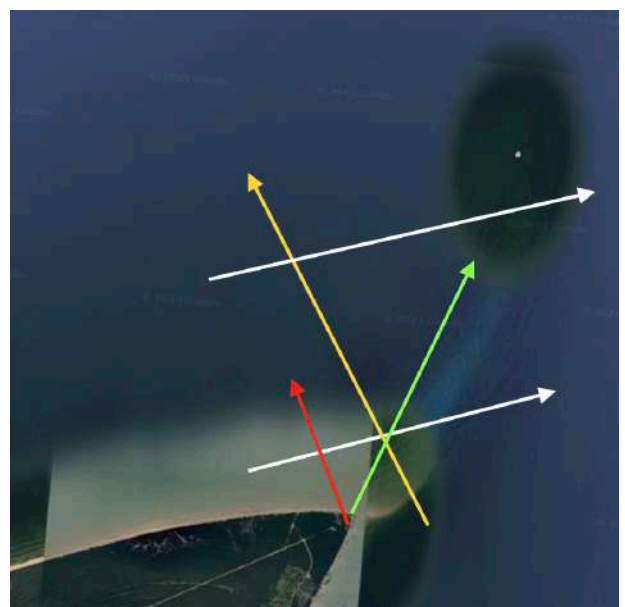


Report from migration counts at Kolkasrags April 24th - May 6th 2023

Following shorter visits to Kolka in late April and September 2022 I decided to make a longer trip there to count migrating seabirds in 2023. Kolka is interesting as the birds passing Kolkasrags east probably do not show up at regular western Estonian count sites such as Pöösaspe or Ristna so Kolka figures could therefore be important in understanding the seabird migration of this area. I was also interested in counting Black-throated Divers coming from the southeast and flying northwest, probably having departed the Black Sea and travelling overland before passing Kolka.

As I was alone it was difficult to cover the landbird migration. On one morning with low wind and low-flying birds I used a Telinga dish to passively record. Even on days when few birds were audible from the ground I now and then scanned up into the sky and noticed a quite heavy migration of passerines towards north-northeast. Each morning large numbers of landbirds (except thrushes) came in from the north as well, well into late morning. Species noted here were siskins, linnets, wrens, robins, wagtails etc. I made an effort to count all raptors I observed as well, but as I usually left around 11 am they are surely under-represented.

Many birds fly far out from land, especially if the winds are blowing away from land. But on days when there are strong winds towards land, as I experienced previous year, birds pass comparatively close.



The image shows main migration directions of

Yellow - Black-throated Divers

White - ducks, geese, gulls, terns, waders

Red - Hen Harrier, Rough-legged Buzzard, egrets

Green - passerines, sparrowhawks

(Based on visits both 2022 and 2023)

How to get there

Kolka is c two and a half hour's drive from Riga Airport, four hours from Klaipeda harbour (Lithuania), 1 hour from Ventspils harbour and two and a half hours from Liepaja. If driving through Jurmala one has to pay a tax, otherwise roads are toll-free. In my previous experience Green Motion is the best car rental option in Riga, if one counts service and reliability as well as price. There are regular buses from Riga to Kolka several times a day.

Parking

There is a parking fee at Kolkasrags, 1,5 € a day in peak season after May 1st. It is payable in the kiosk. There are also toilets there.

Accommodation

There are a number of places to stay in Kolka within walking distance from the point, their internet presence varies though and they are difficult to google. Look at airbnb and [booking.com](https://www.booking.com) etc. The water quality is low and the water contaminated with iron in the village, in some places also water pressure is low. The water is not hazardous to drink, but bottled water tastes nicer.

Usi - rents out rooms in a private house or a newly built building next door. If staying in Usi one has access to the garden, which is a migrant trap. One can either stay in the main building, or in a newly built house. Self-catering. The nice landlady speaks English and German.

Zitkari - hotel

Rustic hotel, owner speaks some English and Swedish. Adequate as lodging, no idea of how the restaurant is, probably only open on weekends off-season.

Melnsils www.melnsils.lv

This is where I stayed this time. Good service, cozy and clean rooms with heating and a steady water supply in the taps. Also there is a pub/restaurant that is open daily from May 1st (only on weekends before that). In my opinion the best option comfort-wise. Most rooms have a kitchenette, equipped to a degree and the staff speak English. It is also possible to camp here. The drive to Kolka is 15 minutes, so you need to have a transport to stay here.

Roja

There several hotels here, including Hotel Roja.

Food

There are small Citro stores in every village, and in Roja a larger Maxima which has a much better range of products than Citro. In Kolka the Citro next to the hotel is better stocked than the other one, still it may be difficult to find decent vegetables, fruit and fresh bread so expect just the basics. If you have a diet it is advisable to bring your own stuff with you. Don't expect much help from the older staff in the shops, who generally only speak Latvian or Russian and seem to be schooled in the soviet-era way of treating customers. Look for the younger ones if you have questions or need help.

Petrol

In Kolka there is a small petrol station which also has a limited range of food/snack items, a different selection from Citro and more western European-like. Otherwise filling up is relatively hassle-free except at Neste Kauguri stations where one can only select pre-specified amounts, like €10, €50 etc and you need to know how much capacity your fuel tank has left before filling

up. If you pay for more than capacity the fuel is wasted, and you are unlikely to get any help from the associated Narvesen shop on the premises.

There are two (at least) charging stations in Kolka for electric cars.

Restaurants

If you are here before May 1st, expect most restaurants to be closed. At the parking place in Kolka there is a small kiosk (which administers parking permits) and a small and very nice cafe with some food. In both these places the staff speak English. The nearest larger town is Talsi, c 1 hour away, but even here the options are few off-season. The Jazz Cafe was ok in 2022 but seemed closed in 2023. A very good and classy restaurant is available in Roja, Otrāpuse, which has a brilliant menu and excellent service but is only open on weekends early in the season.

Money

It is advisable to bring cash as credit cards are not always accepted, check when booking your accommodation. The nearest cash machine is in Roja.

Observation points

Kolkarags - migration

You stand at the beach at a pile of rocks, and if very windy shelter can be an issue 57.757469, 22.604048. In westerly winds I have counted from the platform at the other car park 57.758033, 22.592299, but the drawback here is that one misses the raptors coming up from the south until they are right over you or have passed. At Kolkarags you need to scan almost 360 degrees, so I prefer standing up and being able to turn around quickly. There are some rock/concrete remains at the point, which can give some shelter for single persons sitting down. I have also tried standing at the edge of the forest, depending on winds, but then miss out the birds coming from the south.

The seabird movements here are southeast-northwest (black-throated divers) and southwest-northeast or opposite (ducks, divers, gulls, terns etc). Birds of prey go south-north, as well as passerines and Wood Pigeons (see image above). This means that one has to be alert in all directions. There is also a strong north-south return movement of passerines during the morning hours.

In my opinion this place in spring is on par with eg Falsterbo in autumn when it comes to passerine migration.

Kolka village

Most birding takes place in the Usi garden, but you are not allowed in there unless you stay there. But the garden is easily overviewed from the road. And in my opinion each garden in the village has great potential. I also like the area round the abandoned factory 57.740988, 22.591722 which looks nice for passerines, perhaps especially if the wind is from the west. The Usi meadows is also from where raptors are counted.

Vidale gravel pits 57.610956, 22.443845

This is my favourite, as here the farmland turns into the forest and this area produces thermals as well as a very good view across most of the peninsula. So on raptor migration days it should be a good observation point.

Other places

Sikrags 57.664295, 22.225238 can be good for migration, I have just seen seabirds and raptors moving along the coast here, but no doubt birds cross to Saaremaa from here in favourable conditions.

The wet meadows here 57.599683, 22.598649 can reputedly hold Spotted Crake on migration, but I guess they could be anywhere where the habitat is good. Savi's Warblers inhabit the reeds. So explore along the road, and check also where there is access to the coast on the eastern side of the road as large numbers of seaducks rest in the waters here. The private, artificial island off Kaltene 57.452146, 22.901710 held large numbers of scoters and Long-tailed Ducks on my visit, perhaps 8000+.

Capercaillie is quite common, hens are frequently seen mornings and evenings along the road from Roja to Melnsils, my record count is 5 in one drive-by. Also gravel roads around Mazirbe are good for them. Ural Owl breeds sparsely, as well as Tengmalm's Owl. Black Grouse is common and are sometimes seen at Kolkasrags, attempting to migrate. Hazel Hen occurs but is difficult, seeing them at roadsides in the morning conflicts with migration counting so I have not made any great efforts. White storks nest in the villages and there is a healthy (?) population of cranes. Serin breeds in Roja and is also seen on migration at Kolka. Hoopoe is also breeder.

Bird information

The Latvian database for faunistic is here <https://dabasdati.lv/lv> . This site is also available as an app and called Dabas Dati.

Weather

The weather was not favourable this time, sub-zero temperatures in the morning and in general cold during the days. A normal year more tropical migrants would probably have arrived.

Questions? Welcome to contact me at erik@hirschfeld.se

Species recorded - comments only on some migrants

Red-breasted Goose *Branta ruficollis*
2 passed in a Barnacle flock on 28.4.

Barnacle Goose *Branta leucopsis*
Total of 9495 migrating.

Greylag Anser *anser*
Total of 3.

White-fronted Goose *Anser flavirostris*
Total of 26.

Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*

Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus*
None on migration, singles here and there.

Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*
Resident, seen daily.

Shoveler *Anas clypeata*
Total of 165.

Gadwall *Anas strepera*
Total of 32.
Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope*
Total of 321.

Pintail *Anas acuta*
Total of 89.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*
Total of 19.

Eurasian Teal *Anas crecca*
Total of 484.

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*
Total of 30.

Scaup *Aythya marila*
Total of 249. Also small flocks resting.

Common Eider *Somateria mollissima*
Total of 25.

Velvet Scoter *Melanitta fusca*
Total of 825.

Common Scoter *Melanitta nigra*
Total of 15 019. Many more, five-digit numbers resting around the whole peninsula. At times difficult to distinguish migrating from local movements, the figure is conservative.

Long-tailed Duck *Clangula hyemalis*
Total of 18 096. Many more, five-digit numbers resting around the whole peninsula. At times difficult to distinguish migrating from local movements, the figure is conservative.

Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula*
Total of 26.

Common Merganser *Mergus merganser*
Total of 37.

Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator*
Total of 177.

Capercaillie *Tetrao urogallus*
Singles along roadsides, all females.

Black Grouse *Lyrurus tetrix*
Hear displaying from the road, Melnsils.

Red-throated Diver *Gavia stellata*
Total of 388.

Black-throated Diver *Gavia arctica*
Total of 1350.

Unid. divers
Total of 2200, the vast majority following the track of Black-throateds, ie southeast-northwest.

Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*
Singles seen resting.

Black Stork *Ciconia nigra*
1 at the gravel pits. Probably breeds.

White Stork *Ciconia ciconia*

Maximum flock of 49 at Vidale.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*
Total of 23.

Great White Egret *Ardea alba*
Total of 7.

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*
Total of 2.

Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*
1 second-year at Vidale.

Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*
Total of 121.

Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*
Total of 11.

Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus*
Total of 8.

Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus*
1 female on migration.

Red Kite *Milvus milvus*
1 at Vidale.

Black Kite *Milvus migrans*
Total of 5.

White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*

Rough-legged Buzzard *Buteo lagopus*
Total of 2.

Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*

Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus*

Common Coot *Fulica atra*

Common Crane *Grus grus*

Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*

Avocet *Recurvirostra avoceta*
1 recorded migrating east 26.4.

Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*

Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria*

Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*

Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*
Total of 22.

Curlew *Numenius arquata*

Ruff *Philimachus pugnax*

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucua*

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*

Redshank *Tringa totanus*

Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*

Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus*

Black-headed Gull *Chroicephalus ridibundus*

Little Gull *Hydrocoleus minutus*
Total of 420. Most migrated later in the day, thus under-recorded.

Common Gull *Larus canus*

Great Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus*

Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*

Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*

Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia*
2 observations.

Sandwich Tern *Thalasseus sandvicensis*
Local birds amde counting difficult, only singles undoubtedly migrating.

Little Tern *Sternula albifrons*
Total of 4.

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*

Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisaea*

Arctic Skua *Stercorarius parasiticus*
Total of 31.

Razorbill *Alca torda*

Domestic Pigeon *Columba livia*

Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus*
Migrating and/or attempting to migrate every morning. I did not pay attention to these, but possibly numbers were quite high, several hundred each morning.

Stock Dove *Columba oenas*

Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*

Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*

Tawny Owl *Strix aluco*

Hoopoe *Upupa epops*
1 on migration, 1 attempting.

Wryneck *Jynx torquilla*

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*

Black Woodpecker *Dryocopus martius*

Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*

Merlin *Falco columbarius*
Total of 8.

Hobby *Falco subbuteo*
Total of 5.

Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*
A pair hunted returning migrants one morning.

Jay *Garrulus glandarius*
Daily, up to 47 in one flock attempting migration, but returning.

Magpie *Pica pica*
As for Jay, maximum 15 in one flock.

Jackdaw *Corvus moendula*

Rook *Corvus frugilegus*

Hooded Crow *Corvus cornix*

Raven *Corvus corax*

Crested Tit *Lophophanes cristatus*

Marsh Tit *Poecile palustris*

Willow Tit *Poecile montanus*

Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus*

Great Tit *Parus major*

Coal Tit *Periparus ater*

Wood Lark *Lullula arborea*
Common both as breeder and migrant.

Skylark *Alauda arvensis*

Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*

Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

House Martin *Delichon urbica*

Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*

Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*

Wood Warbler *Phylloscopus sibilatrix*

Savi's Warbler *Locustella luscinioides*

Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*

Lesser Whitethroat *Curruca curruca*

Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*

Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*

Nuthatch *Sitta europea*

Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*

Blackbird *Turdus merula*

Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris*

Redwing *Turdus ilia*

Song Thrush *Turdus philomelus*

Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus*
Common both as breeder and migrant.

Robin *Erithacus rubecula*

Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*

Rdstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*

Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*

Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*

Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*

Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola*
An oddly patterned male and one normal female seen, both resting briefly before flying off to the northeast.

White Wagtail *Motacilla alba*

Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*

Rock Pipit *Anthus spinoletta*

Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*

Brambling *Fringilla montifringilla*

Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*

Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*

Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris*

Twite *Linaria flavirostris*

Redpoll *Acanthis flammea*

Crossbill *Loxia curvirostris*

Goldfinch *Carduelis cardueli*

Serín *Serinus serinus*

Yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella*

Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*