

Estonia 23 - 30 March 2013

By Mads Elley and Tina Elley

Short summary of our recent trip to Estonia with focus on where to find the better species.

We knew this was not going to be a trip with a long list. Our targets were Ural Owl, White-backed Woodpecker and Steller's Eider. Next in priority were Grey-headed and Threetoed Woodpeckers, Pygmy and Tengmalm's Owls and finally Black and Hazel Grouse and Capercaillie. We only missed Tengmalm's Owl, Hazel Grouse and Capercaillie. In total we noted 65 species of birds and 5 (6) species of mammals.

NaTourEst sell a concept they call "Self-guided birding tour with smart device". This means you get some maps, where the best places are indicated. Some of them described only as good areas for certain species, others with very exact directions for recent sightings. You'll need a smart phone or a tablet, or you can rent it from them. We brought an iPad and bought a prepaid sim card from "elisa"; they have a shop in the shopping center a few hundred meters from the airport. Unlimited internet for a week cost 5€. In most of the country the internet runs very well, but in some of the more remote areas it can be annoyingly slow. Ask NaTourEst to also send you the text version with coordinates, this was helpful in those situations along with the gps in the car.

In late March most of the info on the maps was from 2012, later in spring it will be updated with 2013 sightings (maybe including some of ours?)

We absolutely recommend the "Self-guided birding tour with smart device" from NaTourEst if you like to do things at your own pace.

More info on www.natourest.ee

The weather was brilliant with sun, blue skies and hardly any wind almost all the time. Day temperatures around -3 to +2 degrees, but the early mornings (by far the best for birding) were cold, down to -17 degrees according to the thermometer in the car.

For any further information please contact us: madselley@gmail.com

Itinerary

23/3 Morning flight Copenhagen – Tallinn. Drive to Saaremaa for our first 2 nights at Emalendur Guest Houses. Few birds: 226 km and only 12 common species! Best sighting was an Elk. In the evening we heard a Pygmy Owl at (58.294223, 22.103634) and two pairs of Tawny Owls at (58.294223, 22.103634) and (58.306017, 22.075911) in Vidumäe Nature Reserve.

- 24/3 Undva Promontory and Uudepanga Bay: 300 Steller's Eiders at (58.514321, 21.89558) (first of our targets), 3 White-tailed Eagles. On the way back we saw a Golden Eagle in Vidumäe NR.
Owl listening in Vidumäe NR in the evening gave the same 2 species (same birds). A Fox crossed the road in front of us.
- 25/3 Drive to Roosta Holiday Village for our next night. 1 White-tailed Eagle and 2 flocks of Snow Buntings on the way.
15.30 – 21.00 drive along the road from Höbringi (59.139912,23.576446) to Viluveri (59.08371,23.729224). Not very many birds, Parrot Crossbill was the highlight. 7 Wild Boars at dusk at (59.092,23.704677). Stops every 1000 m gave no owls at all.
- 26/3 06.00 – 11.00 drive along the same road. Black Grouse heard lekking in 2 places, Grey-headed Woodpecker seen and heard singing in 2 places, Three-toed and Black Woodpeckers, Nutcracker 7-8, Parrot Crossbill 5. Amazing how different the same area can be at different times of the day! On the way back we found a pair of Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers at (59.130412, 23.556061).
Drive to Pärnu for our next 2 nights at Green Villa.
Afternoon searching for Middle Spotted Woodpecker at (58.151346,25.019474) remained fruitless. The species is regularly reported from this spot.
A pair of Ural Owls had been reported at (58.16083, 24.85551) some 10 days earlier. We didn't stay there till dark, because it was by the road and the forest was too snowcovered to walk into.
- 27/3 Morning walk along the road in Soometsa Forest. A Whitebacked Woodpecker showed well at (58.212866, 24.587638) (our second target) and within the next 400 meters south along the road we heard another Whitebacked drumming and saw and heard 4-5 Grey-headed Woodpeckers singing and drumming. On the way back a female Lesser Spotted Woodpecker flew across the road, giving great views as it perched at (58.278911, 24.576094).
In the afternoon we went to Nigula Peat Bog and Forest. As in the other afternoons birds were few, but a Nutcracker was seen and shortly before sunset 4 male Black Grouse were feeding in the treetops at (58.025692,24.735589).
At dusk we heard our first Ural Owl from the sharp bend at (57.981031, 24.62255). The bird was calling from the forest to the south west. Our third target!
- 28/3 Drive to Mäetaguse for our last 2 nights at Mäetaguse Manor Hotel and Spa. Nothing on the way except for a couple of Snow Buntings.
Afternoon in the Sirtsu Preserve produced Great Grey Shrike (59.258862, 27.002678) and Black Woodpecker.
At 19.10 we heard our second Ural Owl from (59.274828, 26.83239) at a long distance from NW. We couldn't drive closer because of the snow.
On the way back we heard a Pygmy Owl from (59.242252, 27.023921) singing from SW.
- 29/3 In the early morning we listened for Hazel Grouse, first at (59.235469, 26.997914) and then at (59.202394, 26.918993). It was reported from both places a few days earlier, but we had no luck. In the former place we found a Three-toed Woodpecker calling and drumming and at the

latter we heard a distant (small) lek of Black Grouse). Great Grey Shrike and Black Woodpecker were both at (59.208941, 26.918135).

In the evening we tried to come closer to the Ural Owl from yesterday. We spent more than an hour at (59.296484, 26.770077) but nothing (literally!) was heard. The forests can be very quiet at this time of the year.

We then followed the road to the west (and then south) to road 88. Stops for every 2 kms listening for Tengmalm's Owl gave nothing until at (59.27422, 26.68664) where we heard a Ural Owl. It only called a few times, probably as a reaction to us playing the Tengmalm's Owl. We played it for 20 seconds and heard the Ural Owl 1 minute later (we never found Tengmalm's Owl). It probably came to scare off the intruder. An Elk crossed the forest road in front of us.

All the way back to Mäetaguse we stopped every 2 kms listening for owls. The Pygmy Owl from yesterday was silent, it was too late. At (59.23361, 27.16180) to the south of the road, quite close was yet another Ural Owl calling. We had now heard 4 of these magnificent owls in 3 nights!

Our last sighting was of a completely white Hare crossing the road at (59.226073, 27.062845).

30/3 No more birding. Drive to the airport in Tallinn for our flight back home.

Birds

Great Crested Grebe (<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>)	24/3 1 Uudepanga Bay
Great Cormorant (<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>)	24/1 few Uudepanga Bay
Grey Heron (<i>Ardea cinerea</i>)	23/3 – 25/3 noted in a number of places on Saaremaa Island
Mute Swan (<i>Cygnus olor</i>)	24/3 numerous in Uudepanga Bay
Whooper Swan (<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>)	24/3 few in Uudepanga Bay
Common Shelduck (<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>)	24/3 1 Uudepanga Bay (a bit of a surprise this early in spring)
Mallard (<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>)	24/3 tens Uudepanga Bay. Singles or pairs in other places
Tufted Duck (<i>Aythya fuligula</i>)	24/3 a few flocks in Uudepanga Bay
Greater Scaup (<i>Aythya marila</i>)	24/3 1 male Uudepanga Bay
Steller's Eider (<i>Polysticta stelleri</i>)	24/3 2 flocks 15 + approx. 300 Uudepanga Bay (see text)
Long-tailed Duck (<i>Clangula hyemalis</i>)	24/3 800+ Uudepanga Bay
Velvet Scoter (<i>Melanitta fusca</i>)	24/3 25 Uudepanga Bay
Common Goldeneye (<i>Bucephala clangula</i>)	24/3 1000+ Uudepanga Bay
Red-breasted Merganser (<i>Mergus serrator</i>)	24/3 10 Uudepanga Bay
Common Merganser (<i>Mergus merganser</i>)	24/3 6 Uudepanga Bay

White-tailed Eagle (<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>)	24/3 3 Undva Promontory / Uudepanga Bay
Northern Goshawk (<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>)	26/3 1 heard Höbringi – Viluvere road
Eurasian Sparrowhawk (<i>Accipiter nisus</i>)	24/3 1 Saaremaa Island
Common Buzzard (<i>Buteo buteo</i>)	Single birds here and there. A few looked like ssp vulpinus
Golden Eagle (<i>Aquila crysaetos</i>)	24/3 1 imm Viidumae NR
Common Kestrel (<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>)	23/3 1 roadside on the way to Virtsu
Black Grouse (<i>Tetrao tetrix</i>)	26/3 heard lekking in 2 places Höbringi – Viluvere road 27/3 4 males Nigula Forest (see text) 29/3 heard from a small lek from (see text)
Herring Gull (<i>Larus argentatus</i>)	Singles in many places. Numerous Uudepanga Bay
Stock Dove (<i>Columba oenas</i>)	25/3 2 roadside on the way to Roosta Holiday Village
Wood Pigeon (<i>Columba palumbus</i>)	23/3 a few noted roadside on the way to Virtsu
Pygmy Owl (<i>Glaucidium passerinum</i>)	23/3 and 24/3 1 heard Viidumae NR (see text) 28/3 1 heard (see text)
Tawny Owl (<i>Strix aluco</i>)	23/3 2 pairs Viidumae NR (see text)
Ural Owl (<i>Strix uralensis</i>)	27/3 1 (see text) 28/3 1 (see text) 29/3 2 (see text)
Grey-headed Woodpecker (<i>Picus canus</i>)	26/3 2 seen and heard Höbringi – Viluvere road 27/3 4-5 seen and heard Soometsa Forest (see text)
Black Woodpecker (<i>Dryocopus martius</i>)	26/3 1 heard Höbringi – Viluvere road 28/3 1 heard Sirtsu Preserve 29/3 1 seen and heard (see text)
Great Spotted W. (<i>Dendrocopos major</i>)	Very common in any forest
White-backed W (<i>Dendrocopos leucotos</i>)	27/3 2 Soometsa Forest (see text)
Lesser Spotted W (<i>Dendrocopos minor</i>)	26/3 2 (see text) 27/3 1 (see text)
Three-toed W (<i>Picooides tridactylus</i>)	26/3 1 Höbringi – Viluvere road 29/3 1 (see text)
Common Blackbird (<i>Turdus merula</i>)	Singles here and there
Fieldfare (<i>Turdus pilaris</i>)	24/3 1 Kihelkonna (Saaremaa Island)

	26/3 1 roadside on the way to Pärnu
Goldcrest (<i>Regulus regulus</i>)	Singles in most forests
Long-tailed Tit (<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>)	A total of 6 birds noted on 4 locations
Blue Tit (<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>)	Single birds noted on 8 locations
Great Tit (<i>Parus major</i>)	Very common
Crested Tit (<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>)	25/3 2 Höbringi – Viluvere road
Coal Tit (<i>Periparus ater</i>)	26/3 2 Höbringi – Viluvere road
Marsh Tit (<i>Poecile palustris</i>)	1-2 birds noted on 3 locations
Willow Tit (<i>Poecile Montana</i>)	1-2 birds on 4 locations
Nuthatch (<i>Sitta europaea</i>)	Single birds on 3 locations
Treecreeper (<i>Certhia familiaris</i>)	5 birds on 4 locations
Great Grey Shrike (<i>Lanius excubitor</i>)	28/3 1 (see text) 29/3 1 (see text)
Eurasian Jay (<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>)	1-2 birds noted in most forests
Eurasian Magpie (<i>Pica pica</i>)	Common in most places
Nutcracker (<i>Nucifraga caryocatactes</i>)	26/3 7-8 Höbringi – Viluvere road 27/3 1 Nigula Forest
Jackdaw (<i>Corvus monedula</i>)	Common in open land. Some showing white neck like ssp soemmerringii
Rook (<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>)	Small numbers in open land
Hooded Crow (<i>Corvus cornix</i>)	Very common
Northern Raven (<i>Corvus corax</i>)	Seen daily in small numbers
House Sparrow (<i>Passer domesticus</i>)	Surprisingly few. Only noted in a few places
Eurasian Tree Sparrow (<i>Passer montanus</i>)	Only noted in Pärnu
European Greenfinch (<i>Carduelis chloris</i>)	Noted daily in small numbers. Many singing
European Goldfinch (<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>)	2 birds on 2 locations
Eurasian Siskin (<i>Carduelis spinus</i>)	Common in most forests
Common Redpoll (<i>Carduelis flammea</i>)	Noted on 3 locations

Red Crossbill (<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>)	27/3 1 Soometsa Forest 28/3 Sirtsu Preserve 29/3 2-3 Sirtsu Preserve
Parrot Crossbill (<i>Loxia pytyopsittacus</i>)	25/3 heard Höbringi – Viluvere road 26/3 5-6 Höbringi – Viluvere road 27/3 1 Soometsa Forest
Eurasian Bullfinch (<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>)	Common in most forests
Snow Bunting (<i>Plectrophenax nivalis</i>)	A total of 40 birds in 4 flocks, all seen roadside
Yellowhammer (<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>)	1-3 birds in many locations

Mammals

Elk (<i>Alces alces</i>)	23/3 1 roadside on the way to Virtsu 29/3 1 crossing the road in front of us in the dark
Red Deer (<i>Cervus elaphus</i>)	24/3 2 Saaremaa Island
Wild Boar (<i>Sus scrofa</i>)	25/3 7 Höbringi – Viluvere road (see text)
Red Fox (<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>)	24/3 1 in the dark, Viidumäe NR
(Raccoon Dog (<i>Nyctereutes procyonoides</i>))	30/3 1 road kill seen on the way to Tallinn)
Mountain Hare (<i>Lepus timidus</i>)	29/3 1 all white (see text)