

# **Estonia in Spring**

## **Arctic migration in the Baltic**

**28 April to 5 May, 2007**

**Leaders:** Tim Earl and Antero Topp

This was a great trip to witness the Arctic migration of sea-ducks, divers [loons] waders and attendant predators which pass up the Baltic States in spring. It was marred by a persistent cold north-easterly wind which stopped small bird migration and made conditions uncomfortable [the worst I have known]. Compensation came from a great group whose warmth and friendliness would have earned us jobs with the United Nations. Our US friends were great fun to have along highlighting the 'differences which divide the two nations' [*Winston Churchill*] while cementing the bond between us. Thanks to everyone who found birds, enjoyed a joke or two, supped wine and added greatly to our Baltic blast.

### **Highlights:**

- Skeins of Barnacle Geese touched pink by the rising sun on our first morning. This was followed by superb views of Lesser White-fronted Geese.
- Ruffs in full breeding plumage ranging from black through gold to white neck-feathers.
- A female Capercaillie which sat in a pine tree for us all to admire and photograph for several minutes.
- Huge flocks of Barnacle, White-fronted and Bean geese filling the skies.
- Pied Flycatchers and Wood Warblers which entertained us in freezing conditions.
- A lek of multicoloured Ruffs near the Russian border was made the more thrilling by Little Gulls in full breeding plumage and a passing Hobby.
- Europe's finest lek of Great Snipe performed well on our two evenings in Tartu. What a shame we could only hear them the second evening as field-mist rose and coated the birds in an impenetrable blanket.

## **Daily diary**

### **Saturday 28 April**

**To Haapsalu, Estonia:** Sunny, little breeze, cool 8°C

A field with 500 Bean and White-fronted geese was a good start to Estonia birding. True, we had seen a couple of nesting White Storks and a lone Common Crane, but the sight of wildfowl in numbers was a delight.

The flight from Heathrow was uneventful and we met those starting in Tallinn in good spirits, despite riots in the city during the day – Russians protesting about a Second World War monument being moved.

The drive to Haapsalu was interesting – as much for the fact that the countryside looked quite bleak after a long cold winter. Estonia's snow had melted early this year, the grass was greening up and trees bursting forth. We saw Raven, a Buzzard, Common Gulls, White Storks and several Lapwings along the journey.

But the weather forecast for tomorrow was good, our first dinner delicious [especially the salad and salmon in cream] and we retired soon afterwards in anticipation of an early start in the morning.

### **Sunday 29 April**

**Haapsalu Bay:** Sunny, overcast later, cold north wind -4°C to 8°C

Getting up for a 5am start was easier than expected and tea or coffee before we left a bonus. It meant that we were in fields in the Haeska area with Skylarks singing overhead and all around us, watching skeins of Barnacle Geese turned pink in the rising sunrays – to the haunting calls of about 40 Cranes which we could see feeding close by. A Roe buck put in an appearance along with a couple of Bean Geese and a pair of Greylags. Two Elk [Moose] appeared in a distant field and we set off to get closer views... of their bums as they turned around and trotted off.

No matter. After a stop to admire yet more Barnacle Geese, this time feeding, we pulled up next to a small flock of grey geese. These were examined closely through 'scopes which confirmed Antero's hunch of Lesser White-fronted Geese. There were eleven with one Greater White-fronted Goose for comparison, a wonderful sight. We took our time watching them but when we drove around a corner for even better views they took off.

Exploring the fields we were delighted to listen to a Whinchat singing sweetly and with surprising volume. Several more were watched before we found our first Wheatears. A Great Grey [Northern] Shrike posed on a wire for us before assuming its natural perch on a low tree. Our journey took us to the delightful Vönnu pond where we searched for one of Estonia's great rarities – with success – the Moorhen was blogging around and singing for us. It shared the pond with a Little and a Slavonian [Horned] grebe and a pair of Goldeneyes which took off as we arrived. To end the waterbird list a female Goosander did several fly-arounds.

A whistling Grey-headed [Grey-faced] Woodpecker flew above our heads and called in its mate. This set off a couple of Wrynecks which also called. One was finally found and admired through 'scopes.

After a good breakfast we visited Haapsalu Bay starting on a peninsular where we viewed the sea from a farmer's ramp. Once again we found huge numbers of Barnacle Geese [the day total ended around 10,000] which were searched in the hope of a rarity without success. We did get good views of Wood Sandpipers, most of the common duck species, a couple of distant White-tailed Eagles and numerous Arctic Terns.

Moving on to the tip of the peninsular we were greeted by another flock of Barnacle Geese which was duly examined and a singing Black Redstart. A sea-watch produced a flock of displaying Black Scoters and a few Scaup just offshore with Cormorants passing in small flocks. It was then we noticed that there were thousands of birds on the sea further out – we hoped they might be held up by the cold northerly wind. Little and Arctic terns were feeding in front of us. On land a stunning Yellow Wagtail flew past as did a pair of Linnets and a flock of Cranes as we boarded the buses.

Lunch was eaten in a field near the Haeska Tower which we visited afterwards, spending the afternoon in this exciting place. The wind was too cold to stay up the tower long but we did see 500 Spotted Redshanks and scores of Ruff at a distance, A group of Whooper Swans was found and pointed out to the less hardy below.

Sheltering in the comfort of a newly thatched building we had a super time with all sorts of goodies including several Smew, fly-past White-tailed Eagle, one of which snatched something from the surface, a Caspian Tern, three Hawfinches which did their usual non-hanging-around trick, a pair of Garganey and a Grey Heron.

Returning to the hotel at 4.45pm we relaxed in the warmth while Derek went off to find Haapsalu Marina where he built up an impressive list of 'extras'.

We were delighted when two cases which had disappeared into 'Finnair' on arrival were delivered to the hotel at 9pm.

### **Monday 30 April**

**Grouse and Haapsalu Bay:** Sunny, light cloud, cold north wind -2°C to 7°C

A brilliant start to the day with some great birds, even before breakfast. We left the hotel at 5am and were soon in deep forest looking for a Black Grouse lek. Our first lone male was not a good start. It looked as if lekking had finished. Rich spotted another high in a dead tree some distance away as we were watching Wood Lark and Crested Tit.

We decided that it was best to seek out other birds and enjoyed a short walk through remote forest on which we saw Goldcrest, Tree Pipit, Brambling and a stunning Goshawk. My bus stopped to investigate a White-backed Woodpecker found by Richard and a male Redstart. When we caught up with the others they were admiring two Black Grouse cocks – we discovered later that they were part of a lek comprising eight males and a female.

Highlight of the morning was a female Capercaillie which was found on the side of the track and flew into a pine tree giving us stunning views for some minutes. Every detail of her plumage could be seen and we were thrilled as she gazed down on the two buses with apparent curiosity. Many pictures were taken to record this delightful event.

No birding trip ought to miss a sewage works visit and ours was no exception. Happily the one at Haapsalu does not pong too much and a search for Penduline Tit and Water Rail was mounted. The latter was successful with two birds calling but not seen. Several Reed Buntings and a Lesser Black-backed Gull were compensation for the latter.

Our second stop of the morning was in a sheltered corner of Haapsalu Bay where there was a great deal to see. White-tailed Eagles were numerous with at least five seen. Margaret had the delight of watching one and an Osprey in her 'scope at the same time. There were lots of Grey Herons with 30 roosting on a small island at the same time. Good numbers of Tufted Ducks led the waterbird interest; in addition there were also several Smew and Great Crested Grebes. Common Terns predominated, the first we had seen, and a singing Willow Warbler grabbed the attention of some.

Moving on to Pöösaspea Neem, a birdwatching hide on the point, had fire-making materials so we decided to light it and have lunch there. Collecting driftwood for the stove was easy and it was soon apparent that a good decision had been made.

The sea had lots of Long-tailed Ducks bobbing around waiting for the wind to shift before continuing their migration north. They were joined by a few Eiders, lots of terns and gulls and at least one Red-necked Grebe in full breeding plumage. The overall sight was terrific.

As a bonus there was a little visible migration going on with a Rough-legged Buzzard and male Hen [Northern] Harrier leading the charge. Siskins went through in dribs and drabs joined on one occasion by Crossbills which were heard but not seen. A Yellow Wagtail made up the small-bird list.

Cold Plants were in bloom along the shingle spit, a species which was once popular in British gardens but seems to be dying out.

A stop at the Nova Reserve on our way back was largely unproductive but a pair of Bullfinches and a Mistle Thrush was seen.

We ended the day at Haapsalu Marina where Pochard were numerous, at least three White-tailed Eagles were seen, including one on the opposite bank, Smew and a Goosander [Common Merganser] made up the Sawbills. Three Coots and a small flock of House Martins were seen on the way back to the hotel.

Several group members played the part of Buff-breasted Sandpipers in an attempt, extremely successful, to help me explain lekking before a good dinner was enjoyed by all.

## **Tuesday 1 May**

**To Häädemeister:** Sunny, cold wind dropping slowly during the day, -5°C to 8°C

Our hopes for a calm day and strong migration were dashed when we arrived at Dirhami Harbour at 5.45am to stand in a wind which was bitter and strong. Birds were on the move, however, and our efforts were not unrewarded. Large numbers of Long-tailed Ducks were passing through although many of them dropped out just beyond the point where a large flock built up. Divers hate a headwind but some were facing their nemesis and flying past. Most were Red-throated Divers but there were a few Black-throated too. A few Black Scoter had Velvet [White-winged] Scoters for company; there were Goosander and Red-breasted Merganser, Shelduck and even a couple of Mute Swans. Land birds passing over included Siskins and a Hobby.

We finished earlier than normal as hypothermia was setting in for all of us. A Sparrowhawk, Marsh Harrier and many thrushes – Song Thrush and Redwing – were seen on the way back to the hotel.

After another great breakfast we said our goodbyes and left for Häädemeister stopping for a last look at the Haeska Tower. The wind had dropped considerably on the last time we were there and the group squeezed together at the top to enjoy the sights and sounds of the area. Geese were still there in their thousands with vast though distant flocks responding to the attentions of White-tailed Eagles. Barn Swallows and House Martins had arrived and a good number were feeding around the mudflats beneath us. But the hoped-for Ruffs and Spotted Redshanks had gone along with some of the ducks. One big flock of Teal had come in and to our delight the flock of 11 Lesser White-fronted Geese we had seen previously were feeding with Barnacles on one of the reed islands.

Our drive to a nearby coffee-stop, the only roadside café in Estonia, was delayed by the sighting of a Lesser Spotted Eagle which put on a display for us [Er, probably for its mate – Ed] for about five minutes, soaring and plunging in equal measure. Lunch was a picnic in the Avansi Uula area, on a slight ridge where we watched a male Montagu's Harrier ghosting over the fields putting up Reed Buntings as it went. Marsh and Hen harriers were also seen before we resumed our journey.

The next top was at Parnu golf course where, on wet fields nearby, a Red-breasted Goose had been seen the previous day. As we arrived, a pair of Black-tailed Godwits in full breeding plumage was feeding on the course giving excellent views, although one had a damaged leg.

Flocks of geese were wheeling around raising hopes that we might see the Red-breasted Goose but our arrival at a pumping station where it had been seen drew a blank – there were no birds there.

We drove on to Parnu, going through this big Soviet-style city with no hold-ups, and on to Häädemeister, arriving at the hotel in time for a little birding in the grounds.

### **Wednesday 2 May**

**Nigula Forest woodpeckers;** bitter cold with cloud building giving solid rain and sleet, clearing later -6°C to 6°C

Another 5am start gave us the opportunity to make the most of this bitterly cold day. There had been a hard frost overnight but happily the Nigula forest was sheltered and we enjoyed a great pre-breakfast walk.

A Black Woodpecker was heard drumming almost immediately but could not be located – we had better luck with a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker [drumming almost as loudly as the Black] which posed on top of a high tree for us while a Pied Flycatcher flitted around beneath it. We were amazed that an insect-eating bird should be around in such cold conditions.

A pair of Hazel Grouse flew across the ride we were walking down but could not be located. There was plenty of song for compensation with Wood Warbler, Wren, Song Thrush, Treecreeper and Nuthatch all in the chorus line. Rounding a corner, we were watching a Black Woodpecker when three Spotted Nutcrackers landed in a tree in front of us – wonderful

fortune indeed. A Great Spotted Woodpecker was next in line followed by two Dunnocks singing from the very tops of high Spruce trees.

Returning to the buses we saw a Marsh Tit and a Nuthatch of the eastern race. Wood Warbler, Wren, Chiffchaff and Treecreeper were all heard. Snipe were drumming when we stopped the buses in a clearing to watch a pair of Grey-headed Woodpeckers and a Green sandpiper which flew over displaying was a great bonus bird to see.

A Blackcock lek was found by Antero on the way back to the hotel. We were able to watch five males displaying in a field in front of us. Two Golden Plovers were in the bottom of the field but flew off before many could see them.

Breakfast was followed by a short drive to Häädemeister where we went down a track through reeds to the Baltic Sea. An immature White-tailed Eagle lifted from a rock just five metres in front of us as we approached the beach, an amazing sight given its huge size.

Attempts to see birds in the reed-beds were thwarted due to the cold wind but Mute, Bewick's and Whooper swans were all seen on the sea together with large numbers of Cormorants which breed nearby.

It was beginning to rain when we arrived at the Kabli bird observatory, that then turned to sleet making our walk through woods uncomfortable, to say the least, and birdless. We returned to the hotel for lunch and a siesta.

The plan was to go out again at 4pm but the weather was worse by then so we met at 4.30 for a slide show on the Galapagos, given by John, and Falklands by me. A pair of Tree Sparrows and a Great Tit were queuing to join us, also keen to get out of the weather and allowing us great views through a window. The talks were voted a success and when we emerged the weather had started to improve. An impromptu birding session around the hotel produced great views of a pair Little Ringed Plovers in display mode with a third bird present. A pair of Sandwich Terns was found while three Lesser Black-backed Gulls included two of the Scandinavian race *L. f. fuscus* and one from northern Russia *L. f. heuglini*.

All in all, the day had turned out well, considering the cold, wet weather.

### **Thursday 3 May**

**Picla Pools and Tartu:** overcast, cold wind but dry 2°C to 7°C

Our rooms at the hotel overlooked the sea and some of us enjoyed an hour's sea-watching from them. Lots of Long-tailed Ducks were streaming past with Red and Black-throated Divers [Loons] too. A later start was appreciated and we left the hotel at 8.30am complete with luggage.

Our first stop was at the Picla Pools – a former Soviet fish farm where almost immediately a Bittern was heard booming. Bearded Reedlings [Tits] were calling in the overgrown ponds but only a few of us gained views. They did not like putting their heads up in the seemingly ever-present cold north-easterly wind.

I picked up the reeling song of a Savi's Warbler which showed well in the reeds. We could even see the inside of its red gape. A pair of Marsh Harriers was upsetting the locals Greylags and a White-tailed Eagle passed overhead; two more were seen from the beach. On the sea we found a pair of Gargany which were spectacular, contrasting with Gadwall nearby.

Lunch was a picnic in the beautiful and tempting Sooma National Park – how we all would have liked to stay nearby but sadly there is no accommodation for miles. A Black woodpecker called and flew over our heads soon after we arrived while several Pied Flycatchers were flitting through trees and bushes despite the cold. A pair of Willow Tits was watched feeding in a Spruce and at least three Wood Warblers were found – a really spectacular species.

Driving out of the park Derek called for a bird which landed on a dead Silver Birch and was identified as a White-backed Woodpecker. We all enjoyed good views before it flew off.

European Beavers breed in the park and we saw several areas where they had been active plus one huge lodge.

We arrived at the hotel in Tartu spot on time at 5pm despite a detour to investigate some huge flocks of Bean and White-fronted geese. A couple of Tundra Bean geese were identified among the thousands of Taiga Beans.

Highlight of the Tartu stay is a visit to Europe's best Great Snipe lek in fields just outside the city. Sadly, Antero was told by eminent Finnish and Swedish ornithologists that the lek was deserted but we went out to look anyway, despite more rain and sleet. Our persistence paid huge dividends with great views of seven Great Snipe clicking, leaping, fanning their white-edged tails and generally putting on a great display. We watched until there was no light left when we returned to the hotel for a celebratory drink.

#### **Friday 4 May**

**Aadla Magic and the Russian border;** rain at first slowly clearing 2°C to 8°C

The Aadla marshes are a much abused but stunning birding area on the outskirts of Tartu. We were there at 6.15am and immediately rewarded by sounds of a calling Spotted Crake. It was while searching for the bird that Gill noticed a brightly coloured yellow wagtail – a brilliant male Citrine Wagtail. We watched it feeding no more than five metres from us for some time before it flew off and we could again concentrate on the crake. It was seen by Antero heading right across a tiny channel. I saw it return a few minutes later but most of the group had to be content with hearing its calls.

A flock of 50 [Barn] Swallows was roosting on a fallen tree in a pond while two Red-necked Grebes swam around beneath them. A 'marsh bandit' [also known as Penduline Tit] put in an appearance after being heard in willow trees but we decided to visit the other side of the area where a flock of about 70 Little Gulls was found. Returning to the hotel we stopped to investigate a flock of Bean and White-fronted geese and were rewarded with good views of two Tundra Bean Geese.

Our quest after breakfast was the Russian border – we fancied having a picnic while overlooked by Soviet guards on duty in a frontier tower. A walk around Rāpina Mõisa park in search of Middle Spotted Woodpecker was unsuccessful although we did get great views of Treecreeper and the eastern race of Nuthatch *S. e. europaea*.

Our journey east was broken at the wonderful Audru nature reserve where a huge flock of about 400 Golden Plovers had joined some Bean and White-fronted geese. After an embarrassing episode with a minibus which seemed to take root in a wet field, we walked down to get fabulous views of a Ruff lek next to a flash of floodwater.

About 25 males, which ranged from pied through brick red to black, were raising their neck feathers, displaying and charging each other in a frenzy of pre-nuptial ritual. They jumped in the air, chased each other and at times seemed to ram their competitors. We studied them through 'scopes for some time until a passing Hobby scared the birds which adjourned to a distant field to continue their displays.

We had been witnesses to one of the great European ornithological sights and were delighted with the experience. Mother Nature never arranges these things in isolation, however, and the Ruffs were not exception. A flock of about 30 Little Gulls was roosting and occasionally lifting into the air over the flooded field. They were accompanied by about 15 Greenshanks, a few Wood Sandpipers and, when we arrived, two Roe Deer.

Our journey into and out of the reserve was along tracks bordered by snow drifts [yes, snow in May...] which had reduced the surface to a quagmire. We skidded and slid across Estonia until at last terra firma was resumed and our quest for the East was continued.

Lunch was eaten under the gaze of a military tower across the short divide of Lake Peipus, a world apart from Estonia and the European Union but only a couple of hundred metres for the White-tailed Eagle and Marsh Harrier which happily drifted from us to Them.

Derek positioned himself at the top of a wooden wildlife observation tower to watch Curlew, Black Tailed godwit, redshanks and Snipe perform their courtship displays while we lesser mortals below enjoyed views of Common Cranes and an unidentified sandpiper below.

We returned to the hotel in preparation for dinner which was followed by another trip to fields in which Great Snipe congregate to lek [what a day for lekking] for those who had missed it the day before.

Oh dear!

The Swedish and Finnish ornithologists who had spread doom and gloom were there before us – standing in the wrong place. No wonder they had not found the lek. The birds were calling with their strange clicking calls [like rain on a conservatory roof] but we could not see them.

An atmospheric mist had risen in the still evening air and the birds displayed, jumped, spread their white outer-tail feathers and clicked under a white cloak of invisibility. Bring back the sleet, rain, wind and visibility of the birds.

I often say one should never try to repeat wildlife successes and was proved right tonight. We saw very little of the lekking Great Snipe. The sight of Venus above the red setting sun was poor compensation. Skeins of geese passing overhead, joined by a few Cranes and even a Woodcock, could not make up for our disappointment.

The tour ended with a few drinks in the bar while pictures and laptops were discussed by some.

### **Saturday 5 May**

**Tallinn airport and away:** a sharp frost over night was prelude to a fine day -2°C to 4°C

The journey down from Tartu was uneventful. A few reminders of our tour were seen on the 150-minute drive to the airport: Common Crane, Roe Deer, grey geese, a Raven or two...

Flights operated on schedule and we arrived in London in time for buses and planes to take us to final destinations.

## ANNOTATED LIST OF SPECIES

## BIRDS

<b>PHEASANTS &amp; ALLIES</b>		<b>Family Phasianidae</b>	
1	<b>Hazel Grouse</b>	<i>Tetrastes bonasia</i>	One crossed the road in the Nõva reserve; two in the Nigula Forest.
2	<b>Western Capercaillie</b>	<i>Tetrao urogallus</i>	One female seen superbly well in Leidissoo Forest.
3	<b>Black Grouse</b>	<i>Lyrurus tetrix</i>	two leks - one of eight males in the Leidissoo reserve, the second of five males near the Nigula Forest.
<b>WILDFOWL</b>		<b>Family Anatidae</b>	
4	<b>Taiga Bean Goose</b>	<i>Anser fabalis</i>	Seen in huge flocks and skeins particularly inland.
5	<b>Tundra Bean Goose</b>	<i>Anser serrirostris</i>	Two seen at the Aadla marshes, two near the Russian border the following day.
6	<b>Greylag Goose</b>	<i>Anser anser</i>	A few most days.
7	<b>Greater White-fronted Goose</b>	<i>Anser albifrons</i>	Seen on six days, sometimes in flocks of more than 1,000 birds.
8	<b>Lesser White-fronted Goose</b>	<i>Anser erythropus</i>	A flock of 11 birds seen near the Haeska Tower on two days.
9	<b>Barnacle Goose</b>	<i>Branta leucopsis</i>	Seen on five days in flocks of up to several thousands.
10	<b>Mute Swan</b>	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	Abundant on the Baltic Sea coasts.
11	<b>Tundra Swan</b>	<i>Cygnus columbianus</i>	Seen on five days with a maximum of 30 off Häädemeister.
12	<b>Whooper Swan</b>	<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>	Small numbers [total 10] on three days.
13	<b>Common Shelduck</b>	<i>Tadornatadorna</i>	Small numbers, maximum six, recorded on five days.
14	<b>Gadwall</b>	<i>Anas strepera</i>	Seen on four days, a total of 20.
15	<b>Eurasian Wigeon</b>	<i>Anas penelope</i>	Flocks seen at the Haeska tower - 15 on Sunday and 100 the following Tuesday.
16	<b>Mallard</b>	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	Up to 50 daily.
17	<b>Northern Shoveler</b>	<i>Anas clypeata</i>	Up to 30 daily.
18	<b>Northern Pintail</b>	<i>Anas acuta</i>	Seen on five days with a maximum of 100 at the Haeska tower.
19	<b>Garganey</b>	<i>Anas querquedula</i>	Single pairs seen at the Haeska tower and Piela fish ponds.
20	<b>Eurasian Teal</b>	<i>Anas crecca</i>	Noted on four days with a maximum of 200 seen at the Haeska tower.
21	<b>Common Pochard</b>	<i>Aythya ferina</i>	A total of 50 recorded on the sea over two days.
22	<b>Tufted Duck</b>	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>	Recorded on four days with a maximum of 100 in Haapsalu Bay.
23	<b>Greater Scaup</b>	<i>Aythya marila</i>	Numerous offshore with thousands in Haapsalu Bay.
24	<b>Common Eider</b>	<i>Somateria mollissima</i>	Good numbers migrating past Dirhami Harbour, a few elsewhere.
25	<b>White-winged Scoter</b>	<i>Melanitta deglandi</i>	Surprisingly few with just 20 on our morning seawatch.
26	<b>Black Scoter</b>	<i>Melanittanigra</i>	Seen on five days with good numbers off Kabli especially.
27	<b>Long-tailed Duck</b>	<i>Clangula hyemalis</i>	The most common migrating sea duck with hundreds seen on at least three days.
28	<b>Common Goldeneye</b>	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>	Seen in small numbers on six days.

29	<b>Smew</b>	<i>Mergellus albellus</i>	A total of 53 over three days was about average for this species.
30	<b>Common Merganser</b>	<i>Mergus merganser</i>	About 50 seen at the Haeska tower on our first visit, a few elsewhere.
31	<b>Red-breasted Merganser</b>	<i>Mergus serrator</i>	Seen on five days with a maximum of 10 seen at the Haeska tower.
	<b>LOONS</b>	<b>Family Gaviidae</b>	
32	<b>Red-throated Loon</b>	<i>Gavia stellata</i>	Recorded in tens migrating north on three days.
33	<b>Black-throated Loon</b>	<i>Gavia arctica</i>	Six over two days.
	<b>GREBES</b>	<b>Family Podicipedidae</b>	
34	<b>Little Grebe</b>	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	One at Vönnu Pond on our first morning.
35	<b>Red-necked Grebe</b>	<i>Podiceps grisegena</i>	Two seen on the sea, a pair at the Aadla marshes.
36	<b>Great Crested Grebe</b>	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	Good numbers on open water; seen on four days
37	<b>Horned Grebe</b>	<i>Podiceps auritus</i>	One at Vönnu Pond on our first morning.
	<b>STORKS</b>	<b>Family Ciconiidae</b>	
38	<b>White Stork</b>	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	Common: up to 40 seen on nests and feeding daily.
	<b>HERONS, BITTERNES</b>	<b>Family Ardeidae</b>	
39	<b>Eurasian Bittern</b>	<i>Botaurus stellaris</i>	At least one heard booming at the Picla fish ponds.
40	<b>Grey Heron</b>	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	Common to abundant daily.
	<b>CORMORANTS</b>	<b>Family Phalacrocoracidae</b>	
41	<b>Great Cormorant</b>	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	Common to abundant on the coast daily.
	<b>FALCONS</b>	<b>Family Falconidae</b>	
42	<b>Common Kestrel</b>	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	Just one seen in the week.
43	<b>Eurasian Hobby</b>	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>	Two seen during the tour.
	<b>KITES, HAWKS, EAGLES</b>	<b>Family Accipitridae</b>	
44	<b>Osprey</b>	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	Five seen on three days.
45	<b>White-tailed Eagle</b>	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>	Up to 10 seen daily: most on the coast.
46	<b>Western Marsh Harrier</b>	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	Fairly common in land; maximum five on 4 May.
47	<b>Northern Harrier</b>	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>	Four males and one female seen over two days.
48	<b>Montagu's Harrier</b>	<i>Circus pygargus</i>	One male ghosting over fields during our picnic in the Avansi Uula area.
49	<b>Eurasian Sparrowhawk</b>	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	Just one on 1 May.
50	<b>Northern Goshawk</b>	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>	One during our pre-breakfast Leidissoo Forest walk.
51	<b>Common Buzzard</b>	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	Common: up to six seen most days.
52	<b>Rough-legged Buzzard</b>	<i>Buteo lagopus</i>	Two seen during the week, neither well.
53	<b>Lesser Spotted Eagle</b>	<i>Aquila pomarina</i>	One displaying in the Haeska area; two in the Sooma Reserve.
	<b>RAILS, CRAKES, COOTS</b>	<b>Family Rallidae</b>	
54	<b>Spotted Crake</b>	<i>Porzana porzana</i>	One heard in the Aadla marshes was seen only by the leaders.
55	<b>Common Moorhen</b>	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	A national rarity: one at Vönnu Pond on our first morning.
56	<b>Eurasian Coot</b>	<i>Fulica atra</i>	Fairly common; a few seen on four days.
	<b>CRANES</b>	<b>Family Gruidae</b>	
57	<b>Common Crane</b>	<i>Grus grus</i>	Seen in good numbers daily with a maximum of 70 on 29 April.

	<b>OYSTERCATCHERS</b>	<b>Family Haematopidae</b>	
58	<b>Eurasian Oystercatcher</b>	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	Up to 40 daily on the coast.
	<b>STILTS, AVOCETS</b>	<b>Family Recurvirostridae</b>	
59	<b>Pied Avocet</b>	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>	Five seen near Häädemeister over two days.
	<b>PLOVERS</b>	<b>Family Charadriidae</b>	
60	<b>Northern Lapwing</b>	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	Abundant daily.
61	<b>European Golden Plover</b>	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>	Seen twice: maximum a flock of about 400 at the Audru Reserve.
62	<b>Common Ringed Plover</b>	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	Seen on four days, a total of 10.
63	<b>Little Ringed Plover</b>	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>	Seven seen on two days, the second sighting at the Lapanina Hotell where a pair were courting.
	<b>SANDPIPERS, SNIPES</b>	<b>Family Scolopacidae</b>	
64	<b>Eurasian Woodcock</b>	<i>Scolopax rusticola</i>	Singles seen on two days, the first flushed when looking for Hazelgrouse.
65	<b>Great Snipe</b>	<i>Gallinago media</i>	Brilliant views of a lek near Tartu - probably the best in Europe - mist hid the birds on our second visit.
66	<b>Common Snipe</b>	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	Seen on five days, including two occasions when birds were displaying.
67	<b>Black-tailed Godwit</b>	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	Twelve birds seen on four days ; displaying birds on two occasions.
68	<b>Whimbrel</b>	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>	Seen on two days, maximum of six at the Haeska tower.
69	<b>Eurasian Curlew</b>	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	Common displaying in fields and on the coast.
70	<b>Spotted Redshank</b>	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>	An amazing flock of 500 at the Haeska tower held up on migration by north-easterly winds.
71	<b>Common Redshank</b>	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	Common on the coastal sites and a few inland.
72	<b>Common Greenshank</b>	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	Seen on five days with a maximum of 15 at the Ruff lek.
73	<b>Green Sandpiper</b>	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>	Five seen on two days including two displaying.
74	<b>Wood Sandpiper</b>	<i>Tringa glareola</i>	Ten at Puise marshes on our first day.
75	<b>Common Sandpiper</b>	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	A few seen here and there.
76	<b>Dunlin</b>	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	Just one at the Puise marshes.
77	<b>Ruff</b>	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>	A good congregation at the Haeska tower were put in the shade by a fabulous lek in the Audru Reserve.
	<b>GULLS, TERNS, SKIMMERS</b>	<b>Family Laridae</b>	
78	<b>Common [Mew] Gull</b>	<i>Larus canus</i>	Common daily.
79	<b>Great Black-backed Gull</b>	<i>Larus marinus</i>	A few around the coastal areas.
80	<b>Herring Gull</b>	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	Common daily.
81	<b>Lesser Black-backed Gull</b>	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	Five seen on two days including the sub-species L.f. heuglini.
82	<b>Common Black-headed Gull</b>	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>	Good numbers with many migrating north.
83	<b>Little Gull</b>	<i>Larus minutus</i>	Jackpot with this beautiful gull came on the last day with 70 in the Aadla marshes and another 40 or so at the Audru Reserve Ruff lek.
84	<b>Caspian Tern</b>	<i>Sterna caspia</i>	Four on two days in Haapsalu Bay.
85	<b>Sandwich Tern</b>	<i>Sterna sandvicensis</i>	Numbers built up during the week with 40 migrating north at Kabli.
86	<b>Common Tern</b>	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	Common almost daily.
87	<b>Arctic Tern</b>	<i>Sterna paradisaea</i>	Common almost daily.

88	<b>Little Tern</b> <b>SKUAS</b>	<i>Sterna albifrons</i>	Seen three days: nine birds in total.
89	<b>Parasitic Jaeger</b>	<b>Family Stercorariidae</b> <i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>	Surprisingly few: one at the Dirhami seawatch.
	<b>PIGEONS, DOVES</b>	<b>Family Columbidae</b>	
90	<b>Common Pigeon</b>	<i>Columba livia</i>	Common in towns and villages.
91	<b>Stock Dove</b>	<i>Columba oenas</i>	Two in the Nõva Reserve.
92	<b>Common Wood Pigeon</b>	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	A few daily.
	<b>WOODPECKERS</b>	<b>Family Picidae</b>	
93	<b>Eurasian Wryneck</b>	<i>Jynx torquilla</i>	Three at Võnnu pond.
94	<b>Lesser Spotted Woodpecker</b>	<i>Dendrocopos minor</i>	One in the Nigula Forest.
95	<b>White-backed Woodpecker</b>	<i>Dendrocopos leucotos</i>	Singles in the Leidissoo Forest and Sooma nature reserve.
96	<b>Great Spotted Woodpecker</b>	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	Recorded on only two days with four in the Nigula Forest.
97	<b>Black Woodpecker</b>	<i>Dryocopus martius</i>	Three in the Nigula Forest, one overhead at the Sooma nature reserve picnic spot.
98	<b>Grey-headed Woodpecker</b>	<i>Picus canus</i>	Two pairs: at the Võnnu pond and in the Nigula Forest.
	<b>SHRIKES</b>	<b>Family Laniidae</b>	
99	<b>Great Grey Shrike</b>	<i>Lanius excubitor</i>	One in the Haeska area.
	<b>CROWS, JAYS</b>	<b>Family Corvidae</b>	
100	<b>Eurasian Magpie</b>	<i>Pica pica</i>	Common daily
101	<b>Spotted Nutcracker</b>	<i>Nucifraga caryocatactes</i>	Two sightings: one in the Leidissoo Forest, three in the Nigula Forest.
102	<b>Western Jackdaw</b>	<i>Corvus monedula</i>	Common daily: some clearly of the NE race <i>C.m. soemmeringii</i> with a white shoulder.
103	<b>Rook</b>	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	Common.
104	<b>Carrion Crow</b>	<i>Corvus corone</i>	Abundant.
105	<b>Northern Raven</b>	<i>Corvus corax</i>	Common: up to six daily.
	<b>TITS, CHICKADEES</b>	<b>Family Paridae</b>	
106	<b>Marsh Tit</b>	<i>Poecile palustris</i>	Singles on two days.
107	<b>European Crested Tit</b>	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>	One in the Leidissoo Forest.
108	<b>Great Tit</b>	<i>Parus major</i>	Common daily.
109	<b>Blue Tit</b>	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	Common daily.
	<b>PENDULINE TITS</b>	<b>Family Remizidae</b>	
110	<b>Eurasian Penduline Tit</b>	<i>Remiz pendulinus</i>	One 'marsh bandit' at the Aadla marshes.
	<b>SWALLOWS, MARTINS</b>	<b>Family Hirundinidae</b>	
111	<b>Barn Swallow</b>	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	A few seen most days with a passage on 4 May.
112	<b>Common House Martin</b>	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	Seen in small numbers on three days.
	<b>OLD WORLD WARBLERS</b>	<b>Family Sylviidae</b>	
113	<b>Savi's Warbler</b>	<i>Locustella luscinioides</i>	One reeling in the Picla fish ponds.
114	<b>Willow Warbler</b>	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	A few seen or heard most days.
115	<b>Common Chiffchaff</b>	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	Common: singing birds widespread.
	<b>GOLDCRESTS, KINGLETS</b>	<b>Family Regulidae</b>	
116	<b>Goldcrest</b>	<i>Regulus regulus</i>	Two or three seen in forest conifers.
	<b>WRENS</b>	<b>Family Troglodytidae</b>	
117	<b>Winter Wren</b>	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	Heard more than seen in deep forest.
	<b>NUTHATCHES</b>	<b>Family Sittidae</b>	
118	<b>Eurasian Nuthatch</b>	<i>Sitta europaea</i>	Two in Nigula Forest; two in Röpina Mõisa park. All of the E-European race <i>S.e. europaea</i> .
	<b>TREECREEPERS</b>	<b>Family Certhiidae</b>	
119	<b>Eurasian Treecreeper</b>	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>	Quite common in forests and parks.
	<b>STARLINGS</b>	<b>Family Sturnidae</b>	
120	<b>Common Starling</b>	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	Common daily.

<b>THRUSHES</b>		<b>Family Turdidae</b>	
121	<b>Common Blackbird</b>	<i>Turdus merula</i>	Common daily.
122	<b>Fieldfare</b>	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>	Common most days.
123	<b>Redwing</b>	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>	A few still moving north: common.
124	<b>Song Thrush</b>	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	Heard singing more than seen but common.
125	<b>Mistle Thrush</b>	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	Two in the Leidissoo Forest.
<b>CHATS, OLD WORLD FLYCATCHERS</b>		<b>Family Muscicapidae</b>	
126	<b>Black Redstart</b>	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	Two in Haapsalu.
127	<b>Common Redstart</b>	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>	One male in the Leidissoo Forest.
128	<b>Whinchat</b>	<i>Saxicolarubetra</i>	A few seen on four days, one singing well.
129	<b>Northern Wheatear</b>	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	Common daily.
130	<b>European Pied Flycatcher</b>	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>	Amazingly, several in the Nigula Forest and Sooma Reserve in sub-zero temperatures.
<b>OLD WORLD SPARROWS</b>		<b>Family Passeridae</b>	
131	<b>House Sparrow</b>	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	Uncommon, only a few in towns.
132	<b>Eurasian Tree Sparrow</b>	<i>Passer montanus</i>	The most common sparrow with flocks of up to 30.
<b>ACCENTORS</b>		<b>Family Prunellidae</b>	
133	<b>Dunnock</b>	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	One in the Leidissoo forest, three singing from Nigula Forest treetops.
<b>WAGTAILS, PIPITS</b>		<b>Family Motacillidae</b>	
134	<b>Western Yellow Wagtail</b>	<i>Motacilla flava</i>	A few of the blue-headed race <i>M.f. thunbergi</i> migrating seen on 4 days.
135	<b>Citrine Wagtail</b>	<i>Motacilla citreola</i>	A stunning male in the Aadla marshes.
136	<b>White Wagtail</b>	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	Abundant daily.
137	<b>Meadow Pipit</b>	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	Common daily.
138	<b>Tree Pipit</b>	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>	Common in forests.
<b>FINCHES</b>		<b>Family Fringillidae</b>	
139	<b>Common Chaffinch</b>	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	Abundant daily.
140	<b>Brambling</b>	<i>Fringilla montifringilla</i>	One male in the Leidissoo Forest.
141	<b>European Greenfinch</b>	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>	A few daily.
142	<b>Eurasian Siskin</b>	<i>Carduelis spinus</i>	Common daily, visible migration at Dirhami harbour.
143	<b>European Goldfinch</b>	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	A few daily.
144	<b>Common Redpoll</b>	<i>Carduelis flammea</i>	One at the Vönnu pond.
145	<b>Common Linnet</b>	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>	Seen in small numbers on three days.
146	<b>Red Crossbill</b>	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>	Fly-over birds recorded on two days.
147	<b>Eurasian Bullfinch</b>	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>	Pairs seen on three days.
148	<b>Hawfinch</b>	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>	Typical short-stay sightings on two days.
<b>BUNTINGS, NEW WORLD SPARROWS &amp; ALLIES</b>		<b>Family Emberizidae</b>	
149	<b>Yellowhammer</b>	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>	Common daily.
150	<b>Common Reed Bunting</b>	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	Common daily.
<b>MAMMALS</b>			
<b>RABBITS &amp; HARES</b>		<b>Family Leporidae</b>	
1	<b>European Hare</b>	<i>Lepus europaeus</i>	Four seen on three days.
<b>BEAVERS</b>		<b>Family Castoridae</b>	
2	<b>Eurasian Beaver</b>	<i>Castor fiber</i>	Lodges or chewed trees seen in the Picla fish ponds, Avansi Uula area and the Audru reserve.
<b>DOGS &amp; FOXES</b>		<b>Family Canidae</b>	
3	<b>Red Fox</b>	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>	Three seen on two days.
<b>WEASELS &amp; BADGERS</b>		<b>Family Mustelidae</b>	
4	<b>European Pine Marten</b>	<i>Martes martes</i>	Two road-kills seen.

	<b>MOLES &amp; DESMONS</b>	<b>Family Talpidae</b>	
5	<b>European Mole</b>	<i>Talpa europaea</i>	Hills seen every day.
	<b>PIGS</b>	<b>Family Suidae</b>	
6	<b>Wild Boar (Domestic Pig)</b>	<i>Sus domesticus</i>	Rootings seen in the Leidissoo Forest, Nigula Forest and Sooma nature reserve.
	<b>DEER</b>	<b>Family Cervidae</b>	
7	<b>Western Roe Deer</b>	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>	Common, up to six daily.
8	<b>Elk [Moose]</b>	<i>Alces alces</i>	Just three on our first morning, phew!
9	<b>White-tailed Deer</b>	<i>Odocoileus virginianus</i>	One seen on the drive from the airport to Haapsalu.

### **FLUTS (BUTTERFLIES)**

1	<b>Green-veined White</b>	<i>Pieris napi</i>	The only butterfly recorded more than once on this 'Arctic' trip.
2	<b>Brimstone</b>	<i>Gonepteryx rhamni</i>	One on 29 April.
3	<b>Red Admiral</b>	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>	One on 29 April.
4	<b>Small White</b>	<i>Pieris rapae</i>	One on 1 May.

### **HEAVENLY BODIES**

1	<b>Venus</b>		Seen well on our last crack at the Great Snipe lek.
---	--------------	--	-----------------------------------------------------

**Tim Earl**  
Principal Leader, Guernsey, May 2007

© The Travelling Naturalist and Limosa Holidays