

Estonia in spring

Arctic migration in the Baltic

28 April to 5 May, 2010

by **Tim Earl**

Leaders: Tim Earl and Antero Topp

We had another great trip to watch the migration of birds up the Baltic coast on their way to the Arctic. This was a major highlight with huge flocks of White-fronted, Tundra Bean and Barnacle Geese seen in fields, all manner of ducks including Smew, Long-tailed, Black and Velvet Scoter passing through and even some Bewicks (Tundra) and Whooper Swans remaining. Our group gelled well and was great fun. Early morning starts were compensated for by some wonderful sightings of birds and mammals (Elk, Raccoon Dog and no fewer than three Pine Martens seen among more common species). The success rate on major target species such as Lesser White-fronted Geese, Great Snipe and Citrine Wagtails was 100% (that is, all three seen well by every member of the group). It was great to have travelled with so many of the group before and hope that new friendships made will also result in new places explored together.

Highlights (as selected by group members):

- Nine wild, boar which crossed the road and were seen by everyone in the lead minibus.
- Ruffs in full breeding plumage ranging from black through gold to white neck-feathers.
- Our major sea-watch on which all manner of ducks and geese were seen along with Black- and Red-throated Divers. Smew and Eider were singled out by some for special mention.
- Huge flocks of Barnacle, Whitefronted and Bean geese filling the skies and fields in places.
- The unexpected Red-necked Grebes seen in brilliant light on our way to Tartu.
- Lesser Spotted, Middle Spotted and Great Spotted Woodpeckers seen Tartu Cemetery.
- Little Gulls feeding over flood water which had swamped low-lying fields.
- Seeing new species of birds such as Caspian Gull, Middle Spotted Woodpecker and Citrine Wagtail plus getting better acquainted with others like Ruff, Wryneck and Lesser Spotted Woodpecker.
- Seeing a Hazel Grouse which perched so obligingly for us.
- Observing the races of Long-tailed Tits (white headed), Nuthatches (Ferro-Scandinavian) and Yellow Wagtails (blue headed).
- The way a Pine Marten responded to calls of a Three-toed Woodpecker played from a tape.

Daily diary

Saturday 28 April

To Haapsalu, Estonia

Sunny, north westerly breeze, cold 5°C

I suppose the highlight today was getting here at all. After 10 days of uncertainty caused by Icelandic volcanic ash we arrived in Tallinn on time.

The drive to Haapsalu was without a stop – improved roads have been given ‘clearway’ status – although we did see a small flock of geese, two Cranes, a Marsh Harrier, several Grey Herons and a Raven.

The view from our rooms was a little bleak but the sharp-eyed among us picked out lots of mute swans, Goosanders, Scamp, Black-headed, common and Great Black-backed Gulls.

We turned in after a good dinner for an early night in preparation for tomorrow’s 5am start.

Sunday 25 April

Matsalu Bay and environs

Sunny, cold early on but a slightly lighter and warmer wind – 4°C rising to 12°C

We started the day with a wild goose chase and ended looking for an Estonian rarity... and both were successful. Our 5am start (after tea, coffee and biscuits) was rewarded with views of 22 Lesser White-fronted Geese and the day ended with a pair of Moorhens!

There was much more in between.

Our pre-breakfast session started well with a flock of Greater White-fronted and Barnacle Geese before sunrise. The atmosphere was charged as we searched the Matsalu Fields... the sun rose turning the western sky red, skeins of geese were on the wing, gulls were wheeling above an early plough and skylarks sang overhead, invisible against the pure blue sky.

But these were not the Lesser White-fronts! We drove slowly around the fields noting a Fox on its way home, a pair of Roe Deer, the buck carrying antlers still in velvet, and disturbing a Brown Hare – but not that much (*check names of Roe Deer).

My bus stopped for three birds in a bush, Wryneck was one, giving its identity away by calling, the other two were a pair of Yellowhammers. Six Wheatears were close by and then we found four Finnish birders (one standing on the roof of his car which had a platform fitted for his tripod and telescope) who were watching a small flock of White-fronted Geese (about 100 in all).

Among them were the Lessers and after some perseverance we were able to make out their larger white faces, smaller beaks and, in good light only, the yellow eye-rings of a few.

Our first stop after watching two White-tailed Eagles over breakfast (actually they were sitting on rocks on the other side of the bay. We set off for Matsalu Bay.

The wind had increased forcing us to use sheltered observation points. The first was at a ramp up to a barn at Pegari-Sassi Rannit where a host of ducks, geese and swans were on the sea. Mute, Bewick's (Tundra) and Whooper Swans were present in numbers. Barnacle and White-fronted Geese were roosting while Teal, Scaup and Pochard represented the quackers.

Our first waders included Avocets, Bar-tailed Godwits in breeding plumage, Ringed and Grey Plovers, Redshanks and Oystercatchers.

We stopped to 'scope' a flock of Tundra Bean Geese on the way back.

Returning to the Matsalu Fields we passed the Wryneck bush which had been taken over by a flock of nine Hawfinches! These showed well and we enjoyed some time watching them.

The nearby Haeska Tower was terrific – Rita found our first pair of Smew, there were hundreds of Pintails plus a good smattering of many other duck species.

Some saw a Peregrine from the tower and a pair of Caspian Terns was found roosting on a rock. A huge flock of geese lifted from their roost noisily as a hunting White-tailed Eagle passed overhead.

Our picnic lunch was followed by a fruitless search for big flocks of geese but a small group of Bullfinches was some compensation.

We ended the day at a small lake where Fieldfares were 'chacking' in excitement, Redwings and a few more Bullfinches were seen with a pair of Siskins. Highlight of the stop were two Moorhens found skulking on the banks – a rare species up in Estonia.

A pleasant two hours was spent at the hotel – many people were on their balconies watching a host of birds in the bay.

Monday 26 April

Sea watching and Matsalu Bay area

Sunny, high cloud later, southerly wind – 4°C to 15°C

A flock of Common Scoter flew behind the vehicles as we parked at Spithami Point to start our early-morning sea-watch... birds were flashing past before we were out of the minibuses!

They were the start of a cold but exciting 90 minutes of super birding. Highlights were Black and Red-throated Divers, Velvet Scoters and hundreds of Long-tailed Ducks. But it was the spectacle of so many rare (for us) seabirds on the water close-by and migrating past which was the real highlight.

Groups of Eider and Common Scoter drakes were taking part in communal displays (a little like floating leks), Golden-eyes Red-breasted Mergansers and a Shelduck put in appearances while overhead we saw or heard Woodlarks, Tree Pipits, Siskins and even two White-tailed Eagles.

As if this were not enough, a pair of Little Ringed Plovers was watched, the male doing display flights, as we returned to the buses.

The rest of our day should have been an anti-climax but matched the sea-watch with booming Bittern for lunch (not literally? – Ed), Willow, Penduline and Bearded Tits, Little Terns, Little Gulls, and late arrivals (probably arriving on the southerly wind as we watched) in the form of Willow Warblers, Yellow Wagtails, Robins and a male Common Redstart.

Perhaps the most significant event was the sight and sound of Cranes migrating northwards. At least two flocks of 30 birds and several other smaller groups were seen.

Our first stop after breakfast was at the up-market sewage works – one of the few I've visited that does not pong. There we saw Savi's Warbler, glimpsed briefly a Bearded Reedling (Tit) and heard Water Rail. Another Estonian rarity had just migrated in – a Dunnock which sang sweetly for us.

The first of three stops in the Silma Reserve produced great views of Smew, Little and Caspian Terns.

Some of us saw a Green Sandpiper on the way to our lunch stop. A visit to the high tower put us close to several Little Gulls while Penduline Tits wheezed beneath us. A Willow Tit and another Penduline Tit were seen and a Bittern boomed occasionally.

Willow Warblers had begun to sing – we thought they had just arrived. A Red-necked Grebe was ‘singing’ in a reed-bed and our first House Martin was seen.

A short walk to a tower hide was welcome exercise as was picking out Yellow Wagtail, more than 100 Curlews in a line, 16 Greenshanks and two (newly arrived?) Robins.

Most of us saw Woodcock and Snipe (hearing the latter too in some cases), listened to Bitterns and Water Rails but saw no Elks, on a late-evening drive. Antero’s bus did see nine Wild Boar crossing the road in front of them, however.

We turned in late for a short night’s sleep ready to leave at 5am for a spot of Blackcock watching.

Tuesday 27 April

To Häädemeister and the Lapanina Hotel

Sunny, some broken cloud, SW wind 17°C.

It proved impossible to find a Black Grouse lek despite searching their usual haunts. The Matsalu Forest was our destination – we investigated a remote-controlled camera hidden in an old tree stump shortly after getting out of the buses while a Crested Tit came to investigate us..

A short walk produced three Treecreepers, Robins and Dunnocks singing from high tree-top perches and a Snipe drumming.

Stopping on our way back we saw a stunning long-tailed Tit of the white-headed race, another Treecreeper and our first singing Wood Warbler. Other firsts included Tree Pipit and Pied Flycatcher. Our journey to Häädemeister was broken with several stops.

At the Haeska Tower (in better conditions this time) we saw a group of Spotted Redshanks, thousands of roosting Pintails, Bewick’s and Whooper Swans and our first Spotted Flycatchers. We kept

To tradition by calling at the country’s only road-side café (although a few petrol stations now have coffee facilities) at Kasari but the rewards this year were limited.

Lunch was another picnic eaten at the Avansi Uula fields where two distant Montague’s Harriers were seen. A female Hen Harrier put in an appearance just as we were leaving.

Skirting Parnu and the golf course (which has a few hundred White-fronted Geese on the driving range) we arrived at a goose-filled marsh (do we call it the Duvet Marsh then? –Ed). Parma Marsh is well known for the geese which stop there while migrating north but that did not prepare us for the sight of 15,000 White-fronted and Tundra Bean Geese. At one point all the birds took off in response to a White-tailed Eagle overhead.

Our arrival at the Lapanina Hotel was greeted by singing Serins (possibly the most northern in Europe) and sea-ducks outside our windows. Scoters, Wigeon and Shoveler were identified despite atrocious light as the sun set.

Wednesday 28 April

Nigula Forest; east, north and south

Overcast early but sunny later, cool wind 12°C.

The bass calls of a Ural Owl stopped us in our tracks as we walked deep in the Nigula Forest. The bird seemed to be moving away as it repeated them and we failed to see it. It had been a thrilling contact, nevertheless.

A start at 4am had not been too painful and we were rewarded with a delightful morning walk. Wrens, Dunnocks and Robins were singing loudly despite having just arrived after a long migration from warmer winter homes. They were joined by the big movers – Willow and Wood Warblers.

But our thoughts were on woodpeckers and several tapes were played without response until a Three-toed Woodie was heard drumming. Antero called it up using a tape and a couple of fly-past views were obtained.

The more athletic jumped over a stream to follow the bird into the forest to be rewarded with views ... of a Pine Marten which responded to the tape with interest.

A Cuckoo was heard several times but none showed. A Raccoon Dog ran across our path though and a Willow Tit was also seen. A Great-spotted Woodpecker was drumming as we reached the minibuses.

Our second stop was also to call up woodpeckers – this time a pair of White-backed appeared and posed for us, a most handsome species. A Snipe was drumming overhead and we could see its outer-tail feathers which are responsible for making the noise as the bird dived from on high.

A male Black Grouse was found in a field which held a lek last time we were here – perhaps the other males had finished their displays and gone off by the time we found him.

Our breakfast was welcome – five hours after most of us had risen and it was still only 8.30: 6.30am back home!

A Nuthatch of the Eastern European race *S. e. europaea* was seen from the car park and at least three Serins were singing after breakfast, perhaps the most northerly in Europe.

We drove to the pretty Parnumaa Puhkeala nature reserve where a pair of Long-tailed Tits turned up. At last we were all able to see their white heads. They were of the northern European race *A. c. caudatus*.

A walk through the reserve was delightful, giving us good views of two Goldcrests, Pool Frogs and a Great-spotted Woodpecker excavating a nest-hole. Bullfinches were found by Richard while Rita spotted a male Pied Flycatcher.

Exploring the forest, some of us saw a Black Woodpecker fly off from its nest-hole but it did not return and we eventually returned to the hotel for our 'picnic' lunches which were eaten inside, some with a beer and most followed by a siesta.

Sea-watching from the rooms produced views of Velvet and Black (Common) Scoter, Long-tailed Ducks, Wigeon, Black-throated Divers and Little Gulls. A great result.

I had noticed a long-forgotten track in the morning and at 4pm we went to explore it. To my delight there were many signs of European Beaver activity including an old lodge, a path used to drag Aspen branches back to the stream, many severed sapling stumps and a possible active 'lodge'.

European Beavers have a completely different way of life from their dam-building American cousins. By looking at the activity of those in the Nigula Forest we could see that they are not the menace that the press and some scaremongers like to make out.

The group split – some to watch the Black Woodpecker nest hole found in the morning, the rest of us to take a walk on which a male Pied Flycatcher was found among other species.

We returned to the hotel weary, pleased with our day but definitely looking forward to a lie-in tomorrow.

Thursday 29 April

To Tartu via the Sooma Reserve

Rain, overcast, NE wind 6°C

Rain came in earnest after our 8am departure spoiling what should have been great visits to Kabli bird observatory and the Pielca ponds. It was not just the rain but a raw north-easterly wind which made the temperature seem lower than it was.

A Wheatear and a Red Squirrel were seen at the observatory but the former carp ponds had only a few Grey Herons and four Shelducks of note. The Shelducks were chased from a small field by an indignant horse seemingly jealous of its grazing.

After a coffee stop we drove to the Sooma National Park where we admired a Beaver lodge and explored a side-road.

Antero heard the Goldcrest-like song of a Hazel Grouse which sat and perched for the group to admire for a few seconds. We headed on towards Tartu after a picnic lunch stopping at a small lake to admire 22 Little Gulls and a stunning pair of Red-necked Grebes which were posing in front of a Beaver's lodge.

The highlight of the journey, however, was when we reached the Vaile-Rakke fields where thousands of geese greeted us. They were crammed into fields by flooding in their regular migration stop-over haunts. Estonia had heavy snowfall this winter and the melt water combined with heavy rain before our arrival had caused severe flooding in places.

Our first stop was to admire a flock of Spotted Redshanks which had been joined by Wood Sandpipers and Greenshanks. I found our first Garganey – two pairs on the far side of a lake which was a field last time I was here. Antero played guinea-pig, driving his mini-bus along a track which was flooded in places. It looked as if he was floating at times but his wheels stayed on terra firma and I followed safely.

The far side of the flood water was crowded with birds – Yellow Wagtails, many ducks and a large flock of Ruffs – splendid males in their finest breeding plumage.

White – chestnut – black and combinations of the three colours in extravagant head and neck decorations were sported by the birds. They could not resist a spot of sparring, preparation for the serious job of lekking which would take place on their Arctic breeding grounds.

It was difficult to choose a bird to watch, however, as about 80 Little Gulls were on the water, a few feeding on insects in the air. How could we choose between the extravagant Ruffs and immaculate Little Gulls. It was impossible so we did both.

There were distractions – thousands of White-fronted, Bean and Barnacle Geese took to the air occasionally, perhaps, in response to a passing Osprey which hovered over the flood-waters.

Eventually we tore ourselves away, thrilled by the spectacle of birds waiting for the thaw to work north and liberate their breeding grounds.

After checking in at a Tartu hotell (note the spelling!) and a good dinner we piled into the buses to seek out and watch lekking Great Snipe at possibly Europe's best site – the Kavivere Fields.

Darkness was falling early under a leaden sky, there was more than a hint of rain and I worried that we might not be able to see the birds. Worries curdled to despair when I saw the lekking fields. They were under water! Even the 'go no further' post was under water 10 yards from solid ground and that is usually 150 yards from the lek. This was awful.

Antero and I got out of the buses, exchanged worried looks, and started searching the drier high ground.

Suddenly we heard a characteristic ratchet-like call and saw a flash of white outer-tail feathers as a bird leaped into the air no more than 50 yards away, close to the track we had driven down.

Everyone piled out of the vehicles and all were soon watching the Great Snipes' display at a distance which was a third of the usual. It was fantastic as between nine and 12 (possibly more) males leaped and twisted in the hope of impressing (invisible) females nearby.

Darkness finally put an end to our observations although the clicking calls continued. We returned to the hotel pleased with the sight and resolved to return in better light tomorrow.

Friday 30 May

Russia, Rapina and grave drama with spotted Woodpeckers

Sunny, some cloud, warm SW wind 20°C

Our early morning excursion was relaxed with a 6.00am start to visit the nearby Aardla marshes. They too were flooded and once again Antero and I wondered if we would find the target species – Citrine Wagtail. Happily, a stunning male popped up onto reeds after 10 minutes of searching. Next to it was a male Yellow Wagtail and we were able to compare and contrast the two species.

As expected Marsh Harriers were quartering what little area was still above water and a Bittern was heard booming. Two White-tailed Eagles were sitting benignly in dead trees. We saw the panic and pandemonium as a raptor spooked huge duck flocks a little later.

Moving around the reserve, several Whinchats were seen and heard but there was no sound of Thrush Nightingales, which obviously had not arrived yet.

The Russian border was our destination after breakfast, reached with a comfort stop which produced our first Lesser Whitethroats and a pair of Bullfinches. Common Toads, Pool and Common Frogs were on the grass verge, an indication of the rich pickings for several pairs of White Storks nesting in the village.

An immature Caspian Gull was roosting with Herring Gulls as we reached Lüübnitsa Tower overlooking the Russian border across the narrow end of Lake Peipus. Sadly the bird flew before we could get good views of it.

Greenshanks, Wood Sandpipers and Snipe were in the marsh under the tower. Bittern was booming (we never did see one) while a White-tailed Eagle and Buzzard which were 'interacting' drifted over the lake giving us a Russian 'tick' for the trip!

Those who climbed the tower were rewarded with great views of Russian guards up a tower on the other side of the lake. More importantly, they looked down into a Lapwing nest which had four eggs.

Lunch was late as we were held up on the track to Rapina Polder Tower by the sight of almost 100 Golden Plovers in breeding plumage roosting in the field we were driving through.

High drama was in progress when we walked around Tartu Cemetery – a quiet place full of trees until a row broke out between a Middle-Spotted and a pair of Great Spotted Woodpeckers. The Middle Spot was doing most of the shouting while dive-bombing the male Great Spot.

We never did learn what was happening: had the Great Spot raided or taken over the Middle Spot's nest hole or was he just being over-territorial? Whatever, the argument went on for 10 minutes at which time we left them to it.

Not long afterwards a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker was found, possibly stirred up by the others as the commotion continued. Our bird was content to add his four-penneth by drumming on a broken tree snag. It was an extraordinary event.

Ilmatsalu fish ponds were our penultimate destination – there we walked to an observation tower for views of a Great White Egret and a few Little Gulls. We were enjoying these when a Red-necked Grebe popped up in one of the pools, a super sight from on high. Two more were seen on the way back along with three Sand Martins.

The Great Snipe lek was reached at 6.45pm and we enjoyed the very start of this evening's show before turning our back on Estonia's birds, returning to the hotel to pack for home. Great Snipe was a great bird to end on, or so we thought.

Saturday 1 May**Aardla Marshes and homeward bound**

Heavy drizzle, overcast, cold 7°C

Great Snipe lost the title of last fabulous bird when those who went out to the Aardla Marshes heard and then had brilliant views of a Thrush Nightingale.

It must have arrived (with another close by) overnight and was already establishing its territory at 6.15am. What fabulous views we had as it pretended that the bare undergrowth was in full leaf. We could see you!

The other notable sighting was a negative – most of yesterday's ducks had moved out, lured northwards by the clear evening and warmer weather.

We moved south – via a northward journey to Tallinn and Helsinki – home to Heathrow.

ANNOTATED LIST OF SPECIES

		BIRDS	
	GALLIFORMES		Family Meleagrididae
1	Hazel Grouse	<i>Tetrastes bonasia</i>	Two in the Sooma N. P.
2	Black Grouse	<i>Lyrurus tetrix</i>	One lekking near the Nigula forest.
	WILDFOWL		Family Anatidae
3	Tundra Bean Goose	<i>Anser rossicus</i>	Flocks around the Matsalu Bay area; Vaike-Rakke fields and near Tartu.
4	Taiga Bean Goose	<i>Anser fabalis</i>	One unconfirmed of this species at the Parnu marshes.
5	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	Common in the Matsalu Bay area, a few elsewhere.
6	White-fronted Goose	<i>Anser albifrons</i>	Huge flocks around the Matsalu Bay area; Parnu marshes; Vaike-Rakke fields and near Tartu.
7	Lesser White-fronted Goose	<i>Anser erythropus</i>	A flock of 23 in the Matsalu Bay area.
8	Barnacle Goose	<i>Branta leucopsis</i>	Big flocks in with White-fronted Geese in the Matsalu Bay area; a skein flew past the Lapanina Hotel, a few elsewhere.
9	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	Many from the Baltic Hotell, Haapsalu; common around Haapsalu Bay; a few near the Lapanina Hotel.
10	Tundra Swan	<i>Cygnus columbianus</i>	Hundreds still in the Matsalu Bay area; 10 at the Kantri bird observatory.
11	Whooper Swan	<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>	Hundreds in the Matsalu Bay area; a few in the Vaike-Rakke fields near Tartu.
12	Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	One at the Haeska Tower; four chased off by a horse at the Picla Ponds.
13	Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>	Three at the Haeska Tower; a few in the Aardla marsh, Tartu.
14	Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Anas penelope</i>	Common, seen most days.
15	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	Common, seen most days.
16	Northern Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>	Common, seen most days, sometimes in good numbers.
17	Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>	Huge numbers at the Haeska Tower; lots elsewhere in the Matsalu Bay area, Vaike-Rakke fields near Tartu and Aardla marsh.
18	Garganey	<i>Anas querquedula</i>	Two pairs in the Vaike-Rakke fields, several more pairs at the Aardla marsh, Tartu.
19	Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	Common, seen most days.
20	Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>	Common, seen most days.
21	Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>	Common, seen most days.
22	Greater Scaup	<i>Aythya marila</i>	Common on the sea.
23	Common Eider	<i>Somateria mollissima</i>	Hundreds on our sea-watch from Spithami Point.

24	White-winged Scoter	<i>Melanittadeglandi</i>	A few on the sea-watch and from the Lapanina Hotel.
25	Black Scoter	<i>Melanittanigra</i>	Many on the sea-watch and from the Lapanina Hotel.
26	Long-tailed Duck	<i>Clangulahyemalis</i>	Many on the sea-watch and from the Lapanina Hotel.
27	Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>	Common, seen most days.
28	Smew	<i>Mergellus albellus</i>	Good numbers (maximum 25) on the sea in the Matsalu Bay area.
29	Common Merganser	<i>Mergus merganser</i>	Common, seen most days.
30	Red-breasted Merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>	About 20 on the sea-watch; a few on the sea from the Lapanina Hotell.
	LOONS	Family Gaviidae	
31	Red-throated Loon	<i>Gavia stellata</i>	Ten on the sea-watch.
32	Black-throated Loon	<i>Gavia arctica</i>	Two on the sea-watch; a few from the Lapanina Hotell.
	GREBES	Family Podicipedidae	
33	Red-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps grisegena</i>	One heard in the Silma Reserve; three at the Ilmatsalu fish ponds.
34	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	Common in the Matsalu Bay area; two on the lake opposite the Russian border.
35	Horned Grebe	<i>Podiceps auritus</i>	A pair on a pond near Haapsalu.
	STORKS	Family Ciconiidae	
36	European White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	Common, seen daily including many on nests.
	HERONS, BITTERNs	Family Ardeidae	
37	Eurasian Bittern	<i>Botaurus stellaris</i>	Three heard booming in the Matsalu Bay area; one booming in the Aardla marsh.
38	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	Common, seen most days.
	CORMORANTS	Family Phalacrocoracidae	
39	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	Common, seen most days in the Matsalu Bay area, sometimes in skeins.
	FALCONS	Family Falconidae	
40	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	Just one near Partu.
41	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	Singles at the Haeska Tower and Aardla marsh.
	RAPTORS	Family Pandionidae / Accipitridae	
42	Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	One at the Vaike-Rakke fields near Tartu.
43	White-tailed Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>	Common, daily especially in the Matsalu Bay area where up to 14 a day were seen.
44	Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	Common, a few seen daily.
45	Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>	One female at Avansi Uula ridge.
46	Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>	Two distant males displaying at Avansi Uula ridge.
47	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	One or two seen on four days.
48	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	Common, up to six seen most days.
49	Lesser Spotted Eagle	<i>Aquila pomarina</i>	uncommon this year with just three seen in the Nigula forest area.
	RAILS, CRAKES & COOTS	Family Rallidae	
50	European Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>	Heard at the Haapsalu sewage works and another nearby.
51	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	A pair seen just outside Haapsalu.
52	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	Fairly common in the Matsalu Bay area.
	CRANES	Family Gruidae	
53	Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>	Common, a few seen on most days but a passage on the 26th resulted in about 80 being recorded.
	OYSTERCATCHERS	Family Haematopidae	
54	Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	Common in the Matsalu Bay area and around Kantri..

	STILTS, AVOCETS			
55	Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>		Family Recurvirostridae Six seen in Matsalu Bay.
	PLOVERS			Family Charadriidae Common daily.
56	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>		A flock of 80 roosting at Rapina Polder.
57	European Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>		Two or three in Matsalu Bay.
58	Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>		Six in the Matsalu Bay area.
59	Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>		Seen on three days in small numbers; a pair displayed at the Spithami Point sea-watch.
60	Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>		
	SANDPIPERS, SNIPES			Family Scolopacidae Several on our evening outing in the Matsalu Bay area; One in the Nigula forest.
61	Eurasian Woodcock	<i>Scolopax rusticola</i>		Two drumming on our evening outing in the Matsalu Bay area; one seen doing the same Nigula forest.
62	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>		Two at the Vaike-Rakke fields near Tartu.
63	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>		Four in Matsalu Bay.
64	Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>		Two at Aardla marsh, one at the Lüübnitsa Tower (Russian border).
65	Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>		large flocks in the Matsalu Bay area and at the Lapanina Hotell.
66	Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>		Small groups seen in the Matsalu Bay area; and at the Vaike-Rakke fields near Tartu.
67	Spotted Redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>		Up to 10 seen on four days.
68	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>		Seen in groups of up to 16 on six days.
69	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>		Up to three recorded on four days.
70	Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>		Common, seen almost daily.
71	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>		Groups of up to 15 seen on four days.
72	Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>		Just one seen in the Matsalu Bay area.
73	Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>		One seen in breeding plumage displaying at the Haeska tower,
74	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>		After a slow start a group of 50 was found, many in breeding plumage, in the Vaike-Rakke fields.
75	Ruff	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>		
	GULLS & TERNS			Family Laridae Common, seen daily.
76	Mew gull (Common gull)	<i>Larus canus</i>		Common, seen daily on the coast.
77	Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>		Common, seen daily.
78	Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>		One immature seen at the Lüübnitsa Tower (Russian border).
79	Caspian Gull	<i>Larus cachinnans</i>		Singles in the Matsalu Bay area and at Lapanina Hotel were of the race L.f. fuscus.
80	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>		Common, seen daily.
81	Black-headed Gull	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>		Fantastic contacts with this special species with good flocks on the way to Tartu and in the Aardla marsh.
82	Little Gull	<i>Larus minutus</i>		A few seen in the Matsalu Bay area.
83	Caspian Tern	<i>Sterna caspia</i>		Four and two respectively at the Lapanina Hotel and Kantri bird observatory.
84	Sandwich Tern	<i>Sterna sandvicensis</i>		Common daily.
85	Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>		Common daily at the coast.
86	Arctic Tern	<i>Sterna paradisaea</i>		Six in the Matsalu Bay area.
87	Little Tern	<i>Sterna albifrons</i>		
	PIGEONS & DOVES			Family Columbidae Common daily in towns.
88	Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>		Just three seen on two days in the Matsalu area.
89	Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>		Common daily with one or two good migrating flocks.
90	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columbapalumbus</i>		

	CUCKOOS		Family Cuculidae
91	Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>	Heard in the Nigula forest.
	OWLS		Family Strigidae
92	Ural Owl	<i>Strix uralensis</i>	One heard in the Nigula forest.
	WOODPECKERS		Family Picidae
93	Eurasian Wryneck	<i>Jynx torquilla</i>	Great views of one in the Matsalu area.
94	Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos minor</i>	Male seen drumming in Tartu cemetery.
95	Middle Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos medius</i>	One in Rapina park; one fighting two Great-spotted Woodpeckers in Tartu cemetery
96	White-backed Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos leucotos</i>	Two seen well in the Nigula forest.
97	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	Heard and seen on three days in the Matsalu area, Nigula forest and Tartu cemetery.
98	Three-toed Woodpecker	<i>Picoides tridactylus</i>	One in the Nigula forest.
99	Black Woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus martius</i>	One and its nest hole in the Nigula forest.
	CROWS, JAYS		Family Corvidae
100	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	Common daily.
101	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	Common daily.
102	Eurasian Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>	Common daily.
103	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	Common most days.
104	Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>	Common daily.
105	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	Common, seen daily with increased numbers near the Tartu rubbish tip..
	TITS & CHICKADEES		Family Paridae
106	Willow Tit	<i>Poecile montana</i>	Singles in the Matsalu Bay area and Nigula forest.
107	Coal Tit	<i>Periparus ater</i>	One in the Nigula forest.
108	European Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>	Singles in the Matsalu forest and Kantri area.
109	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	Common daily.
110	Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	Common daily.
	PENDULINE TITS		Family Remizidae
111	Eurasian Penduline Tit	<i>Remiz pendulinus</i>	A pair in and out of a swinging nest in the Sutlepa Tahu Bay area; heard at the Ilmatsalu fish ponds.
	SWALLOWS, MARTINS		Family Hirundinidae
112	Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	Three at the Ilmatsalu fish ponds.
113	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	A few seen daily.
114	Northern House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	A few on two days in the Matsalu area.
	BUSHTITS		Family Aegithalidae
115	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	One and a pair of the white headed race in the Matsalu and Nigula forests.
	LARKS		Family Alaudidae
116	Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>	One heard during the sea-watch at Spithami Point.
117	Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	Common daily.
	OLD WORLD WARBLERS		Family Sylviidae
118	Savi's Warbler	<i>Locustellaluscinioides</i>	One seen and heard at the Haapsalu sewage works.
119	Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	Common daily.
120	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	Common daily.
121	Wood Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus sibilatrix</i>	Common daily.
122	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	Singles seen or heard in the Matsalu area.
123	Lesser Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia curruca</i>	Suddenly appeared in the Tartu area.
	BABLERS, PARROTBILLS		Family Timaliidae
124	Bearded Reedling	<i>Panurus biarmicus</i>	A male at the Haapsalu sewage works.
	GOLDCRESTS		Family Regulidae
125	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>	Two in the Massiaru forest.

WRENS			Family Troglodytidae
126	Northern Wren	<i>Troglodytestroglodytes</i>	Heard commonly almost daily but not seen.
NUTHATCHES			Family Sittidae
127	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>	Birds of the rather dull eastern European race <i>S.e. europaea</i> seen on five days.
TREECREEPERS			Family Certhiidae
128	Eurasian Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>	Singles in the Matsalu area and Nigula forest.
STARLINGS			Family Sturnidae
129	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	Common daily.
THRUSHES			Family Turdidae
130	Eurasian Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	Common daily.
131	Fieldfare	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>	Common daily.
132	Redwing	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>	Common, seen or heard on five days.
133	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	Common daily.
134	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	Up to three seen on four days in the Matsalu area and Nigula forest.
FLYCATCHERS			Family Muscipidae
135	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	Common daily, an amazing observation as all had migrated into Estonia.
136	Thrush Nightingale	<i>Luscinialuscinia</i>	Two singing, one seen well, Aardla marshes, last morning.
137	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	One at the Baltic Hotell, Haapsalu.
138	Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>	Seen on three days.
139	Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>	Maximum 10 at the Aardla marsh, Tartu.
140	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	Common almost daily.
141	Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>	Two at the Haeska tower.
142	European Pied Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>	seen on four days in the Matsalu area; Nigula forest and a pair at a nest box in Rapina park.
SPARROWS			Family Passeridae
143	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	Fairly common, a few daily.
144	Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>	Up to six seen on three days.
ACCENTORS			Family Prunellidae
145	Dunnoek	<i>Prunellamodularis</i>	Seen at the tops of trees singing their hearts out in the Matsalu area and Nigula forest.
WAGTAILS & PIPITS			Family Motacillidae
146	Western Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>	Seen on four days.
147	Citrine Wagtail	<i>Motacilla citreola</i>	Three at the Aardla marsh, Tartu.
148	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	Common daily.
149	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	Common daily.
150	Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>	A few in the Matsalu area; Nigula forest and Aardla marsh, Tartu.
FINCHES			Family Fringillidae
151	Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	Common daily.
152	Brambling	<i>Fringilla montifringilla</i>	Four near the Haeska tower.
153	European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	at least three males holding territory at the Lapanina Hotel.
154	European Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>	Common daily.
155	Eurasian Siskin	<i>Carduelis spinus</i>	Common daily.
156	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	Common daily.
157	Common Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>	Common daily.
158	Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>	Up to nine seen in the Matsalu area and Nigula forest.
159	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>	A flock of nine seen near the Haeska tower, singles seen or heard on three other days.

BUNTINGS & ALLIES		Family Emberizidae
160	Yellowhammer <i>Emberiza citrinella</i>	Common daily.
161	Reed Bunting <i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	Twos or threes seen on five days.
MAMMALS		
RABBITS & HARES		Family Leporidae
1	European Hare <i>Lepus europaeus</i>	Singles on two days in the Matsalu area.
DOGS & FOXES		Family Canidae
2	Red Fox <i>Vulpes vulpes</i>	Singles on four days.
3	Raccoon Dog <i>Nyctereutes procyonoides</i>	One crossed our path in the Nigula forest.
OTTERS, WEASELS & BADGERS		Family Mustelidae
4	European Pine Marten <i>Martes martes</i>	Two individuals in separate parts of the Nigula forest; one at the Aardla marsh, Tartu.
MOONRATS & HEDGEHOGS		Family Erinaceidae
5	Western Hedgehog <i>Erinaceus europaeus</i>	One on a frosty morning in Haapsalu.
MOLES & SHREW-MOLES		Family Talpidae
6	European Mole <i>Talpa europaea</i>	Common, mole-hills seen daily.
SHREWS		Family Soricidae
7	Common Shrew <i>Sorex araneus</i>	One in the Matsalu area.
DEER		Family Cervidae
8	Western Roe Deer <i>Capreolus capreolus</i>	Common, up to five seen on five days.
9	Elk (Moose) <i>Alces alces</i>	One seen in the Matsalu forest.
REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS		
TOADS		Family Bufonidae
1	Common Toad <i>Bufo bufo</i>	Two or three seen near Tartu.
FROGS		Family Ranidae
2	Pool Frog <i>Rana lessonae</i>	Common, heard or seen almost daily.
3	Common Frog <i>Rana temporaria</i>	Uncommon, seen only once.
TYPICAL LIZARDS		Family Lacertidae
4	Common (Viviparous) Lizard <i>Lacerta vivipara</i>	Three seen on two (warm) days.
FLUTS		
WHITES & YELLOWS		Family Pieridae
1	Large White <i>Pieris brassicae</i>	
2	Small White <i>Pieris rapae</i>	
3	Brimstone <i>Gonepteryx rhamni</i>	
BRUSH-FOOTED BUTTERFLIES		Family Nymphalidae
4	Camberwell Beauty <i>Nymphalis antiopa</i>	
5	Small Tortoiseshell <i>Aglais urticae</i>	
6	Comma <i>Polygonia c-album</i>	
7	Peacock <i>Inachia io</i>	
BLUES, HAIRSTREAKS & COPPERS		Family Lycaenidae
8	Green Hairstreak <i>Callophrys rubi</i>	
9	Common Blue <i>Polyommatus icarus</i>	
HEAVENLY BODIES		
1	The Moon	The only heavenly body seen (in daylight) in the Matsalu area and Nigula forest (full).

PLANT LIST

With thanks to Kate Hayward for preparing this list

Species name	Taxa	Dates	Sites	Notes
Trees & shrubs				
Silver Birch	<i>Betula pendula</i>	daily	High forest	
Alder	<i>Alnus glutinosa</i>	daily	High forest	
Scots Pine	<i>Pinus sylvestris</i>	daily	High forest	
Willow	<i>Salix spp</i>	daily		

Norway Spruce	<i>Picea abies</i>	daily	High forest	
Hazel	<i>Corylus avellana</i>	Most days	Scrubby woodland	
Juniper	<i>Juniperus communis</i>	26th	Tahu Bay	Abundant
Mezereon	<i>Daphne mezereum</i>	28th	Nigula, Parnumaa	In flower
Flowering plants				
Butterbur	<i>Petasites hybridus</i>	25th	Matsalu fields	By a pond
Colt's foot	<i>Tussilago farfara</i>	daily	Forest edges & fields	
Spring squill	<i>Scilla verna</i>	daily	Shady areas	Common
Yellow gold star	<i>Gagea lutea</i>	25, 28th	Haeska & Nigula	ID not conclusive, possibly <i>G. minima</i>
Yellow anemone	<i>Anemone ranunculoides</i>	Most days	Matsalu, Silma, Nigula	
Wood anemone	<i>Anemone nemorosa</i>	Most days	Wooded & shade	
Blue anemone	<i>Anemone appenina</i>		Wooded & shade	unconfirmed
Lesser celandine	<i>Ranunculus ficaria</i>	Most days	wooded / shaded areas	
Violets	<i>Viola spp</i>	25, 28th	Matsalu, Nigula	prob <i>V. odorata</i>
Primrose	<i>Primula vulgaris</i>	26, 27th	Silma, Matsalu, Haeska	
Cow slip	<i>Primula veris</i>	26, 27th	Silma, Matsalu, Haeska	
Hepatica (Liverleaf)	<i>Hepatica nobilis</i>	Most days	Spithami, Silma, Matsalu, Nigula	
Eastern Pasque flower	<i>Pulsatilla patens</i>	26th	Spithami Point	Rare, unusual habitat (ID?)
Snowdrops	<i>Galanthus nivalis</i>	25, 26, 27th	Haeska, Tahu, Matsalu	
Cranberry	<i>Vaccinium oxycoccos</i>	27th	Matsalu	Still had berries
Great Wood- rush	<i>Luzula sylvatica</i>	27, 28th	Matsalu & Nigula	
Marsh Marigold	<i>Caltha palustris</i>	27,28, 30th	Parnu, Massiaru, Luubnitsa	
Solomon's- Seal	<i>Polygonatum multiflorum</i>	28th	Parnumaa Puhkeala	NR
Toothwort	<i>Lathraea squamaria</i>	28th	Parnumaa Puhkeala	NR Purple / pink florets
Tridif bur marigold	<i>Bidens tripartia</i>	Most days	Wooded areas	
Golden saxifrage	<i>Chrysosplenium alternifolium</i>	Most days	Woods & shaded areas	Very yellow leaves at top
Asarabacca	<i>Asarum europaeum</i>	28th	Parnumaa Puhkeala	NR Wooded areas
Wood Sorrel	<i>Oxalis acetocella</i>	28th	Parnumaa Puhkeala	NR Wooded areas
Wild strawberry	<i>Fragaria vesca</i>	Most days	Open and shaded areas	
Heather	<i>Calluna vulgaris</i>	27th	Matsalu forest	
Dog's mercury	<i>Mercurialis perennis</i>	27, 28th	Matsalu & Nigula	
Sedge	<i>Carex spp</i>	28th	Wood rides	
Common Reeds	<i>Phragmites australis</i>	daily	Marshes & reed beds	
Lower plants				
Field horsetails	<i>Equisetum arvense</i>	Most days	Field margins	Pale
Horsetails	<i>Equisetum pratense</i>	Most days		
Wood horsetails	<i>Equisetum sylvaticum</i>	Most days	Matsalu & Nigula	
Fungi and similar				
Scarlet elf cups	<i>Sarcoscypha coccinea</i>	28th	Matsalu & Parnumaa	Bright red cups
Reindeer lichen	<i>Cladonia rangiferina</i>	Most days		Forested areas

Tim Earl

Principal Leader, Guernsey, May 2010

© The Travelling Naturalist and Limosa Holidays