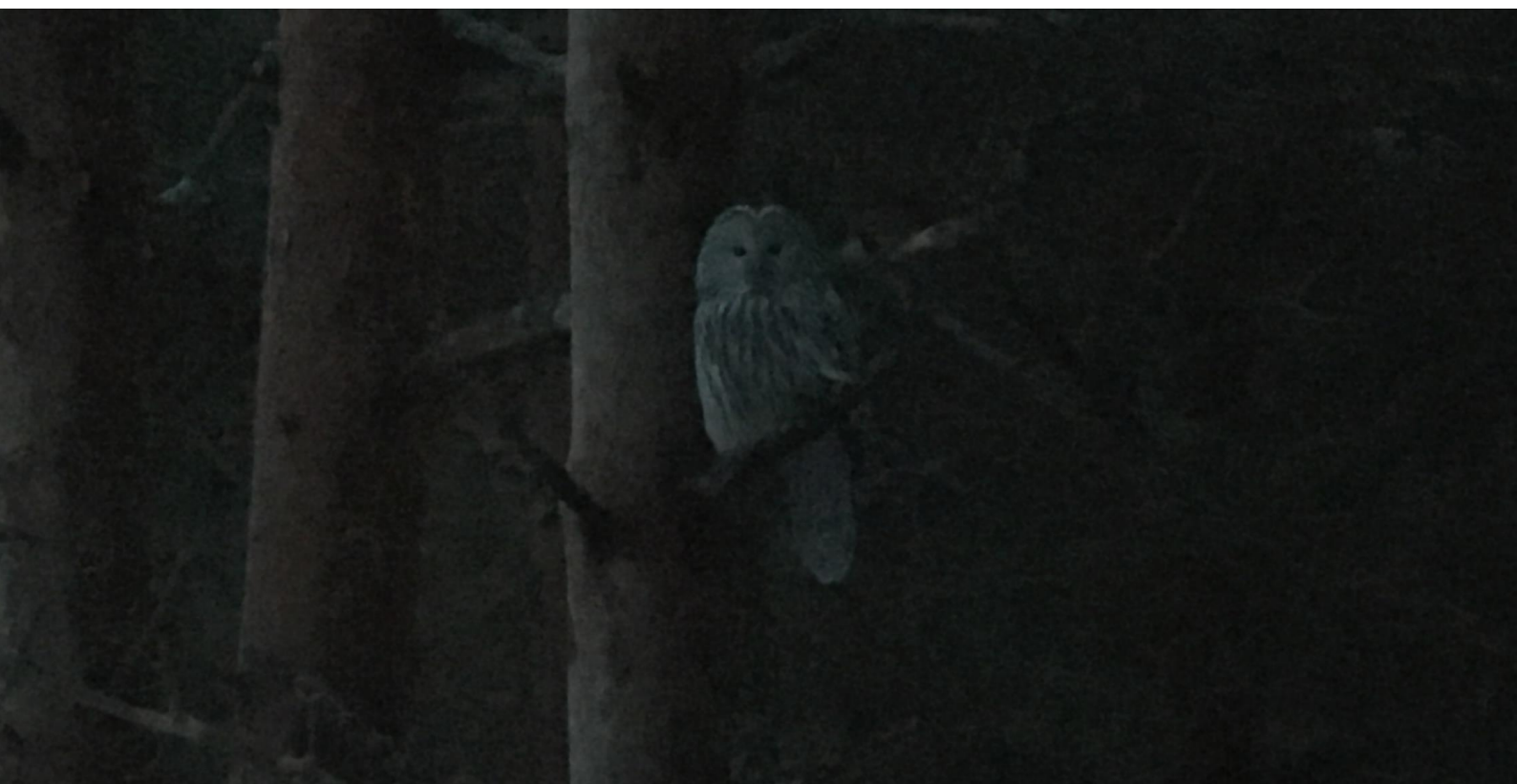




ORIOLE BIRDING



TOUR REPORT

ESTONIA — STELLER'S EIDER AND
TAIGA FOREST

14TH — 19TH MARCH 2019

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LEADERS

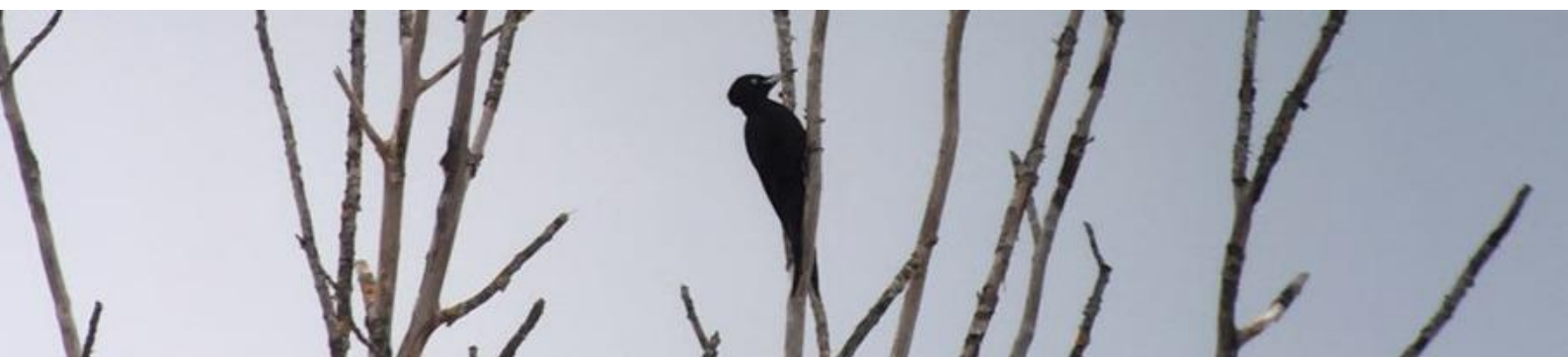
Jason Moss and Uku Paal

PARTICIPANTS

Karl Dutton
Susan Brook
Roger Gabriel
Nicholas Cutts
Stephen Curtis
Carol Rushton

THURSDAY 14TH MARCH – *Overcast and cool, occasional light showers, light S winds, 3C*

Our journey to Estonia commenced with all of us meeting at Gatwick Airport at the delightful hour of 05:55, where we made fast and easy progress through checking and security, had a bite to eat for breakfast, and then boarded our 3 hour flight through to Tallinn Airport in the north of Estonia. We landed at 12:55 local time and met with our local guide from Estonia Nature Tours, Uku Paal. Loading up the van (and noting our first bird of the trip; Hooded Crow) we set off west, on a journey across country towards Virtsu Harbour, where we would catch a ferry to Saaremaa Island. The drive was about 3 hours long, but was punctuated by a couple of short birding stops along the way. A **Great Grey Shrike** on overhead power lines was a treat, while a pause close to Lihula at a small petrol station produced a small group of 6 **Bewick' Swans** in fields keeping company with 12 Canada Geese and 17 Greylag Geese, while a second **Great Grey Shrike** was in the neighbouring field and allowed scope views. On route we noted a single **Common Crane** in flight, and a number of Common Buzzards and Lapwings; the latter newly arrived spring migrants, while Jackdaw, Raven, Blackbird and Starling were also noted in small numbers. A second birding stop provided us with a nice, if tantalising bit of quality. Standing in hushed silence besides the van, we could hear the distant 'oop' call of a **Pygmy Owl**. Deep in a stand of forestry, it wasn't close, and Uku's impressive imitation of the bird couldn't bring it closer. However, following some distantly heard 'Kliiee' calls of a **Black Woodpecker**, Uku managed to usher this bird closer and closer. Evident now that there were a pair, one of these magnificent woodpeckers suddenly flew across the treeline, and came in to land atop of a lone bear tree in the clearing we were stood in! Shortly after, its partner came in, and there we were watching two **Black Woodpeckers**; a male and female, perched together in the same tree! A fantastic way to start things.



Our first of many Black Woodpeckers on this trip

From here we made our way to Virtsu Harbour, where we boarded the car ferry to cross over to Muhu Island via the Suur Strait. There was still quite a lot of ice on the water here, with numerous 'bergs' floating around, and a substantial band of ice which we would sail through to cross. However it is much warmer than our trip last year! A number of Herring and Common Gulls were present along with smaller numbers of Black-headed Gulls on the broken ice, while **Goosander** and Goldeneye occupied sheltered parts of the harbour. The highlight of the crossing was a flock of about 250 **Long-tailed Duck** which took flight as we sailed past, while 4 Common Scoter were amongst

them. Something new for all of us to see was a couple of cow Grey Seals with 1 week or so old pups out on the floating ice sheets part way across the channel. The icy white background concealed the fully-furred white pups perfectly, and revealed the adaptation which these young white pups have, but what is lost as a benefit on the UK colonies. More Goosander were present on the other side of the channel, before we boarded the van and disembarked the boat onto Muhu Island. The drive from here was fairly uneventful with the light fading fast, though a **White-tailed Eagle** sat out on the ice-sheets as we left the harbour was great to see! We arrived at Kihelkonna and our accommodation at Loona Manor Guesthouse at about 19:00 where, following a lovely home cooked meal, we retired to our rooms, tired after a long day of travelling.

FRIDAY 15TH MARCH – *Overcast with occasional bright spells, some showers, sometimes heavy, light S winds, 3C*

Day two in Estonia would see us with a full day on Saaremaa island, and what a cracker it prove to be! Saaremaa is famous for hosting the vast majority of the European population of Steller's Eider; Europe's only critically endangered seaduck, and one of our main targets for this tour. Our quest for this species would see us heading north after breakfast, with a **White-tailed Eagle** noted before departure towards the Undva peninsular in the north-east of the island. Our journey was punctuated by a **Great Grey Shrike** on power lines, but we soon arrived at a remote area of rocky shorelines, Juniper scrub and open bays. We began scanning the flat seas, noting large numbers of Long-tailed Ducks, Goosander, Goldeneye and 3 Red-throated Divers, plus a migrating flock of about 15 **Greater Scaup** heading east and a party of 3 **Smew** heading over in the same direction. A **Snow Bunting** flew over calling but was not seen, and 6 Common Eider were spotted offshore but no sign of their rarer cousins. We headed further along to the west and scanned the neighbouring bay, with a distant dense flock of dark seaduck noted almost instantly on disembarking the van by one of the group. This was them; the **STELLER'S EIDERS**! The flew into the bay and landed on the sea fairly distantly, but offered good scope views as the sea was flat calm. A couple of fly-rounds brought the birds somewhat closer at times, where the rusty underparts and distinctive black collar and 'cape' of the males was clear, particularly when stretching and wing-flapping. The females were distinctive in how blackish they appeared at distance, and also with their double white wing-bars. They were a surprisingly small seaduck, evidenced by them being dwarfed by nearby **Velvet Scoters**! A real treat, and fantastic experience to view this ultra-rare bird. After about 40 minutes of viewing, the rain set in, so we made our way back to the van to get out of the wet. Other birds noted here included a distant **White-tailed Eagle** over the tree tops and another fine selection of seaducks in good number in the bays. Driving away from the site, the rain soon passed allowing us to stop at a small harbour at Veeremaes on our way south. A feature of this site was a superb mixed flock of scoter, containing around 200 **Velvet Scoter** and a similar number of Common Scoter, while Gadwall, Coot and Shelduck were also noted along with a couple of **Greater Scaup** and several hundred Long-tailed Ducks including a few very close to the jetty, offering superb close views. A little further south, an enclosed concrete jetty hosted a flock of about 40 Tufted Ducks and, amongst their number, a couple of **Smew** including a fine drake. The flock unfortunately spooked at distance and left the harbour for open water, so we made our way round to view them out in the main bay. A good number of Goosander, several hundred more Long-tailed Ducks and numerous Tufted Ducks were out in the bay, with a couple more **Greater Scaup** amongst them. We soon picked up a single winter plumaged **Slavonian Grebe** close to the duck flocks, and then a **Red-necked Grebe** amongst the same flock; good winter birds here. Once we finished up here, we made our way back to Loona Manor for lunch, following a thoroughly productive morning of some of the most productive 'sea-ducking' most of us had ever encountered.



The most important flock of Steller's Eiders in the whole of Europe

After a sumptuous lunch of home-made lamb stew, we then headed out for the south-western tip of the island. The journey was punctuated by a small flock of 91 geese in wet roadside fields which provided fantastic value, consisting of around 15 **Russian White-fronted Geese**, 16 **Taiga Bean Geese** and around 60 **Tundra Bean Geese**. The close comparison of the two bean geese was particularly valuable, allowing us all to get a feel not only for the amount of orange present in the bill (which varied immensely between individuals), but also how different the two species are structurally, with Taiga showing its long, thin 'snakey' neck and triangular head and bill profile, as opposed to Tundra Beans shorter, stouter neck and more rounded head profile. The field here was shared by a pair of **Common Cranes**, 8 **Whooper Swans** and a good number of Lapwings, Stock Doves, Skylarks and Jackdaws, and entertained us for a good 30 minutes. From here we moved south onto the Sörve Headland. This scenic peninsular and its impressive tall lighthouse hosted at least 4 **White-tailed Eagles**, including two seen talon-grappling over offshore boulders. The bay also held a pair of **Whooper Swans**, A couple of Wigeon and numerous Red-breasted Mergansers, Long-tailed Ducks and Goldeneye, with smaller numbers of Goosander also present. From here we stopped in at the Sääre museum, where a small bird observatory operates in the spring and autumn, but also contains a small military and natural history museum. An active bird feeder here hosted numerous Greenfinches as well as some **Yellowhammers**, Blue and Great Tits and also brief Bramblings and a Dunnock. However the undoubted highlight of the area was a superbly showy female **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** which spent 10 minutes at head height in bare trees, allowing prolonged views as it worked the trunks and thin branches. The bird performed so nicely that we had to walk away, with time ticking. Our journey home was spent pausing at a couple of likely forest sites, where we tried our luck for Pygmy Owl without joy, but did encounter our first Coal Tits and **Northern Treecreeper**, as well as hearing a scolding **Willow Tit**, but unfortunately not spotting it. A Great Spotted Woodpecker also flew overhead, while Wren and a couple of Roe Deer were noted at another stop. A final pause on our way home provided a nice ending to the day, with a sheltered bay surrounded by reeds hosting a good number of Tufted Ducks and, best of all, about a dozen **Smew**. The drakes were particularly appreciated! From here it was time to head back to Loona Manor, where another delicious dinner was waiting for us; hard-earned after a superb days birding.



The drake Long-tailed Ducks were really quite stunning

SATURDAY 16TH MARCH – Overcast with light rain all day, almost windless, 5C

A rather grey, damp day greeted us today, as we made our way off of Saaremaa Island to head east onto mainland Estonia. The weather meant that this first part of the journey was best served driving, though a brief pause was had for a small flock of **Tundra Bean Geese** which were resting in roadside fields. Making good progress, we arrived at the ferry terminal on Muhu Island for the 08:30 crossing, noting 100's of Long-tailed Duck and numerous Goosander and Goldeneye; all par for the course on this trip! Disembarking the ferry, we wound our way into some forested roads around Tuhi, stopping along a promising stretch where we encountered a couple of *palustris* **Marsh Tits** and heard a Willow Tit but couldn't locate it. A call to Uku from Marika; the director of Estonian Nature Tours informed us of an active **Black Grouse** lek close by. Heading up the road, we were able to enjoy a very energetic display of 11 cock **Black Grouse** strutting and tussling across an open area of boggy grassland. Interestingly the birds shared the area with 19 female **Black Grouse**, who all appeared to be enjoying the show, before they flew up into nearby Silver Birch trees and proceeded to feed on the buds at the ends of the thin branches. We were all impressed by the level of activity we were witnessing, especially so late into the morning. **Common Cranes** were bugling in the distance, while the next frozen field held another treat in the form of a flock of 9 **Waxwings**. These birds were entertaining to watch as they visited the frozen pools, dropping onto the ice with outstretched legs and cocked tail, apparently gleaning some food of some kind, before flying up to overhead wires. Things got even better as we headed deeper into the forest, as we paused to overlook another forest clearing. Drizzle was falling steadily, but the wind was non-existent, and we could hear perfectly for miles around. Things were initially quiet, but then the call of a distant **Pigmy Owl** reached us, from perhaps 500 meters away. A little expert imitation from Uku and some patience later, and a tiny bird bounded over the treetops ahead of us and perched up. No bigger than a Starling, a superb **PYGMY OWL** was sat up for us all to see, and remained there for the next half hour! In fact, we left the area with the bird still in situ! However, this wasn't the only bird of note here. Following a movement in close treetops, a **NUTCRACKER** flew out and over our heads, calling and pulling in no fewer than 5 other **Nutcrackers** from the far end of the clearing. One sat up in tall Spruce and posed for us all; what a performance! Just superb, and some of Estonia at its best.



One of a small flock of noisy Nutcrackers around Tuhi

Our next stop was made in response to a field of wild geese and swans, which provided some really good viewing. The flock consisted of 480 **Tundra Bean Geese**, 6 **Taiga Beans**, a single Pink-footed Goose (a scarce bird in Estonia), several Russian Whitefronts, around 40 Whooper Swans and 8 Bewick's Swans. These flocks have only been arriving in the area over the last couple of spring-like days, heading north to breeding grounds, so we have timed our trip to perfection to enjoy these super flocks. Another good bird, though it didn't hang around for long, was a **Rough Legged Buzzard** which flew alongside the van as we were getting out, but disappeared from view soon after. From here we continued north up the western coast of the country, heading towards our next base at Roosta. Another pause on route featured our first *caudatus* **Long-tailed Tits** of the trip. They didn't show particularly well, but even in flight it was evident what a snowball they were, and we hope to see this distinctive subspecies again before the end of the trip. Another interesting and distinctive

subspecies here was the nominate subspecies of Eurasian Nuthatch, *europaea*. This bird was striking in possessing completely clean white underparts except for the dark red-brown undertail coverts and vent, making it appear an extremely neat and tidy beast. Marsh tit and Jay were also noted here, as well as Great Spotted Woodpecker. Close to our accommodation, we passed a wide bay with still a lot of ice across the waters surface. However, many gaps were forming as the thaw progressed, and these were occupied by numerous Goosander and about 8 Smew, including both males and females, diving in amongst the gaps in the ice. From here we made our way to the Roosta Holiday Village, where we dropped our things, checked in and readied ourselves for a late evening patrol of the nearby key areas.



This Pygmy Owl was full of character

Our first stop from the accommodation was the very scenic peninsular in the north-west, Põõsaspea. The sea here hosted getting on for 1000 Long-tailed Duck, while Goldeneye were abundant and several Goosander were also present, along with a flock of about 30 Eider. This is a good migration spot, but nothing was moving offshore, so we headed into the forest, where we began to patrol suitable habitat where our final target bird of the day might be found; Ural Owl. This holy grail of northern forests is actually not that uncommon in Estonia in the right habitats, and often shows itself in the early evening. However, after pausing at 4 or so sites with no calling heard, and with a fairly persistent drizzle, we wondered if our luck might be used up for one day. A last stop consisted of a fairly open cross-shaped clearing in thick forest, with power line rides cut through, offering good viewing. As the light faded, the incredibly distant calls of a male and female Ural Owl caught our ears, though they were so far away we could barely make them out. Then suddenly Sue gathered our attention, pointing to the edge of the clearing; there was a bloody URAL OWL sitting half way up a tree about 100 meters away! This large, pallid owl looked utterly majestic sat there, its black eyes staring out from a pale facial disc. Amazingly, a second bird then appeared along the forest edge further along the ride, sitting in a similarly exposed position, from where we enjoyed it until the light had nearly faded completely, and we left them in peace to head back to our accommodation. What an experience!



An undoubted highlight of this tour, one of a pair of Ural Owls

SUNDAY 17TH MARCH – Overcast, moderate and cold south wind, 3C, but felt much colder

Today saw us wake up in the well forested Roosta Holiday Village, where we rose at a more leisurely 07:45 to have breakfast and then head onwards. The pine forest here held a coupe of early treats for us, first of all with a pair of vocal **Parrot Crossbills** which erupted from pines outside of reception, flew over calling and then landed prominently on top of a Spruce tree. The deep-based bill and thick necked appearance of this irruptive species was evident, and it was pleasing to catch up with them; a difficult species to catch up with in Estonia. Another good sighting here was an inquisitive **Crested Tit** which investigated us for a while, again showing well and calling loudly from tall pines. A nice way to leave this attractive site. From here, we had a fair day of travelling ahead of us to reach the north-eastern part of the country, where we would be spending the next couple of nights. However before embarking on the drive, we first headed north to revisit the peninsular at Põdsaspea again, to see if any morning migration was evident. A vigil from the headland did produce some movement, with a small passage of Tufted Ducks, **Velvet Scoter** and **Greater Scaup** evident, along with small groups of Russian White-fronted and **Tundra Bean Geese** offshore, while some passerines were also on the move, including a flock of Siskins, several Ravens and a number of Skylarks all either passing or coming in off the sea. The water also hosted numerous Long-tailed Ducks and plenty of Goldeneye and Eider. At the base of the peninsular, and area of rough grassland was worthy of a stop, as it produced 3 **Woodlark** which appeared to have set up territory and were singing high overhead and chasing both each other and the local Skylarks. In the neighbouring field we enjoyed seeing and hearing a pair of **Cranes** which seemed to have set up territory there, while a **Great Grey Shrike** also adorned the overhead wires. From here we commenced our journey east, taking us past Tallinn and on into Lahemaa National Park and the area around Palmse. Entering the area, an adult male **Goshawk** cruised through over open fields and into a woodland stand beyond, right on queue before we headed for an enjoyable lunch in a rather spectacular converted old farmhouse.

After lunch we made our way into some fine areas of old parkland surrounding some impressively regal old manor houses. The habitat looked good for Middle Spotted Woodpecker in particular, so we invested some time in searching for this and other woodland species. The weather had seen a shift from the previous days calm and mild conditions, with a fairly stiff cold wind blowing and very grey skies, and the areas birdlife had responded, showing very low activity and little sound even from the local Great Tits! However, a slow and thorough lap around the impressive grounds of this house did unveil some nice sightings. **Northern Bullfinches** were seen well for the first time in this trip, and also produced their nasal trumpeting calls for the first time, along with illustrating their strawberry red underpart colour and whitish wingbar with thin pale 'teeth' creeping up the outer web of the feather, creating a 'comb' effect to the wing-bar. Marsh Tits were also seen, and a Willow Tit was heard (a species we are yet to catch up with properly yet, so hopefully tomorrow!). With perseverance, we eventually encountered our first woodpecker at the site; a female Great Spotted Woodpecker. A vocal Nuthatch of the northern European subspecies also showed well, showing off its pearly white underparts. Then a smaller woodpecker flew overhead and landed in a further off deciduous tree; a **Middle-spotted Woodpecker**! The bird performed really nicely for us, feeding and visiting a variety of dead and living trees and quietly testing and probing the wood for food, allowing us to note its dark-streaked flanks, neatly and heavily-spotted flight feathers and the delicate pinkish-red flush to the undertail coverts; much less vivid than in Great Spotted Woodpecker. A really great bird and a good performer to boot! From here we then pushed on with our journey east. The weather steadily worsened as we drove, with the wind increasing, and a light snow beginning to fall. The journey produced an impressive number of Common Buzzards, with an impressive 35 birds counted over the duration. We began to discuss how surprised we were to not see a **Rough-legged Buzzard** amongst their number, when as if on queue an adult (probably a male) rose up from the roadside and banked away from the van, revealing its white tail-base and pale streaked head and upper breast. Stopping the van, we saw the bird pass round the back of a mound, but never saw it appear out of the other side! Another rather brief encounter with this species. A couple of Common Crane were also noted besides the van during the journey. As we neared our final destination, we entered some areas of mature Spruce forest which hosted lots of fallen dead wood; ideal habitat for Three-toed Woodpecker. The wind was really blowing through the treetops here and the forests

were more-or-less silent, so we struggled to get many sightings of note, though it was interesting to see holes in the lower trunk of a Spruce created by a Three-toed Woodpecker attempting to extract sap from the pine. With this, we headed to Rakvere where we would spend the night, looking forward to entering the old forests of this region tomorrow, on the hunt for woodpeckers!

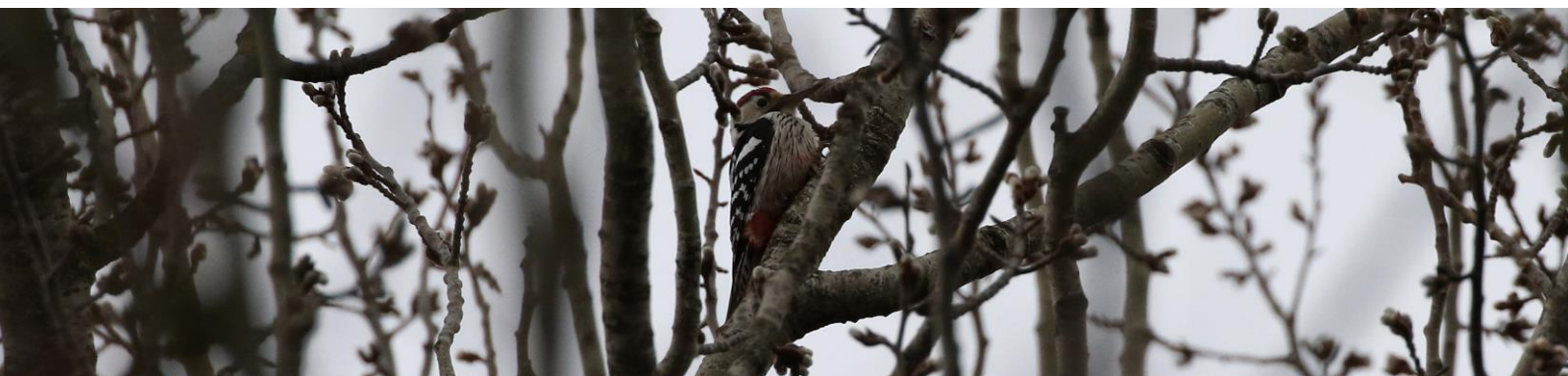


Middle-spotted Woodpecker; a highlight of an overall quiet windy day

MONDAY 18TH MARCH – *Overcast with sunny spells and wintry showers pm, light S winds am, easing later, 7C*

Our final full day in Estonia saw us entering some of the most densely forested regions of the country, where we would make a big effort to encounter the regions specialist woodland species. A combination of the forests age and wild state, with much natural tree growth and dead wood from fallen trees mean that it is a haven for woodland birds and mammals, with the diversity of woodpeckers here being particularly impressive, and so it proved today! Our day started after breakfast with a drive out from Rakvere, entering the forest from the west. The strategy for today, with so many promising areas of forest to explore, was to pause within a variety of rich areas, and just wait and listen. This strategy proved extremely fruitful in the main through the day, though the morning was grey and a little windy, so things started fairly slowly. Our first couple of stops produced little in the way of activity, though a high passage of Lapwings and Skylarks was evident overhead, and continued through much of the day. Much of our exploration took us along frozen forest logging tracks, where we entered into a winter wonderland of mature Spruce forest with thick white snow covering the ground. It was in a location like this that we encountered the first of one of our most sought-after species; a **Three-toed Woodpecker**. This elusive species appeared silently above us in high Birches, before flying across the track and perching up long enough to get a scope on it, noting that it was a female bird, lacking yellow on the crown, before it passed silently back into the forest and never reappeared. **Black Woodpeckers** were also very vocal here. Searching for forest birds, we were conscious that the morning period can often be the most productive time, with birds at their most active. However, we were more-or-less finding the opposite was true this morning, with a relative lack of activity from most things, probably down to the cool grey conditions. However, we did manage to encounter some great hotspots of action. One such hotspot involved a tit flock which featured **Crested Tits**, a couple of the northern race of **Willow Tit** (our first good sighting of this distinctive bird, and one we had been looking forward to seeing well), **Goldcrests** and **Marsh Tits**. A couple of calls from a **White-backed Woodpecker** were also heard here, but no sighting was forthcoming. Our next stop took us into more open forestry with some larger clearings between Spruce stands. This site produced another sought-after woodpecker for us; a fine female **Grey-headed Woodpecker**. This bird gave us a good show, calling regularly with its distinctive high pitched, descending 'kleee klee kle klu klu klu' call which sounds somewhere between a Green and Black Woodpecker. A short drive onwards saw us pause in another promising site, which Uku said looked good for **White-backed Woodpecker**. As has been the case for almost this whole trip, Uku's intuition was proved correct, with a splendid male **White-backed Woodpecker** appearing, clinging onto a tall deciduous tree trunk, before dropping very low down towards the base, where it began probing for food, moved around the back and was lost. Considering this morning felt like the weather

had made many of the woodland birds 'quiet', we were doing very well, with our two most sort-after woodpeckers in the bag! Another nice sighting here was of two more very vocal *borealis* Willow Tits which showed well as they sang their hearts out in front of us. From here, it was time to have our picnic lunch, surrounded by 1-meter deep snow and peaceful forest.



White-backed Woodpecker; arguably our most sought-after woodpecker in Estonia

Finishing our lunch and coffees, we then continued onwards, heading further east into the Alutaguse forest. We paused in an area where a long forest trail led off at a right angle from the main track, and was covered by relatively soft snow still. We scanned this trail with binoculars as we passed, as there is always a chance of spotting a grouse or mammal using these quiet tracks. Nothing was obviously present, but on getting out of the van, a male **Capercaillie** erupted from the forest edge and flew down the ride, entering the pines half way along! It was obviously just feeding off the track! We walked along the track a short way in the hope of spotting this majestic bird in the trees. We stopped in our tracks as a **Three-toed Woodpecker** called over our heads, giving its squeaky 'quick' kick call. Unfortunately, despite a long vigil we couldn't get a sighting, the bird probably slipping away unseen. However, 6 **Woodlark** were noted flying overhead on migration, and then the **Capercaillie** flew again, heading further down the track! We weren't going to likely manage a better view of this bird, so we left it to it, and returned to the van. Our next stop took us to a wide-open clearing, where we enjoyed a superb show from two **Black Woodpeckers**; a male and female which were incredibly vocal and flew across the clearing, landing in isolated trees and showing superbly well, giving a full range of vocalisations. The weather was improving now, with glimmers of sunshine, while an immature **White-tailed Eagle** cruising into view seemed to agree. However, this didn't last, with a dark weather front passed over us, bringing some heavy wintry rain our way. This lasted about 20 minutes, but we remained out of the van, as we discovered some fascinating mammal tracks in the snow nearby. European Elk tracks lined the path, as did a number from Roe Deer. However even better were a long set of **Brown Bear** tracks which Uku found leading down a narrow trail covered in thick snow. These animals are only just waking up from hibernation, and these tracks were probably as fresh as to be from last night! Another good set of tracks were those of **Eurasian Lynx**; the large cat-like impressions working along the side of the track. Following this fascinating distraction, we then continued our hunt for woodland birds! A walk along a quiet snow-covered track proved fairly quiet, until a **Hazel Grouse** began calling from nearby! The habitat was perfect, with tightly packed and low-growing Spruces forming an impenetrable forest floor. With this, it was unsurprising that we didn't see the bird, but it was cool to hear it. Back to the main track, an immature **Goshawk** cruised over, as did an adult **White-tailed Eagle**, before we moved on. Heading between sites, we paused to scan some open countryside, which yielded **Common Crane**, numerous Buzzards, a flock of Fieldfare and, frustratingly, a distant *aquila* eagle which eluded identification but was either Golden or one of the Spotted Eagles. We then moved into further mature forest, and with the weather markedly improved, bird activity continued to remain high, particularly from the woodpeckers. **Black Woodpeckers** were ridiculously vocal (and totalled 10 individuals across the day), while we also managed further very good sightings of **Grey-headed Woodpeckers** (finishing the day with 6 individuals) and **White-backed Woodpecker** (totalling 4 for the day); a true woodpecker-fest! A superb highlight of this late period was a huge male **Capercaillie** which, unlike today's earlier one, sat up in the top of a tall spruce for a bit before flying down into the forest and

away. With the light fading, we heard three different **Pygmy Owls**, before making our way back to Rakvere for our last evening in Estonia. What a cracker of a day.



Black Woodpeckers were a constant and welcome distraction throughout our trip

TUESDAY 19TH MARCH – *Overcast but dry for most part, light to moderate S winds, 5C*

Our last day in Estonia dawned grey and cool. this would primarily be a travel day, moving from Rakvere to Tallinn, in order to catch our lunchtime flight. However, on route, it would have been a shame not to visit the surrounding forest areas one last time, to catch up with some of the areas birds, and particularly to try and encounter Three-toed Woodpecker as, despite us having some encounters yesterday, they were brief and some in the group failed to catch a glimpse. Unfortunately, despite a big effort to find the species in ideal habitat, we didn't have even a sniff! The weather seemed to have shut down most activity in the forest in fact, with very little sound or movement in most of our stops. However a few bits and pieces were noted, including flyover Bullfinch, Brambling and Linnet, along with a couple of calls from Marsh Tits and Great Spotted Woodpeckers. Soon it was time to push onto the airport, and with a number of flocks of Tundra Bean and White-fronted Geese, and a couple of **Great Grey Shrikes**, we said fairwell to Uku Paal and Estonia. Following a delayed departure of our flight (and a lot of standing around), we finally boarded, arriving back in Gatwick about 20 minutes later than scheduled, where we said our fair wells and headed home.

Estonia – Steller's Eiders and Taiga Forests – March 2019

Species order, names and taxonomy follows - Clements, J. F., T. S. Schulenberg, M. J. Iliff, D. Roberson, T. A. Fredericks, B. L. Sullivan, and C. L. Wood. 2018. The eBird/Clements checklist of birds of the world: v2018. Downloaded from <http://www.birds.cornell.edu/clementschecklist/download/>

#	Common name	Scientific name		14	15	16	17	18	19		Comments
Anatidae (Ducks, Geese, and Waterfowl)											
1	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>		✓	✓	✓					
2	Greater White-fronted Goose	<i>Anser albifrons</i>			15	✓	✓		✓		<i>Ssp. albifrons, 'Russian White-fronted Goose</i>
3	Taiga Bean Goose	<i>Anser fabalis</i>			16	✓					
4	Tundra Bean Goose	<i>Anser serrirostris</i>			60	✓	✓		✓		
5	Pink-footed Goose	<i>Anser brachyrhynchus</i>				✓					
6	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		
7	Bewick's Swan	<i>Cygnus columbianus</i>		6	✓	✓					
8	Whooper Swan	<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>			✓	✓	✓		✓		
9	Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>			✓	✓	✓				
10	Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>			✓		✓				
11	Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Mareca penelope</i>			✓	✓					
12	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
13	Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>			✓						
14	Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>			✓		✓				
15	Greater Scaup	<i>Aythya marila</i>			✓		✓				
16	Steller's Eider	<i>Polysticta stelleri</i>			✓						
17	Common Eider	<i>Somateria mollissima</i>			✓	✓	✓				
18	Velvet Scoter	<i>Melanitta fusca</i>			✓		30				
19	Common Scoter	<i>Melanitta nigra</i>		4	✓	✓	✓				
20	Long-tailed Duck	<i>Clangula hyemalis</i>		250	✓	✓	✓				
21	Common Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
22	Smew	<i>Mergellus albellus</i>			✓	✓	✓				
23	Goosander	<i>Mergus merganser</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
24	Red-breasted Merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>			✓	✓					
Phasianidae (Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies)											
25	Western Capercaillie	<i>Tetrao urogallus</i>						2			

#	Common name	Scientific name		14	15	16	17	18	19		Comments
26	Black Grouse	<i>Tetrao tetrix</i>				✓					
27	Hazel Grouse	<i>Tetrastes bonasia</i>						H			
Podicipedidae (Grebes)											
28	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>			1						
Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)											
29	Rock Dove (Feral Pigeon)	<i>Columba livia</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
30	Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
31	Common Woodpigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>		✓		✓	1	✓			
Rallidae and Gruidae (Rails, Coots and Cranes)											
32	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>			✓	✓	✓				
33	Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>		1	✓	✓		✓	✓		
Recurvirostridae and Charadriidae (Stilts, Avocets, Plovers and allies)											
34	European Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>			2		✓				
35	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		
36	Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>			H						
Laridae (Gulls and Terns)											
37	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		
38	Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		
39	Scandinavian Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		'Ommisus' Scandinavian form
40	Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓				
Gaviidae (Divers)											
41	Red-throated Diver	<i>Gavia stellata</i>			3						
Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)											
42	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>			✓	✓	✓				
Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)											
43	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓				
Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)											
44	Northern Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>				✓	✓	✓			
45	White-tailed Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>		1	8	✓		2			
46	Rough-legged Buzzard	<i>Buteo lagopus</i>				✓	✓				

#	Common name	Scientific name		14	15	16	17	18	19		Comments
47	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		✓	✓	✓	35	✓	✓		
Tytonidae and Strigidae (Owls)											
48	Eurasian Pygmy-Owl	<i>Glaucidium passerinum</i>		H		✓		3H			
49	Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>		H							
50	Ural Owl	<i>Strix uralensis</i>				✓					
Picidae (Woodpeckers)											
51	Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker	<i>Picoides tridactylus</i>						3			
52	Middle Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocoptes medius</i>					1				
53	White-backed Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos leucotos</i>						4			N and E European Ssp. leucotos
54	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
55	Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dryobates minor</i>			1						
56	Grey-headed Woodpecker	<i>Picus canus</i>						6			
Laniidae (Shrikes)											
57	Great Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius excubitor</i>		2	✓	✓	✓				
Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)											
58	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓		
59	Common Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
60	Spotted Nutcracker	<i>Nucifraga caryocatactes</i>				✓					
61	Eurasian Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		Ssp. soemmerringii
62	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
63	Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
64	Common Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Alaudidae (Larks)											
65	Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>					3	✓			
66	Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Paridae (Tits)											
67	Coal Tit	<i>Periparus ater</i>			✓	✓		✓	✓		Ssp. ater
68	Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>					✓	✓			
69	Marsh Tit	<i>Poecile palustris</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓		N european ssp. palustris
70	[Northern] Willow Tit	<i>Poecile montanus ssp. borealis</i>			H	H	H	✓			N. european ssp. borealis

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71	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
72	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
73	Northern Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>				✓					<i>N. european ssp. caudatus</i>
Sittidae and Certhiidae (Nuthatches and Treecreepers)											
74	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea ssp. europaea</i>				✓	✓	✓	H		<i>N. european ssp. europaea</i>
75	Eurasian [Northern] Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris ssp. familiaris</i>			1	✓	✓	H	H		<i>N. european ssp. familiaris</i>
Troglodytidae and Regulidae (Wrens and Kinglets)											
76	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>			H				H		
77	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>			H		H	✓	H		
Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)											
78	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>			4	✓			✓		
79	Eurasian Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
80	Fieldfare	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>			✓	✓		✓			
Sturnidae (Starlings)											
81	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Bombycillidae (Waxwings)											
82	Bohemian Waxwing	<i>Bombycilla garrulus</i>				✓					
Fringillidae (Finches, Euphonias, and Allies)											
83	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓			
84	Eurasian [Northern] Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		<i>N. european ssp. pyrrhula</i>
85	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
86	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>			2			H	H		
87	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>				✓					
88	Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>					12		✓		
Emberizidae (Old World Buntings)											
89	Snow Bunting	<i>Plectrophenax nivalis</i>			H						
90	Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>			✓		H		✓		
91	Common Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>			H						
Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)											
92	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>				✓					

#	Common name	Scientific name		14	15	16	17	18	19		Comments
93	Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>				✓					
#	Other wildlife	Scientific name		14	15	16	17	18	19		Comments
94	Canada Goose	<i>Anser canadensis</i>		12		✓					
95	Black Woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus martius</i>		2		H		10			
96	Red-necked Grebe	<i>podiceps grisegena</i>			1						
97	Slavonian Grebe	<i>Podiceps auritus</i>			1						
98	Brambling	<i>Fringilla montifringilla</i>			2				H		
99	Parrot Crossbill	<i>Loxia pytyosittacus</i>					2				
#	Other wildlife			14	15	16	17	18	19		Comments
1	Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>		2	✓		✓				
2	Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓				
3	Atlantic Grey Seal	<i>Halichoerus grypus</i>		✓	✓	✓					Including pups on the ice
4	Eurasian (Moose) Elk	<i>Alces alces</i>						✓			Tracks in the snow
5	Eurasian Lynx	<i>Lynx lynx</i>						✓			Tracks in the snow
6	Brown Bear	<i>Ursus ursus</i>						✓			Tracks in the snow