

ESTONIA MAMMALS

Fancy something a bit different? A small group trip to this unspoiled country in search of mammals – the only way you're likely to see a Flying Squirrel! Plus Brown Bear, European Beaver, Elk and maybe Raccoon Dog and Wild Boar.

- * Search for Flying Squirrels at dusk with researcher Uudo Timm
- * Night in Brown Bear hide, baited for bears, but Raccoon Dog possible
- * Beautiful early mornings in unspoiled ancient forests and marshes
- * Watch European Beaver with specialist Remek Meel
- * Displaying Great Snipe, Citrine Wagtail, eagles, woodpeckers & owls
- * Spotlighting at dusk for Wild Boar, Raccoon Dog and who knows.... Lynx?!



After our flight we head to the remote area of wetlands and western Taiga forest known as the Alutaguse, which covers a huge area in the far north-east of Estonia. It is a fabulous area for mammals, with Brown Bears, Wolves, Lynx, Raccoon Dog, Wild Boar and Elk all present in good numbers - though some of these species are extremely elusive. After settling into our guesthouse, we hope to find our first birds such as Thrush Nightingale, Common Rosefinch and Icterine Warbler.

2-4 Dusk and dawn are without doubt the best times to look for mammals, so be prepared for early starts and late finishes on this trip - though we shall take a break in the middle of most days to catch up on sleep. A major highlight of this trip



"Imagine the anticipation as we sit quietly in our bear watching hide in the forest. Bears could appear at any moment and other wildlife of the forest could surprise us too! We'll be right there for the first light of dawn as the forest wakes."

Roy Atkins

will be when we team up with Uudo Timms, a zoologist/ecologist who has been studying Flying Squirrels for the last 20 years. His research of their ecology, protection and distribution means we could not be in better hands to find out about these delightful animals named after their ability to glide between trees, with leaps of up to 35 metres, using a fold of skin between their fore and hind legs. Being nocturnal they are never easy to see, so it will be fingers crossed when we meet up in the evening with radio receivers, to give us our best chance of seeing these fascinating animals - and with luck we might even see them gliding from one tree to another.

Being out early and late is always exciting and you never know what might be round the corner. Wolf and Lynx are present but very secretive and we would lucky indeed to see either, though we shall certainly be looking for tracks and signs. Spotlighting at dusk offers our best chance of connecting with some mammal species such as Red Fox, Wild Boar and the curious looking Raccoon Dog - literally like a cross

between a dog and a Raccoon. Elk are widespread here and these ancient forests hold an excellent selection of birds too, with Black Grouse, Capercaillie and Hazel Grouse possible. Wryneck and other woodpeckers such as White-backed and Three-toed are here, as are Red-breasted Flycatcher, River and Grasshopper Warblers, and we'll keep our eyes peeled for Ural and Pygmy Owls - always a possibility at dusk.

Alutaguse is situated near the Russian border and forms a solid natural landscape through to St.Peterburg Oblast's forests and bogs. The large number of bears here have created an Estonian "bear culture", with numerous real-life stories of young bears in human villages. Local people live side by side with bears with few problems and we shall explore this area looking for any signs, droppings and scratching on the trees with our local specialist. In the evening we shall visit a Bear Hide, where we shall spend the night excitedly waiting for any bears or other animals to visit the bait laid out in front of the hide. The wooden hide is cosy, with comfortable seats and viewing slots at the front, plus beds at the back, for those wanting to take a nap during the night. Brown Bears may appear at any time

"By teaming up with local scientists we can offer a unique insight into the lives of exciting mammals like the European Beaver, Brown Bear and the incredibly elusive Russian Flying Squirrel. So much more than a casual sighting."

Roy Atkins



while Raccoon Dogs and sometimes even Wolves occasionally visit the feeding place. We'll enjoy first light with Wood Warblers and Pied Flycatchers, before returning to the guesthouse for breakfast and some sleep! The rest of the day will be relaxed with birding in the forest and looking for Wolf and Lynx tracks.

5-7 We head to the Tartu region, where the lakes and ponds hold Red-necked Grebes, in breeding plumage at this time of year, Little Gulls, Black and White-winged Black Terns and a variety of ducks including Garganey. Citrine Wagtails are seen with increasing regularity and we'll look out for Lesser Spotted Eagle. One evening we'll visit a traditional Great Snipe lek - the males standing erect with chest puffed and tail fanned as they jump into the air with rattles and clicks! The Alam-Pedja, an area of marsh with adjacent forest, is a truly remote and wild region of undisturbed floodplains and winding rivers. Black and Grey-headed Woodpeckers are here, along with Black Stork, Lesser Spotted Eagles, Penduline Tit and Great Reed Warbler. A very early start (perhaps 3:30am!) takes us to meet Remek Meel, a specialist in the study

of European Beaver. He will lead our 'Beaver Safari' as we search this beautiful area of forest and winding streams. These animals are most active at dawn and dusk, so we shall also take a boat ride in the evening on the Emajogi River and with luck we hope to see several individuals going about their nightly construction work.

8 We return to Tallinn by late morning for our return flight to London



enquiries@speysidewildlife.co.uk

www.speysidewildlife.co.uk

Sun 20 - Sun 27 May 12 £1,995

Deposit £300 **Single Supp** £150
Leaders Darren Rees & Local Guides
Flights Easyjet, scheduled
 Outbound: Early morning, Stansted-Tallinn
 Inbound: Afternoon, Tallinn-Stansted

Day 1 Flight to Tallinn – drive to Alutaguse.
Days 2-4 Visit to woodlands in search of Flying Squirrel. Birding and visit to Bear watching hide
Day 5-7 Travel to Tartu area. Birding around Alam Pedja, plus watching European Beaver – Great Snipe lek in evening
Day 8 Visit Tallinn and return flight to London

Weather Can be variable at this time of year but should be pleasant temperature. Chance of rain and may be chilly early in morning (0-20°C).

Walking Mostly easy walking up to 2 miles on good tracks but there may be some walking off tracks in the forest. Torches needed for night walks.

Meals All included from lunch on Day 1 to lunch on Day 8.

Insects Mosquitos should not be a nuisance but if warm it is possible so bring repellent just in case

Accom Group Twin and single rooms with private facilities 6

Just some of what we hope to see ...

- | | |
|----------------------|-------------------------|
| Flying Squirrel | Black Woodpecker |
| Brown Bear | Grey-headed Woodpecker |
| European Beaver | White-backed Woodpecker |
| Elk | Three-toed Woodpecker |
| Red Fox | Crossbill |
| Wild Boar | Crested Tit |
| Raccoon Dog | Wryneck |
| Roe Deer | Icterine Warbler |
| Great Snipe at lek | Barred Warbler |
| Citrine Wagtail | |
| Lesser Spotted Eagle | |
| Spotted Eagle | |
| Red-necked Grebe | |
| Hazel Hen | |
| Black Grouse | |

- Rainar Kurbel:** Flying Squirrel
Jarek Jöepera: Brown Bear
Mati Kose: Citrine Wagtail, Lesser Spotted Eagle
Sven Zacek: European Beaver
Valeri Stserbatõh: Raccoon Dogs
Arne Ader: Great Snipe

01479 812 498