

Mammal watching in Estonia 5-10th of May 2012

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We are three Danish guys who decided to go on a mammal watching tour in 2012. After searching the internet for opportunities the choice of destination became Estonia as this is one of the best countries to watch a number of European species - such as the Brown Bear, Wolf and the Flying Squirrel.

The trip was arranged in close cooperation with Natourest (see www.natourest.ee) and we decided to focus on a number of species which then set the tour program. Our kind and very skilled guide Triin Ivandi arranged the tour and accompanied us on all days except the last one when we went on a boat trip. She was very experienced in tracking and clearly felt at home in the vast forested landscapes.

The tour prize will obviously vary depending on which animals you decide to focus on and the number of days that you have at your disposal. Our tour program amounted to approximately 800 Euro.

Food is relatively cheap compared to Denmark – but true this can also be said about any other country when you compare prizes to Denmark! Anyway a good meal can be bought at less than 5 Euro.

We were fortunate to have mostly nice, quiet, warm and sunny weather with temperatures around 15-20°C. We did notice a little rain during the night on 6-7th and a few drops of water on the very last day – but all in all the weather was fantastic for animal and bird watching and of course for the boat trips as well. On the last evening we witnessed the arrival of annoying mosquitoes which probably hatched as a result of the rain a few days earlier followed by nice warm weather. Flying insects can be a real hazard when you walk the forests later in the spring, so we felt that we had the luck to time our trip perfectly.

We were also fortunate to have a lot of very nice encounters with the exciting wildlife in Estonia and we do not hesitate to recommend others to try their luck with the Estonian mammals and birds.



Pic. 1. The 3 adventurers – left Morten, middle Henrik and right Paw

Itinerary

May 5th

Arrival in Tallinn at 2:30 pm (our plane from Stockholm 4 hours earlier was cancelled due to very few passengers!).

Driving to Maidla where we stayed for 3 nights at a hostel.

In the evening spotting for Flying Squirrel at Paalatsi with an entertaining guide Uudo Timm.

In total 200 km of driving.

May 6th

Early morning drive in Tudu area watching a Black Grouse lek and enjoying the forest wildlife.

Afternoon Bear tracking in Tudu area.

Night in Bear cabin in Alutaguse.

In total 89 km of driving.

May 7th

Morning in Bear cabin then driving in Sirtsu Bog area and back to Maidla for a long rest.

Night in Bear cabin in Alutaguse.

In total 53 km of driving.

May 8th

Morning in Bear cabin then driving to Kakerdaja Bog for a long boardwalk.

Evening in Matsalu National Park.

Back to Hapsalu and goodbyes with our guide Triin.

Night in Tooraku Motel near Rohukula.

In total 370 km of driving.

May 9th

Ferry boat to Heltermaa on the island Dagö.

Boat trip in a fishing boat from Salinõmme out to a Seal reserve including a walk on one of the small islands.

Evening spotting at nortside of Matsalu NP – Kideva, Panga and Häesta.

In total 179 km of driving.

May 10th

Driving from Tooraku to Tallinn via smaller roads between Ridala and Taebla.

Driving in Tallinn and departure in the afternoon.

In total 146 km of driving this day and all in all 1.037 km for the whole week.

Day to day encounters based on Morten's notes

5/5

Tallinn-Viitna 16:30-18:15 (dinner)

Raccoon Dog 1 road kill

White Stork 4, White-fronted Goose 80, Buzzard 2, Mistle Thrush 2, Fieldfare 2

Viitna-Maidla 18:15-19:00

Bat sp. (Pipistrelle type) 1 Maidla, **Red Fox 1** asleep in an open field!

White Stork 12, White-fronted Goose 3500, Pink-footed Goose 150, Barnacle Goose 10

Paalatsi area 20:00-24:00

Brandt's Bat 1 flying along a forest road a few meters below treetop height. Studies show that this species and Northern Bat frequents the same areas as the Flying Squirrels.

Russian Flying Squirrel 2 females observed 22:15-22:35 appearing from daytime hole at sunset and then running up and down the trees. Observed in night vision binoculars, normal binoculars and in telescope. Last sighting was of an individual which jumped from the tree into the darkness.

Roe Deer 1 at road side, **European Hare 1** across the road

Common Snipe 2, Woodcock 4, Fieldfare 2



Pic.1. Small droppings (yellow) from Flying Squirrel

6/5

Tudu area – south of Maidla (open areas) 05:30-09:40

White Stork 4, Pink-footed Goose 160 flying over, Black Grouse 7 males performing at a lek, Corncrake 1 calling, Common Crane 1, Lapwing 4, Great Spotted Woodpecker 1, Stock Dove 2



Pic. 2. Black Grouse displaying near Maidla

Driving in forest

Eurasian Beaver 1 adult seen very well in a ditch along a forest road. Due to the steep banks the animal was trapped in the low water in which it was walking! Twice it tried to scare us by splashing its tail. It was first seen at 50 m distance but then photographed down to only 3 m! We enjoyed the animal during 15-20 minutes or so before we left it.



Pics. 3-6. Eurasian Beaver in Tudu-area. Top right right Henrik. Bottom right Paw and bottom left our guide Triin taking pictures as well.

Roe Deer 2, Mountain Hare 1 running across a forest road

White-fronted Goose 100 flying over, Capercaillie 1 male flushed/briefly flying, Black Grouse 10 males + 1 female, Common Crane 3, Green Sandpiper 6, Common Cuckoo 3, Black Woodpecker 1, Great Spotted Woodpecker 3, White-backed Woodpecker 1 drumming, Wood Warbler 3, Pied Flycatcher 1, Long-tailed Tit 2

Bear tracking Alutaguse 13:30-17:30

White Stork 1, Capercaillie 1 female spotted at 700 m then photographed at 50 m before it disappeared, Black Grouse 1 male, Hazel Grouse 1+2 flushed, Common Crane 1, Mistle Thrush 4, Wood Warbler 3, Pied Flycatcher 1, Jay 4

Night in Bear cabin 18:00-

Red Fox 1 adult - an "old grey-haired" animal seen from the hide at 21:25

Capercaillie 1 female seen briefly flying, Green Sandpiper 1, Common Redstart 2, Waxwing 6 in a forest clearing while walking to the cabin, Pied Flycatcher 1 dead



Pics. 7-8. Views from the Bear cabin hide at Alutaguse. Paw and Henrik to the left.

7/5

Morning in Bear cabin 04:30-07:00

Raccoon Dog 1 feeding at 50 m distance 04:35-42

Black Woodpecker 1 calling, Wood Warbler 1, Raven 2

Sirtsí Bog

Capercaillie 1 male standing at 100 m then flying, Black Grouse 2 males, Golden Eagle 1 subadult seen well in a forest clearing, Green Sandpiper 1, Mistle Thrush 2, Northern Wheatear 2, Common Redstart 1, Pied Flycatcher 1

Back in Maidla 09:45- for siesta and dinner in the afternoon

Common Whitethroat 1, Lesser Whitethroat 1

Night in Bear cabin 17:15-24:00

Green Sandpiper 1 displaying, Common Cuckoo 4, Green Woodpecker 1 calling, Northern Wheatear 1

8/5

Morning in Bear cabin 03:30-07:30. Back in Maidla at 8 am.

Red Fox 1 seen at 03:30

Whooper Swan 45 migrating with geese, White-fronted Goose 20 migrating, Fieldfare 3, Northern Wheatear 1 singing, Wood Warbler 2, Red-breasted Flycatcher 1 ad. male singing – seen well

Maidla – Kakerdaja Bog 12:00-15:35. Lunch in Jäneda

Mute Swan 2, White Stork 9, White-fronted Goose 10 migrating Maidla, Tufted Duck 1, Goldeneye 5, Goosander 2 Maidla, Northern Wheatear 2 Maidla, Lesser White-throat 1, Raven 2

Boardwalk in Kakerdaja Bog 15:35-18:50

Common Viper 2 – 1 black striped and 1 brown individual, **Common Lizzard 1**

Eurasian Teal 4, Goldeneye 5, Pallid/Montagus Harrier 1 2nd year (presumed Pallid but only seen briefly), Common Cuckoo 1, Tree Pipit 2, Northern Wheatear 1, Common Redstart 1, Wood Warbler 2, Raven 3



Pics. 9-10 Common Viper.



Pics. 11-12. Boardwalking in Kakerdaja Bog.



Triin and Morten

Kakerdaja – Matsalu NP 18:55-20:50

White Stork 6, Marsh Harrier 1

Matsalu National Park 20:50-23:00 then driving to Hapsalu and goodbyes to our guide – then back to Tooraku Motel at 24:00

Raccoon Dog 2 walking slowly in a field next to the road. Seen in 5 minutes – also in telescope,
Roe Deer 7, Elk 12 incl. female with two juveniles.

Eurasian Bittern 1, White-fronted Goose 700 at night roost, Barnacle Goose 700, Common Crane 58, Corncrake 1 calling, Black-tailed Godwit 1, Eurasian Curlew 10, Common Snipe 1, Wood Sandpiper 5, Common Sandpiper 2, Thrush Nightingale 3



Pics. 13-14. Elks in all ages at Matsalu National Park

9/5

Ferry boat Rohukula – Heltermaa 06:30-08:00

Tufted Duck 10, Greater Scaup 600, Long-tailed Duck 2000, Eider 50 Goosander 1 (+3 Tooraku), Arctic Tern 4

Boat trip Salinomme - Seal Reserve incl. stopover at a deserted island with old forest 08:15-12:50

Ringed Seal 10 – close to the boat also seen briefly in telescope at sea. 3 individuals were seen roosting at the shore line while we were walking on the island.

Greylag Goose 2, Barnacle Goose 70 migrating, Shelduck 1, Long-tailed Duck 200, Eider 20, Oystercatcher 2, Lapwing 2 flying at sea, Redshank 2, Arctic Tern 15, Wryneck 1 calling, Wood Warbler 1, Chiffchaff 1, Red-backed Shrike 1, Redpoll 1

Ferry boat Heltermaa – Rohukula 16:30-18:00

Ringed Seal 1 – seen close to the ferry at a small flat island with a lighthouse

Black Scoter 3, Long-tailed Duck 1000, Arctic Tern 1

Matsalu National Park (areas north of the bay) 20:00-23:45

European Lynx 1 adult – a totally fantastic observation of an individual for 10 minutes!! The animal was discovered sitting on an open grass field south of Panga less than 200 m from the road at 21:15. Amazingly the animal didn't take much notice of us – even when the car alarm went off because the doors weren't properly closed! It was walking slowly, sniffing around, marking its territory, listening and also sitting a few times. Some pictures were obtained through the telescope but even if they are not of high class the sole fact that we were able to do it and observe a very hard-to-see animal for such long time was really the highlight of the trip!



Pics. 15-18. European Lynx south of Panga.

White-fronted Goose 50, Barnacle Goose 5000, Marsh Harrier 1, Thrush Nightingale 1, Great Reed Warbler 1 singing Kideva, Carrion Crow 5

Häesta (incl. coffee stop at a new café next to the bird tower)

Bat sp. 4-5 next to the bird tower - a medium-sized species, **Red Fox 1 juv.** caught in headlights near Tooraku at 23:45. It turned out to be quite curious as it approached the car down to only 2 m.

Common Snipe 2, Redshank 2, Wood Sandpiper 1

10/5

Tooraku breakfast

Goosander 2, Thrush Nightingale 1 singing, Siskin 4

Tooraku – Tallinn via first Hapsalu/Unguru and then Ridala/Taebla 07:30-09:50

Horned Grebe 2 (breeding?) NE of Ridala towards Taebla, White Stork 4, Garganey 1 pair, Common Crane 1 flyover Taebla, Wryneck 1 calling at Unguru castle ruins, Black Redstart 1 singing Hapsalu railway museum, Thrush Nightingale 1, Icterine Warbler 1 singing NE Ridala, Raven 4 (route 16)

Tallinn incl. a walk around a small lake near the airport 09:50-12:00

White-fronted Goose 4, Pink-footed Goose 4, Common Kestrel 1, Common Tern 1, Arctic Tern 6, Yellow Wagtail 2, Thrush Nightingale 1



Pics. 19-24 Bear-tracking in Alutaguse.



Pic. 25. Tracks of Wild Boar



Pic. 26. Tracks of Elk



Pic. 27. Tracks of Raccoon Dog



Pic. 28. Tracks of Badger

Systematic list of mammal observations

The list follows Aulagner, Haffner, Mitchell-Jones, Moutou & Zima: "Mammals of Europe, North Africa and the Middle East", 2009.

Brandt's Bat *Myotis brandii* – **Brandt's Flagermus**

5/5 1 Paalatsi

Bat species unknown *Myotis/Nyctalus/Pippistrellus* sp. – **Flagermus ukendt**

5/5 1 Maidla (small type) and 9/5 4-5 Häesta (medium sized)

Raccoon Dog *Nyctereutes procyonoides* – **Mårhund**

5/5 1 dead Tallinn-Viitna, 7/5 1 Bear cabin, Alutaguse and 8/5 2 Matsalu NP

Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes* – **Rød Ræv**

5/5 1 Viitna-Maidla, 6/5 1 adult and 8/5 1 Bear cabin, Alutaguse plus 9/5 1 juv. near Tooraku

Ringed Seal *Phoca hispida* – **Ringsæl**

9/5 10 Salinomme to Seal reserve and 1 ferry Heltermaa – Rohukula

European Lynx *Lynx lynx* – **Europæisk Los**

9/5 1 adult south of Panga, Matsalu NP

European Roe Deer *Capreolus capreolus* – **Europæisk Rådyr**

5/5 1 Paalatsi, 6/5 2 Tudu and 8/5 7 Matsalu NP

Elk *Alces alces* – **Elg**

8/5 12 Matsalu NP

European Hare *Lepus europaeus* – **Europæisk Hare**

5/5 1 Paalatsi

Mountain Hare *Lepus timidus* – **Snehare**

6/5 1 Tudu

Russian Flying Squirrel *Pteromys volans* – **Russisk Flyveegern**

5/5 2 females Paalatsi

Eurasian Beaver *Castor fiber* – **Europæisk Bæver**

6/5 1 adult Tudu

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And in addition:

Common Viper *Vipera berus* – **Hugorm**

8/5 2 Kakerdaja Bog

Common Lizzard *Zootoca vivipara* – **Skovfirben**

8/5 1 Kakerdaja Bog

Systematic list of bird observations

Please refer to the daily observations for more specific details of each species.

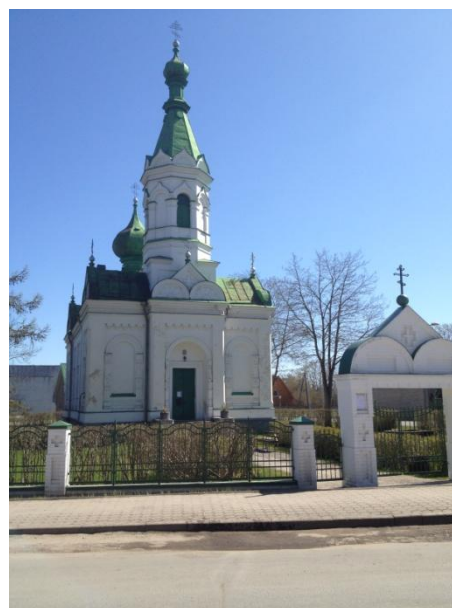
Note that not all common species seen are in the list.

English name	Latin name	Danish name	Total number and in some cases with days/ number of observations shown in brackets ()
Horned Grebe	<i>Podiceps auritus</i>	Nordisk Lappedykker	2
White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	Hvid Stork	40 (7)
Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	Knopsvane	2
Whooper Swan	<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>	Sangsvane	45 (1)
Eurasian Bittern	<i>Botaurus stellaris</i>	Rørdrum	1
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	Skarv	Few
Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	Grågås	Few
White-fronted Goose	<i>Anser albifrons</i>	Blisgås	4.500 (8)
Pink-footed Goose	<i>Anser brachyrhynchus</i>	Kortnæbbet Gås	314 (3)
Barnacle Goose	<i>Branta leucopsis</i>	Bramgås	5.780 (4)
Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	Gravand	1
Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	Krikand	4
Garganey	<i>Anas querquedula</i>	Atlingand	2
Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>	Troldand	11
Greater Scaup	<i>Aythya marila</i>	Bjergand	600 (1)
Common Eider	<i>Somateria mollissima</i>	Ederfugl	70
Long-tailed Duck	<i>Clangula hyemalis</i>	Havlit	3.200 (3)
Black Scoter	<i>Melanitta nigra</i>	Sortand	3
Common Goldeneye	<i>Becephala clangula</i>	Hvinand	10
Goosander (=C. Merganser)	<i>Mergus merganser</i>	Stor Skallesluger	6 (3)
Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	Rørhøg	2 (2)
Pallid/Montagus Harrier	<i>Circus macrourus</i> or <i>Circus pygargus</i>	Steppehøg/Hedehøg	1
Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>	Kongeørn	1
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	Musvåge	Common
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	Tårnfalk	1
Black Grouse	<i>Lyrurus tetrix</i>	Urfugl	21 (4)
Capercaillie	<i>Tetrao urogallus</i>	Tjur	4 (4)
Hazel Grouse	<i>Bonasa bonasia</i>	Hjerpe	3 (2)
Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>	Trane	64 (5)
Corn Crake	<i>Crex crex</i>	Engsnarre	2 (2)
Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	Strandskade	2
Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	Vibe	Few
Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	Dobbeltbekkasin	Common
Woodcock	<i>Scolopax rusticola</i>	Skovsneppe	4
Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	Stor Kobbersneppe	1
Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	Storspove	10
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	Mudderklire	3
Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>	Svaleklire	9 (4)
Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>	Tinksmed	6 (2)
Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	Rødben	4 (2)
Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	Fjordterne	1
Arctic Tern	<i>Sterna paradisaea</i>	Havterne	26

Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>	Huldue	2
Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>	Gøg	Common
Eurasian Wryneck	<i>Jynx torquilla</i>	Vendehals	2 (2)
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopus major</i>	Stor Flagspætte	Common
White-backed Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopus leucotos</i>	Hvidrygget Flagspætte	1 heard/hørt tromme
Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>	Grønspætte	1
Black Woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus martius</i>	Sortspætte	2 (2)
Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>	Skovpiber	Common
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	Hvid Vipstjert	Common
Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>	Gul Vipstjert	1
Bohemian Waxwing	<i>Bombycilla garrulous</i>	Silkehale	6
Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>	Rødstjert	Common
Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochrorus</i>	Husrødstjert	1
Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	Stenpikker	7
Thrush Nightingale	<i>Luscinia luscinia</i>	Nattergal	7 (5)
Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	Misteldrossel	8
Fieldfare	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>	Sjagger	Common
Great Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i>	Drosselrørsanger	1
Icterine Warbler	<i>Hippolais icterina</i>	Gulbug	1
Lesser Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia curruca</i>	Gærdesanger	Few
Common Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>	Tornsanger	Few
Wood Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus sibilatrix</i>	Skovsanger	Common
Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	Gransanger	Few
Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	Løvsanger	Few
Red-breasted Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula parva</i>	Lille Fluesnapper	1
Pied Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>	Broget Fluesnapper	4
Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalus caudatus</i>	Halemejsje	2
Red-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius collurio</i>	Rødrygget Tornskade	1
Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	Sortkrage	5
Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	Ravn	11 (4)
Common Redpoll	<i>Carduelis flammea</i>	Gråsiken	1
Eurasian Siskin	<i>Carduelis spinus</i>	Grønsiken	Few
Common Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>	Tornirisk	Few



Pic. 29. Lunch break in Järeda.



Pic. 30. A Russian church