

ESTONIA



"The wilderness has huge reed-fringed lakes, stunning Baltic coastline, swamps and meadows, however it's the forests that are memorable, hosting mouth-watering birds with White-backed, Black, Three-toed and Grey-headed Woodpeckers, Ural and Pygmy Owls, Hazelhen and Capercaillie all possible." Julian Sykes

Dates Sat 5 - Sat 12 May 2018
 Price £2,795
 Deposit £550 Single Supp £250

Leaders Julian Sykes plus local guides
 Flights Lufhansa, scheduled, via Frankfurt
 Outbound: Morning, Heathrow to Tallinn
 Inbound: Afternoon, Tallinn to Heathrow
 Weather A mixture of sunshine and light showers (3°-15°C) with early mornings and evenings remaining cooler during the spring
 Walking Mainly on good level tracks, but we may also enter the forest in search of tracks and signs and this terrain can be a little more difficult
 Meals All included from dinner on Day 1 to dinner on Day 8
 Insects Could be a problem, please bring repellent and a mosquito hood might be useful
 Accom Comfortable hotels and guesthouses
 Twin and single rooms all ensuite
 Group 7

Just some of what we hope to see:

Bittern	Savi's Warbler
Black Stork	River Warbler
Lesser Spotted Eagle	Icterine Warbler
White-tailed Eagle	Thrush Nightingale
Black Grouse	Penduline Tit
Capercaillie	Golden Oriole
Corncrake	Brown Bear
Great Snipe	European Beaver
Whimbrel	Elk
White-backed Woodpecker	Raccoon Dog
Three-toed Woodpecker	Red Fox
Grey-headed Woodpecker	Roe Deer
Citrine Wagtail	Wild Boar

The Baltic Region at its best - European Brown Bear, Elk and rare birds, such as Great Snipe and Citrine Wagtail, all against a wonderful backdrop of coniferous forest and clear glacial lakes.

- Pristine meandering rivers, vast floodplains and extensive primeval forests
- Woodpeckers and owls plus Hazelhen, Black Grouse and chance of Capercaillie
- Red-breasted Flycatcher, Citrine Wagtail, Blyth's Reed and River Warblers
- Lekking Great Snipe and thousands of migrants
- Boat trip for European Beavers and night watching for Brown Bear
- Spotlighting for owls and mammals such as Elk
- Visit the historic capital of Tallinn, a UNESCO city of amazing architecture

1 Arriving into Tallinn Airport we'll drive to our hotel in the west, stopping for some birding along the route and if time allows, a walk around the hotel grounds searching for any local specialities such as Common Rosefinch, Icterine Warbler and Thrush Nightingale.

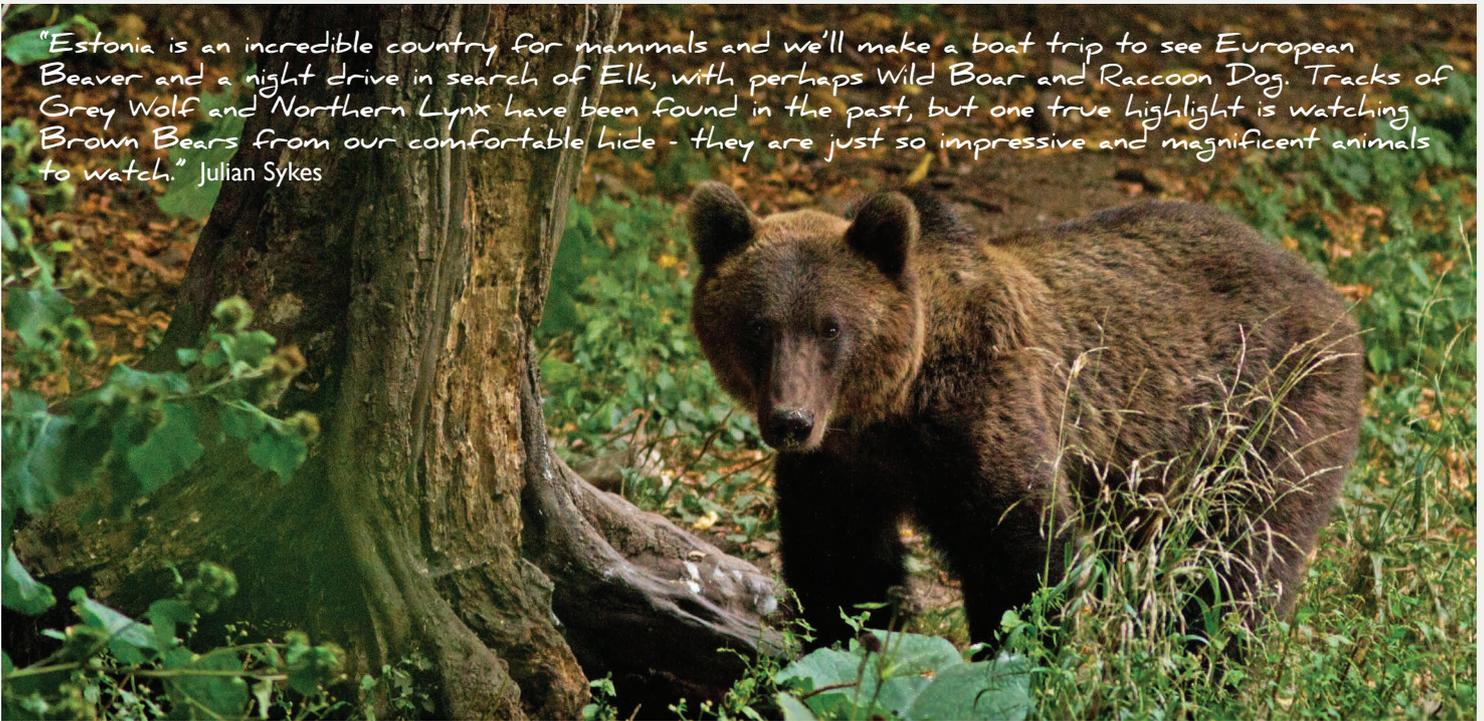
2 In the early morning, we shall enjoy a visit to the Leidisoo area, where a mixture of heathland forests, wetlands, open clearings and fields, provide excellent birding opportunities. We hope to watch the incredible sight of lekking Black Grouse, plus listen for woodpeckers such as White-backed, Grey-headed and Three-toed, amongst the more common species and there is always the chance of an Elk. We'll continue to the Põõsaspea peninsula, which is a migratory crossroads, where masses of

Common Scoter, long-tailed Duck and various geese congregate.

3 Today we'll visit the Matsalu National Park, which is the oldest Ramsar site in Estonia and at peak passage, over a million diving duck have been estimated here. A selection of waders also take advantage of the rich feeding grounds, including vast numbers of Ruff. Matsalu is much more than just an avian service area, with 170 breeding birds recorded, such as Osprey, Red-necked Grebe, Great Bittern, Caspian Tern and White-tailed Eagle. At dusk, we shall look for European Beavers leaving their lodges and with a little patience, we are likely to see several individuals going about their nightly construction work and foraging for food along the river.



"Estonia is an incredible country for mammals and we'll make a boat trip to see European Beaver and a night drive in search of Elk, with perhaps Wild Boar and Raccoon Dog. Tracks of Grey Wolf and Northern Lynx have been found in the past, but one true highlight is watching Brown Bears from our comfortable hide - they are just so impressive and magnificent animals to watch." Julian Sykes



4 Heading south east, by late morning we'll check-in to our hotel and have lunch in Tartu town, followed by a relaxing afternoon birding at some nearby lakes. We'll finish the day at one of the best sites in Estonia for Great Snipe, overlooking a flood plain where these very rare European waders breed.

5 We'll have an early morning start in one of the oldest protected areas in Estonia - Järvselja forest, to see a selection of woodpeckers and other forest species. Although the size of the primeval forest area of Järvselja is not remarkable, it still has significant value and within a small area the diversity of the woodland is simply astounding.

It is home to giant spruces over 200 years old, huge birches, incredible aspens, ashes and maples. After lunch we'll drive to the vast wetlands of Aardla, with lakes and ponds full of waterbirds and hopefully a few surprises, which could include Black Stork, Greater and Lesser Spotted Eagles, Penduline Tit, Citrine Wagtail and much more!

6 Today we'll drive to one of the most densely forested corners of Estonia - Alutaguse, which is good for Roe Deer and Elk, both targets for carnivores. Being near the Russian border it's an area with lots of Brown Bears and the heart of Estonian "bear culture". It is also one of the best places for Black Grouse, Capercaillie and Hazel Grouse, plus Grey-headed, Three-toed and White-backed Woodpeckers.



After lunch, we'll rest and in the late afternoon we'll drive to Oonurme to our bear hide, complete with comfortable beds and a toilet, to make our night's stay much easier. Bears can appear at any time during the night, along with Raccoon Dog and possibly Wolf. This will be a night to remember for so many reasons!

7 With some rest during the night, we will stay in the hide until dawn and as it becomes light the forest is alive with the sounds of woodland passerines such as Spotted Flycatcher, Common Crossbill and possibly Golden Oriole. Occasionally a Golden Eagle or Common Buzzard may appear and if we're very lucky we may glimpse a Capercaillie or Black Grouse. After this, we'll siesta back at the hotel, before heading out again in the afternoon in search of Ural and Pygmy Owls, plus a final opportunity to find more mammals.

8 Today we'll return to the capital and have a pleasant guided tour of Tallinn Old Town before we catch our flight back to the UK.



Outline Itinerary

- Day 1 Arrive in Tallinn and transfer to Western Estonia
3 nights at Roosta Holiday Village, Läänemaa
- Day 2 Early morning birding in Leidissoo forest with chance of Elk and other mammals, then birding at Pöösaspea
- Day 3 Matsalu National Park with Beaver boat trip in the evening
- Day 4 Relaxed start then drive to south-east Estonia, some birding locally, plus Great Snipe
2 nights at Hansa Hotel, Tartu
- Day 5 Whole day birding Järvselja, Aardla and general area
- Day 6 Transfer to north-east Estonia for bear hide
2 nights at Art Hotel, Rakvere
- Day 7 Early morning in hide, plus birding in local forests, with a break after lunch. Optional owling session in evening
- Day 8 Return to Tallinn for city tour before our flight home

Roy Atkins: Ural Owl, Pygmy Owl
Balazs Sziget: White-backed Woodpecker
Yves Gisseleire: Brown Bear
Luke Massey: White-tailed Eagle
Arne Ader: Great Snipe