

# ESTONIA



*"The forests of Estonia make you realise what we are missing in our forests - they have an atmosphere! Fallen trees are scattered on the ground and leaning on standing trees, providing wonderful opportunities for scarce woodpeckers such as White-backed and Three-toed, as well as owls such as Ural and Pygmy." Roy Atkins*

Dates Thur 21 - Tue 26 March 2019  
 Price £1,895  
 Deposit £350 Single Supp £200

Leaders Roy Atkins plus local guides

Flights EasyJet, scheduled, Speedy Boarding and extra legroom included  
 Outbound: Morning, Gatwick-Tallinn  
 Inbound: Afternoon, Tallinn-Gatwick

Weather Likely to be mixed weather, we have had lovely sunshine in the past, but it is a little unpredictable - expect cold with the possibility of snow (-10° to 10°C)

Walking Easy walking on level tracks, but waterproof walking boots are recommended

Meals All included from lunch on Day 1 to lunch on Day 6

Insects Unlikely to be a problem at this time of year

Accom Twin and single rooms all ensuite

Group 12

## Just some of what we hope to see:

Steller's Eider	Three-toed Woodpecker
Long-tailed Duck	Black Woodpecker
Scaup	White-backed Woodpecker
Velvet Scoter	Grey-headed Woodpecker
Bean Goose	Middle-spotted Woodpecker
White-fronted Goose	Nutcracker
Barnacle Goose	Goshawk
Red-throated Diver	Parrot Crossbill
Golden Eagle	Common Crossbill
White-tailed Eagle	Crested Tit
Ural Owl	Waxwing
Pygmy Owl	Great Grey Shrike
Hazel Grouse	Bearded Tit
Capercaillie	Penduline Tit
Black Grouse	Meally Redpoll
Common Crane	Snow Bunting
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	Elk

Excellent birding in a little-known Baltic country with a wonderful range of habitats, from enormous marshes and wetlands to primeval forests and beautiful islands.

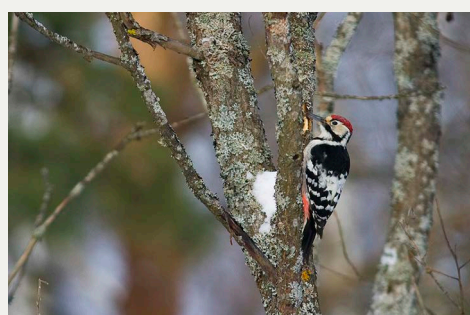
- Steller's Eider and other seaduck on their wintering grounds
- Woodland Grouse - chance of Hazel Grouse, Capercaillie and Black Grouse
- Up to 7 species of woodpecker likely including White-backed and Three-toed
- Atmospheric pine forests - home to Ural and Pygmy Owls and Elk
- Nutcracker, White-tailed Eagle, Rough-legged Buzzard, Great Grey Shrike
- Large flocks of Bean, White-fronted and Barnacle Geese
- Huge reedbeds at famous Matsalu National Park

1 Arriving in Tallin we are greeted by our Estonian guide and head to our hotel in south-west Estonia. The pine forests nearby are wonderfully atmospheric and depending on time we may search for Ural Owls along the forest edge, with a chance of Pygmy Owl too, or with luck even Elk or Raccoon Dog is possible!

2 Early morning finds us exploring Soomaa National Park where natural woodlands mix with swamps and rivers, making it perfect habitat for many Western Taiga forest specialities. This is a stronghold for Capercaillie and with luck we may find them collecting grit at the roadside or in nearby trees, or sometimes even lekking on the road! As the sunrise continues we shall search for woodpeckers, as this is the time of year they are drumming. This is a great place for Grey-headed, while Black,

White-backed and other woodpecker species are also regularly spotted. These same forests harbour Hazel Grouse, their thin whistled calls drawing attention to their presence, though they can be very elusive, but we hope to glimpse one crossing the path. After a refreshing lunch and some rest, the late evening will be spent looking for owls. Pygmy and Ural Owl have good breeding populations here and we hope to find mammals too, with chances of Raccoon Dogs or perhaps Elk - though early morning can be better for these.

3 We head over to delightful Saaremaa Island - a lovely place where Steller's Eiders spend the winter. Up to a thousand of these birds winter here, though at any one location around 300 birds is more likely. They often behave synchronously, all swimming and diving together in a tight flock



"Steller's Eiders pack incredibly tightly together in their wintering flocks off Saaremaa Island - then they all dive and surface at the same time! Meanwhile, scattered around the bay are Long-tailed Ducks, scoters, divers and plenty more, while the island has lovely woodlands for Nutcracker and woodpeckers - what a wonderful place!" Roy Atkins



and though they can be distant we have been lucky in the past to find birds close to shore too. They are joined here by flocks of beautiful Long-tailed Ducks, both Common and Velvet Scoters and other seaduck including Scaup, sometimes in large numbers. Divers pass offshore, as do flocks of migrating swans and geese, while White-tailed Eagles scan the shoreline from small islands off the coast. The woodlands on the island can be good for Lesser Spotted Woodpecker and where the trees are more mixed Nutcrackers and Jays are possible, calling raucously from the trees. Great Grey Shrike and Rough-legged Buzzard can be seen on our way to Undva. After lunch at the guesthouse and a short rest we may go for an owling session, with chances to hear and hopefully see Tengmalm's and Pygmy Owl in Viidumäe Nature Reserve.

**4-5** After breakfast we return to the mainland and head to north-west Estonia. After an enjoyable lunch at Haapsalu town we shall take a walk on the promenade and visit the bird-tower on the edge of the lake, where we have a fantastic view from the top and where several White-tailed Eagles may be seen, along with hundreds of Whooper and Bewick's Swans and plenty more.

We shall visit Põõsaspea, a small north-stretching spit of land and one of the best places for observing Arctic wildfowl migration. Thousands of Long-tailed Duck, scoter, Scaup, Goldeneye, Goosanders and other species pass here, often

with White-tailed Eagles nearby. Atmospheric pine forests hold Crested Tit, Willow Tit, Goldcrest, Hazel Grouse and Black Woodpecker:

We shall also visit Matsalu National Park, the oldest Ramsar area in Estonia and the most famous birdwatching area in the country, known as one of the most important breeding and stop-over sites for waterfowl and shorebirds in the whole of Northern Europe. Over 40 sq km, this Reserve consists of large open floodplains and coastal meadows, riparian and coastal woodlands, river delta and marshlands and shallow Matsalu Bay, with 3,000 hectares of reedbeds, numerous islands and seven birdwatching towers. Thousands of Whooper and Bewick's Swans and Bean, Greylag, Barnacle and White-fronted Geese are likely here, harvesting the grass of local meadows and fields. We hope to find White-tailed Eagles and have the chance of Bearded and Penduline Tits, plus a variety of ducks and perhaps early waders.

**6** We head back to Tallinn, where we shall meet a local guide for a guided tour of the old town, with some of the best medieval architecture in Europe. Then, after lunch in a restaurant here, we return to the airport for our flight back to London.



### Outline Itinerary

- Days 1-2 Fly to Tallinn and drive to our hotel, then following day explore Soomaa National Park  
2 nights Vanaõue Holiday Center
- Day 3 Travel to Saaremaa Island in search of Steller's Eider, Nutcracker and more  
1 night Loona Manor Guesthouse
- Days 4-5 Drive to north-west Estonia for birding around Põõsaspea Peninsula and Matsalu National Park  
2 nights Roosta Holiday Center
- Day 6 Transfer to Tallinn for a short tour of the city before our flight home

Sven Zacek: Ural Owl, White-backed Woodpecker  
Remo Savaaar: Hazel Grouse  
Mati Martinson: Steller's Eiders  
Roy Atkins: Penduline Tit  
Tarvo Valker: Nutcrackers  
Mary Braddock: Great Grey Shrike

