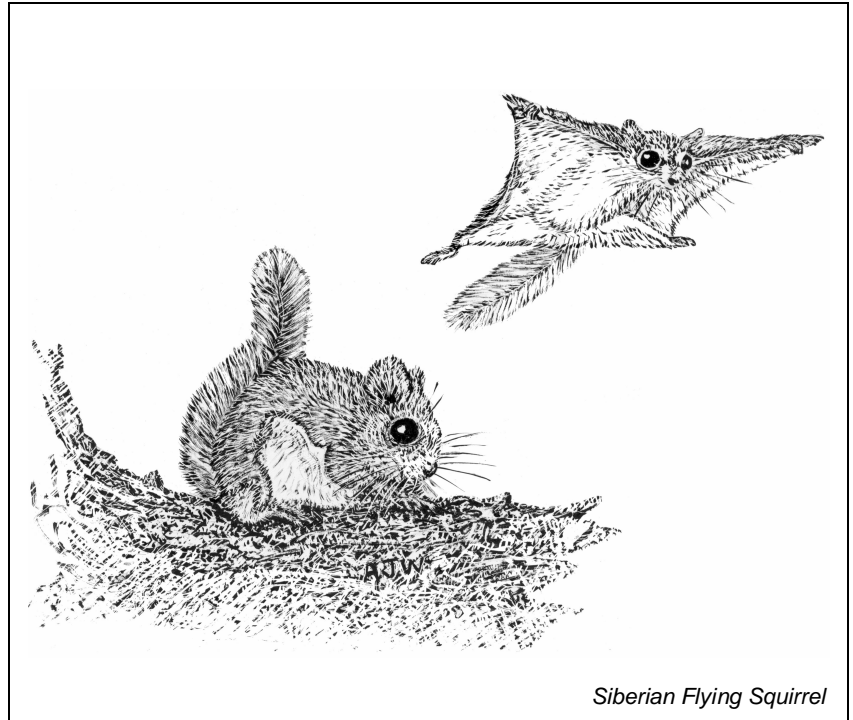


ESTONIA'S MAMMALS

an imaginative tour seeking mammals in the western taiga



Siberian Flying Squirrel

This is a new tour to eastern Estonia, combining both birds and mammals, with the emphasis on watching the latter.

We will travel to areas not visited on our normal itinerary and visit some pristine forest habitats. It will be a two centre holiday, visiting the country's prime mammal watching sites. In this way we maximize our chances of encountering some of the special wildlife still to be found in good numbers.

Estonia has some 50% tree cover and a good proportion of this still consists of old growth forest. The country boasts relatively high population levels of mammals. There are over 150 Wolves, 500 Brown Bears, 700 Lynx, 12,000 Elk, 20,000 Beavers and similar numbers of Wild Boar. On this tour we will be accompanied by expert guides who will escort us to the key areas for mammal observation. One of the special creatures we hope to encounter is the Siberian Flying Squirrel which, within Europe, can only be found in parts of Estonia and Finland. A boat trip into the marshes of southern Estonia will allow us to study the behaviour of European Beavers. The highlight is an overnight visit to a bear hide where, as well as the bears, we could witness the visits of Raccoon Dog and Red Fox or perhaps even a Wolf!

Amongst the forest and bogs we should also expect to find some good birds including Ural Owl, Capercaillie, Hazel Grouse, Black Stork, Lesser Spotted Eagle and Goshawk. Woodpeckers are good indicators of bird diversity and we should encounter several resident species such as Black, Grey-headed and White-backed. All the late summer migrants will have arrived in Estonia such as River Warblers, Marsh Warblers and Blyth's Reed Warblers. In the early mornings the forest resounds to the sound of bird song, in particular the Thrush Nightingale and Wood Warblers. Flowers, particularly orchids, will be in bloom, whilst dragonflies and butterflies are on the wing. All in all, this tour should be a wildlife spectacular; a celebration of Eastern Europe in the spring.

ITINERARY

ALUTAGUSE

From Tallinn airport we transfer to our base in north-eastern Estonia for a stay of four nights. The high season for bear activity is in May and June. Small numbers of bears now visit a feeding station in this area. Later in the summer they switch to a mainly vegetarian diet and as a result become more elusive. On one evening we shall visit a bear viewing hide and make an overnight stay in order to observe them. The hide is fitted with comfortable bunk beds and there are also toilet facilities. In 2011 several bears were visiting the feeding station during May and June and a young wolf was seen in mid-June.

Another sought after mammal which lives in the forests here is the Siberian Flying Squirrel. One evening we shall visit a site for this wonderful creature and try to see one or more of them as they leave their daytime roosts. Smaller than a Red Squirrel, this grey and rather large-eyed squirrel possesses a membrane between its front and back legs which enables it to glide effectively from tree to tree. There are at least 80 known territories of the flying squirrel in Estonia and attempts are being made to locate more. By participating in the tour you will be assisting in both the support and funding of the Estonian Fund for Nature's *Flying Squirrel Research Project*.

Estonia is proving to be one of the best countries in Europe to see large mammals. It is relatively easy to find evidence of various species along the forest trails. By utilizing the

services of local experts we increase the chance of actually seeing these secretive forest dwellers. Brown Bear, Lynx, Pine Marten, Raccoon Dog, Red Fox, European Beaver, Siberian Flying Squirrel, Red Squirrel, Badger, Elk, Roe Deer and Wild Boar are all species that the guides find from time to time.

Birds seen regularly in and around the forests whilst searching for mammals include Capercaillie, lekking Black Grouse, Hazel Grouse, White-tailed, Golden and Lesser Spotted Eagles, Goshawk, Wryneck, Wood Warbler, Pied Flycatcher, Tree Pipit, Crested Tit and Crossbill.

TARTU

On day five we head south to our next base in the second city of Estonia, Tartu. This will be our home for the next three nights, from where we will venture out to see wild boars and go on a beaver-watching safari. On our doorstep here is the floodplain of the Emajogi (jogi is Estonian for river). Accompanied by an Estonian expert in semi aquatic mammals we will attempt to observe European Beavers in their natural habitat. With luck and a little patience we should see several of these industrious creatures going about their nightly business. Wild Boars are also very active in this area. On our birding tour in 2011 we saw several sows with piglets in tow!

AARDLA AND ALAM PEDJA

Situated on the outskirts of Tartu are the wetlands of the now flooded, former polders at Aardla. This is an excellent birdwatching site rated as one of the best in Estonia. A good selection of waterbirds are found here including Red-necked Grebe, Garganey, Little Gull and Black Tern. Small numbers of the gorgeous White-winged Black Tern are increasingly regular. At night Spotted Crakes and Little Crakes join the chorus of rasping Corncrakes. River Warblers sing from riverside scrub and there is always the chance of finding Marsh Sandpiper and Citrine Wagtail, which sometimes breed here.

On the bird tour we shall have visited a Great Snipe lek near Tartu. If time permits we shall revisit this site on the mammal tour. High water levels in the last two springs have made the birds here more difficult to observe. However, this site has also proved to be a good place to watch Red Fox, Roe Deer and Wild Boar.

To the north of Tartu lies the wilderness reserve of Alam Pedja. Immense forests grow here alongside a lush river floodplain. This is a remote place and therefore an excellent site for wildlife. Corncrakes call from the riverside marshes and River Warblers are regularly heard singing. Woodpeckers are a feature of this area, with both Grey-headed and White-backed relatively common, alongside the more usual Black and Great Spotted. The Three-toed Woodpecker is more difficult to find though their tell tale signs can readily be found on forest trees. In late spring Honey Buzzards are actively displaying over the woodland clearings. Osprey and Lesser Spotted Eagle can also be expected and there is a chance of a sighting of the rarer Greater Spotted Eagle too.

The old growth forest here is also good for mammals and on previous tours along the forest tracks we have had sightings of Elk and Roe Deer and, on one occasion, a Brown Bear. If we have been out late or early in the day we will take the opportunity to take a rest in the middle of the day. Bird and wildlife activity tends to drop off at this time and we shall use

this time effectively to recharge our own batteries before the next adventure.

It is possible to combine this tour with our Estonian birdwatching holiday. The tours are designed to complement each other and we shall visit some completely different locations on both. Please contact the office directly for a price.

PACE

The days will be structured in order to maximize our chances of seeing our quarry. Therefore we shall be making both early morning and late evening excursions. Meal times will remain as normal and lunches will be provided at local farmhouses and guest houses. We will be taking advantage of late morning and afternoon siestas in order to catch up on our sleep. Basic fitness is all that is required. Full days will be spent in the field and short/medium length walks on the flat will be undertaken regularly. There are no uphill walks.

ACCOMMODATION AND FOOD

Full-board accommodation is provided with four nights at the Matsu Guesthouse in Alutaguse and three nights at the Hansahotell in Tartu. Rooms are of a very good standard with en suite facilities. One night will be spent in the bear observation hide at Alutaguse, with food and bedding provided. We will, of course, keep our rooms at Alutaguse, so no need to pack and unpack.

PRICE INCLUDES

All bird and mammal watching excursions with expert leader and local guide, full board accommodation (starting with dinner on 27th, ending with breakfast on 3rd), soft drinks at meal times, local transport by mini-bus, reserve entrance fees, international flights and airport taxes. For every person joining us on this tour a donation of £30 will be made to the Estonian Fund for Nature's *Flying Squirrel Research Project*.

WHAT IS NOT INCLUDED

Travel insurance. Personal items, alcoholic drinks, laundry.

INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS

Return flights from both London Heathrow and Manchester to Tallinn (via Helsinki) using the scheduled services of Finnair. Outbound flight departs late morning, with return landing late afternoon.

7 nights:	27th May to 3rd June 2012
Principal leader:	John McLoughlin
Local guide:	Tarvo Valker
Maximum group size:	6 clients with one leader and local guides
Cost with discount (if you book before 11th February 2012):	£2095 per person sharing
Full Cost:	£2195 per person sharing
Single supplement:	£150
Deposit:	£300