

# Estonia

## Autumn Arctic Migration

**Saturday 18 September – Saturday 25 September 2010**

Leaders: Simon Boyes and local guides

2010 Cost: **£1,999** single room supplement **£140**



**T**his will be Ornitholidays' eighth tour to Estonia, a small country on the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea, and our second holiday in the autumn. Estonia is a wonderful destination for birding almost the whole year round. There still are lots of untouched forests, meadows and wetlands, which offer excellent habitats for many bird species. In the autumn you can see Capercaillie, Black and Hazel Grouse and seven species of woodpecker, as well as many other interesting forest species. Meadows are of course best in the summer time, but in autumn many raptors patrol them while thousands of passerines feed on the ground. Chaffinch and Brambling flocks can consist of thousands of birds, and we may also encounter large numbers of Goldcrests, Northern Wheatears and Common Starlings on migration. Wetlands, of which Matsalu Bay is the most famous, are always full of life in the autumn. Thousands of ducks, geese and cranes use these wetlands as their last feeding and roosting grounds before their final migration to the wintering sites. By the coast the arctic migration continues from early September until late October. The first Steller's Eiders arrive at their wintering sites in September. Every day many divers and geese can be seen and with good conditions for migration the bird-count can run into the thousands. Among the migrants there is always a chance to find a rare White-billed Diver, or some other rarity such as Grey Phalarope.

Autumn is of course the best season for Siberian rarities and the Estonian islands of Hiiumaa and Saaremaa are excellent sites to locate one or two exciting eastern species – perhaps Yellow-browed or Pallas's Warblers. Estonia in the autumn is a magnificent destination for the birdwatcher who wants to see forest species together with raptors and arctic migration, with that added touch of eastern rarities. Travel with Ornitholidays, and see why we think that Estonia in the autumn is an exciting tour.

### ITINERARY

#### Days 1 & 2

We catch our morning flight from London to Tallinn, where we meet our guide and transport, and transfer to our hotel where we stay for two nights. En route we make short stops for bird watching. Our first will be in Vihterpalu, which is a lovely forest area facing a large bog. Here we try to find Black Woodpecker, Parrot Crossbill and Crested Tit. The area is also good for raptors and we have the chance to find Golden Eagle

and Goshawk and maybe a late Lesser Spotted Eagle. Next day, after an early breakfast, we visit Leidisoo Bog to look for Black and Hazel Grouse, woodpeckers and Nutcracker. This area is mainly spruce and pine forest but here and there are some open bogs. We continue on our way to the coast at Pöösaspea, which is the best site for arctic migration on the mainland, and we should see hundreds, and maybe thousands, of Long-tailed Ducks, scoters, divers and geese. We return to the hotel for lunch and after a short break we head to Matsalu Bay, which is a huge

nature reserve. The whole area is mostly wetland surrounded by large fields and meadows. This is the main stopover site for hundreds of thousands of birds. We spend the whole day around Matsalu Bay looking for raptors, shorebirds and some woodpeckers.

#### Day 3

After an early morning breakfast we drive to Rohukula where we take a ferry to Hiiumaa Island, which is famous for its large meadows, with juniper trees. Hiiumaa is the best sea-



Spotted Nutcracker



Hazel Grouse



Crested Tit

watching site in Estonia and we visit many sites round the island before we arrive at our quite modest but attractive hotel.

#### Days 4 & 5

Our first destination today after breakfast is Ristna where we watch arctic migration. Besides ducks and divers we have good possibilities of seeing such species as White-billed Diver, Steller's Eider and some skuas. After lunch we drive to Sõru and take a ferry to Saarenmaa Island. Saarenmaa is Estonia's biggest island and has large areas of forest, meadow and beautiful groves and beaches. Our destination is Kuresaar, the capital of Saarenmaa, where we stay for two nights. We can make some birding stops en route to our hotel to look for migrants. Before breakfast next day we visit the Sõrve Bird Observatory to watch the migration and ringing. Sõrve is situated in the southernmost point of Saarenmaa on a narrow cape surrounded by beautiful wetlands. If we are lucky some owls and Siberian rarities such as Richard's Pipit or Pallas's Warbler may show up. After breakfast we visit Undva, which is the best wintering site for Steller's Eiders in Estonia. We should see also species such as Smew, Scaup and Jack Snipe.

#### Day 6

We make another early morning visit to the Sõrve Bird Observatory. After breakfast we drive to

Kuivastu and we take a ferry back to the mainland where we can again look for birds around Matsalu Bay before we head to Pärnu. On the way we make some stops at good raptor sites, as there are vast fields and meadows favoured by many hawks and eagles. Our last stop today is at Pikla pools, which are old fish pools with wide reedbeds covering the whole area. We will try to find Bearded Tits and maybe there will be Bitterns flying over the reeds just before the sunset.

#### Days 7 & 8

In the early morning we visit the Nigula Nature Reserve where there are still some fine old mature forests. Even Brown Bears and Wolves live in this area and Pine Martens are common, as well as many interesting bird species. We will also try to find the secretive Hazel Grouse as well as Black, White-backed and Grey-headed Woodpeckers. After breakfast we visit Pulgoja meadows before we make the long drive to Tartu, which is home to Great Snipe and Spotted Eagle. We shall try to find these two key species but our success is dependant on the weather conditions. Besides the forests and meadows, there are some excellent wetlands and old fishponds close to Tartu. On our final day, after some birding round Tartu before breakfast, we head back to Tallinn. On the way we stop to look for raptors before we catch our return flight to London where we arrive in the afternoon.

#### Outline Itinerary

Day 1	Fly to Tallinn and transfer to Haapsalu
Day 2	Haapsalu
Day 3	Hiiumaa Island
Days 4-5	Kuresaar
Day 6	Pärnu
Day 7	Tartu
Day 8	Depart Tallinn

#### Party Size

Maximum of 12 clients (two leaders with more than six clients).

#### Accommodation

Comfortable accommodation in twin/double and single rooms, with private facilities.

#### Transport

By minibuses driven by the leaders.

#### Includes

All flights, meals, accommodation, transport, entry fees, services of the leaders, VAT, airport taxes and tips.


#### Gradings

 Good

 120

 Cool to Warm


 Low

 Normal

 Moderate

 Good

 Easy

 Scheduled



Goldcrest