooded so we had to view from the car park.

Musk Rat – 1 seen swimming
Pintail
Shoveler
Teal
Mallard
Gadwall
Greylag Goose
White-fronted Goose
Reed Bunting
Meadow Pipit

Kasari Old Bridge -

Taiga Bean Goose – flew over
White-fronted Goose- flew over
Raven
Magpie
Reed Bunting

on route to Haapsalu -

Elk – 3 adult and 1 young seen well from the bus. They came out of the tree cover into full view
got some photos
Blackbird
Song Thrush
Buzzard
Grey Heron
Common Crane
Raven
Goosander
Great Grey Shrike

Rannajõe Watch Tower -

Black Grouse – 1 distant male seen in the scope
Lapwing
Teal

Hotel Promenaadi in Haapsalu had lovely rooms with balconies overlooking the frozen bay with small area of clear water.

White-tailed Sea Eagle – 1 on the ice

Mute Swan
Goldeneye
Goosander

Dinner was at 20.30 beef in sauce with potatoes and cabbage then rice with cherry sauce and coffee or tea

Sunday 10th April – breakfast at 07.00 leaving at 07.45

(Nõva) Taiga Forest in the north-west of Estonia -

Capercaillie – 2 males

Black Grouse – seen in flight then 13 males seen on open ground at a lek

Montagu's Harrier – 1 male flying alongside the bus

Buzzard

Yellowhammer

Chaffinch

Red Fox

The bus got stuck in the snow on a sheltered part of the track where it had not melted and had to be pushed out,

Waxwing – 8 feeding on Juniper berries on a low bush

Black Grouse – several females seen in flight

Rough-legged Buzzard – 2

Buzzard

Raven

Hooded Crow

Magpie

We arrived at Roosta Bungalows at 12.45 collected coffee, tea and biscuits then went to a sea watching hide.

Põõsaspea Peninsula – sea watch hide

Buzzard – 2

Peregrine – 2

Rough-legged Buzzard – 5 seen. They were attempting the crossing to Finland but kept flying back to land because of the strong winds. One was seen very well as it flew overhead several times.

Common Crane – 2 flew out to sea

Long-tailed Duck – several hundred

Common Scoter

Velvet Scoter

Eider

Goldeneye

Goosander

Red-breasted Merganser

Cormorant

Siskin

On the drive back to Roosta Bungalows for a late lunch -

Great Grey Shrike – 2 One had caught a Common Lizard which was hanging from its bill.

Arrived for lunch at 15.00 which was a buffet with pork burgers, mashed potatoes, coleslaw and cake with redcurrant sauce.

After lunch we had a walk round the bungalows -
Crested Tit- 1 seen very well perched singing on top of a pine
Great Spotted Woodpecker – 1

On route back to Haapsalu -
White Stork
Common Crane

We then took a drive to Haapsalu renovated train station with Russian steam trains on display.

From the hotel looking over the bay -
Pochard in the harbour
Smew- 1 male 2 female
Coot
Mute Swan
Goldeneye
White-tailed Sea Eagle

Dinner was at 19.30 fish, potatoes and cabbage then jelly with fruit bits – the first dessert that did not taste good.

Monday 11th April – left hotel at 05.00 to go in the search of owls
On route – several Woodcock

Nõva Forest -

No luck with any owls despite trying several different locations and using tapes.

Woodlark – 2
Song Thrush
Northern Long-tailed Tit
Greenfinch
Chaffinch
Black Woodpecker – 1 in flight
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker – 1 seen in the scopes
Hooded Crow

Capercaillie – 1 male beside the road which then walked over the road in front of the bus and stayed beside the front wheel of the bus for a long time. Watched it for about 30 minutes as it slowly walked along the edge of the road crossing back eventually to the other side. Was very popular for photos as several people got out of the bus to photograph it. It must have seen its reflection in John's large lens as it suddenly put its tail up and started running at John who had to move quick to get out of its way. Should have had a video camera.

We arrived back at the hotel at 09.15 for a very welcome breakfast.

Viewing from the balconies on ground level at the back of the hotel -
Smew- a great count of 42 males and females
Goldeneye
Goosander
Tufted Duck
Scaup

Gadwall
Cormorant Grebe
The ice had melted quite a bit so lots more open water.

Left the hotel at 11.00 to walk to the harbour for closer views of the above plus Oystercatcher.

On route to a watch tower - Redshank, Curlew and Lapwing

We had lunch at 14.00 at Almoisa Guest House which was a very beautiful mansion house with a thatched roof and a lovely dining room, Lunch was terrific individual pies of mushroom, potato, egg and cheese followed by raspberry mousse with raspberries and milk and great coffee from their machine which ground the beans then filled your cup.

Matsalu National Park Kiideva Watch Tower -

Bewick's Swan – 120
Whooper Swan
Mute Swan
Wigeon
Goosander
Tufted Duck
Smew
Goldeneye
White-fronted Goose
White-tailed Sea Eagle
Robin
Tree Sparrow
White-backed Woodpecker

Põgari-Sassi -

Avocet – 6 together
Ringed Plover – 6
Dunlin – 2
Redshank
Lapwing
Wheatear – 1 male
White-backed Woodpecker – 1 seen in the scopes
Snow Hare

Tuesday 12th April – left hotel at 08.00 to drive to Tallinn

Birding at fields on route -
White-fronted Goose – very large numbers
Barnacle Goose – 12
Bewick's Swan
Whooper Swan
Black Grouse ea Eagle
Red Squirrel

Stop at Keila Joa river and waterfall -

Robin
Chaffinch
Pied Wagtail

We arrived at Tallinn and met our tour guide at 11.45 for a tour of Tallinn old town. Beautiful city and the tour was very much enjoyed on a lovely sunny day which felt warmer than it had been. We had lunch at traditional Estonia restaurant called Kuldse Notsu **Kõrts** Tavern where we enjoyed a lovely fish dish with mashed potatoes, carrots, cauliflower and swede followed by cranberry mousse with milk and redcurrants.

After lunch the guide took us to our hotel **Kreutzwald** for check in at 15.00 – the hotel was only 10 minutes drive to the airport. We checked in then left again at 15.20 for a walk to a nearby shopping mall. We had arranged to have dinner in the hotel's restaurant at 18.30 Casa Do Brazil and it was the only really bad meal of the entire trip.

Wednesday 13th April – for the journey home as because of cancellation 3 people had joined at a later date.

Seven of us left Tallinn at 07.00 for a flight to Munich then onto London then Edinburgh. Three of the group left at 07.55 to fly to Stockholm then Copenhagen then Edinburgh. We all managed to arrive at Edinburgh airport within 15 minutes of each other. The remaining three people were lucky in getting breakfast at the hotel as their flight was not till 14.45 going to Helsinki then London then Edinburgh. All flights were again more or less on time.

A very enjoyable trip with good accommodation and excellent food but a lot colder than expected. Estonia had had a very hard winter with a lot of snow since November and the snow had only started to melt the week before we arrived leaving many fields and forests under water. It was still very cold during our visit even the days with clear blue skies had cold winds. The flooded fields had thousands of birds such as large Chaffinch, Fieldfare, Meadow Pipit flocks the likes of which we never see. There were also large numbers of sea duck, swans and it was lovely to see so many Common Cranes each day.

A total of 117 species were seen plus 4 species heard only

Mammals seen were-

Red Fox

Elk

Roe Deer

Grey Seal

Musk Rat

Snow Hare

Red Squirrel

Common Lizard

also Clouded Yellow butterfly