



ORIOLE BIRDING



TOUR REPORT ESTONIA 11TH – 18TH JUNE 2019

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TUESDAY 11TH JUNE – *Calm & dry evening, 18C*

Our afternoon flight from London Gatwick to Tallinn departed on time today at 1600 and we touched down ahead of schedule ready to meet up with our local guide Margus from Estonia Nature Tours. We were soon on the road, navigating out of the city and on our way to our first accommodation base near Haapsalu. The journey took us along mainly empty roads as we headed west through the twilight, with a couple of sightings of roding Woodcock over the forests as we drove, and a Long-eared Owl which flew across the road in front of us. It was 11pm by the time we reached our accommodation, on the shores of the Baltic.

WEDNESDAY 12TH JUNE – *Sunny spells and fresh winds, 20C*

Today we headed about half an hour's drive from the hotel to bird around Matsalu, starting at the peninsula of Puise. A few roadside birds along the way included our first Tree Sparrows, Wheatears, **Red-backed Shrike** and Whinchat. The low juniper scrub on the peninsula held singing **Common Rosefinch**, another male **Red-backed Shrike** and best of all, a pair of **Barred Warblers** which showed really well, the male flying up to perch on the wires and sing – we could see its striking yellow eye easily through the scope. Yellow Wagtail, Redpoll, six Goldeneye and a Tree Pipit were flyovers and down at the shore, we had a great vista out across shallow bays and small islands where many **Arctic Terns** were nesting. Common Ringed Plovers were also displaying here and Wheatears were pretty common. Among the terns, we picked out a single Little Tern, and both Red-breasted Merganser and Goosander were resting on one of the spits. Another male **Common Rosefinch** was singing nearby, and after initially sounding distant it suddenly sang from the bush right next to us! It was a stunning full plumage male and we had very good views as it dropped onto the grass and began feeding on the seeding dandelions. A pair of **Black Redstarts** were also around, as were White Wagtail, Common and Lesser Whitethroats.

Heading back along the peninsula, we stopped to overlook another large bay. Here we picked up a couple of distant Avocets, and three **Spotted Redshanks** in summer plumage, as well as more common breeding waders such as Redshank and Ringed Plover. A **White-tailed Eagle** flew in and dived into the water for a fish, before retiring with it to a nearby rock. It turned out this was a female bird, as its mate then flew in and landed with it, looking much smaller by comparison. Nearby an observation tower overlooked another part of the shallow coastline, and here we had perhaps our best birding of the morning. A pair of **Caspian Terns** were out on one of the islands, while **Common Cranes** and **Whooper Swans** could be seen among the wet grassland and reeds. Ducks included Teal, Shoveler, Gadwall and Goosander, and raptors were well represented – another **White-tailed Eagle** showed well, while a commotion from the local breeding Common Gulls alerted us to a **Lesser Spotted Eagle** drifting in high overhead. A **Honey Buzzard** was also seen, circling above the adjacent mixed forest and giving some good scope views, and a Sparrowhawk was also seen. This whole area was full of dragonflies, with huge numbers of Four-spotted Chasers in particular. We rounded off the morning back near the hotel with lunch overlooking the lake – a pair of **Slavonian Grebes** in summer plumage and an excellent meal made for a successful start to the trip!

After a siesta for a couple of hours, we headed out again for our evening session around 1615, starting with a stop by the lake to get scope views of the **Slavonian Grebes**. We had really good views of three of them, including one just off the end of a small jetty – all in full breeding dress of course. Moving on to the Matsalu National park, we stopped at an observation tower overlooking a vast area of flower meadows to scan for birds of prey and other species. A **Tree Pipit** was singing close by, and gave good views, and was soon joined by a young male **Common Rosefinch** – quite different to the red one we had seen earlier! Scanning the meadows, we had excellent views of a pair of **Montagu's Harriers**, quartering the grassland. Two groups of **Common Cranes** (of four and twenty birds) were striding through the grass and a pair of **White-tailed Eagles** circled over. After a quick ice cream stop in a local town (the Estonians love ice cream and the freezer section of the supermarket stocks a quite bewildering array!) we moved to the spot where we would meet our evening boat trip. A male **Red-backed Shrike** allowed for great photo opportunities by the car park, and another each of

Whinchat and male **Montagu's Harrier** were seen. Marika from Estonia Nature Tours met us with a hot dinner that we would be taking with us on our boat trip, and we set off to wind our way through the reedbeds. It was really quite windy and cool on the trip, and this effected our chances significantly of connecting with European Beaver – only Margus managed to see one swimming across briefly in front of us. But we saw a good array of birds – **Blue-headed Wagtails** were very common, and we also saw a few **Fieldfare**, **Common Cuckoo**, Reed Bunting, Sedge Warbler and Marsh Harrier. Reaching an observation tower, we moored up and had our excellent al fresco dinner on the river bank to a backdrop of singing Garden Warblers. Yellowhammer was also common and we had stunning views of a male, while better still was a **Thrush Nightingale** which sang briefly and then sat right out in the open at the front of a willow bush by the track. We had brilliant views of it through the scope – quite unlike any of us had seen before! Back in the boat, and we retraced our route, the highlight on the way back being several singing **Savi's Warblers**, including one which showed well. It was really late by the time we made it back to the hotel, though a **European Nightjar** flying across the road was a little bonus on our way!



Thrush Nightingale – brilliant views of this notorious skulker on our evening boat trip

THURSDAY 13TH JUNE – *All weathers from 11C in cool winds and overcast conditions, to 28C in sun, and heavy thunderstorms!*

We had breakfast at 0700 this morning, and certainly all slept well after our late finish last night! Our plan for the morning was to head into the network of arable fields in the forest near Leidisoo, and in particular to look for **Black Grouse**. We arrived to find one particular field to be a magnet to all kinds of birds – there were several **Common Cranes** here, including a family with young chick, and a group of nine **Black Grouse** were standing out in the open. We watched them from the vehicle to begin with, to make sure everyone got a view – scanning the field also produced a surprise **Whimbrel**, and a lovely party of summer plumaged **Golden Plover** into the bargain. We wanted to scope the grouse, so drove a bit further on past them and got out a safe distance away. We had excellent views, and even saw one of them spreading its tail in display. One of the real highlights here was the Skylark song – the air was absolutely full of them, and there must have been many scores of pairs just in this one area. Heading back out along the track, we had superb views of **Whinchat** with two pairs present right beside the vehicle, and then three **Eurasian Hobbies** appeared and flew right past us. We had seen a good selection of species in a small area, and now began to navigate our way back out along the various forest tracks towards the coast. Reaching a paved road, we continued towards the peninsula at Poosaspea, but didn't get that far before Margus shouted '**Nutcracker!**' and two flew across the road ahead of us. We pulled over and tried playing their distinctive call, and they responded, with four **Nutcrackers** appearing and one landing nicely in the open so everyone could get a scope view. They then melted back into the conifers and we only heard them calling after that, but still, we had enjoyed really good views of what can be a tricky species to connect with.



Yellowhammer – one of the commonest small birds encountered in Estonia

A short drive on and we reached the Poosaspea peninsula, an area synonymous with visible migration of arctic bound wildfowl in spring. It was cold here, with a stiff wind blowing offshore, but we still saw some nice close groups of Common Eider, four Red-breasted Merganser, six Common Goldeneye

and several more distant flocks of Common Scoters. An **Otter** was out on the rocks in the bay, providing a nice bonus, and Margus spotted a very distant Long-tailed Duck. From here, it was only a short ride to our lunch stop, at the excellent fish café on the other side of the bay. We had a superb meal here, with the best bird seen being a **Woodlark** which was singing above the parking area. Heading back to Haapsalu from here, we had one roadside stop for a male **Montagu's Harrier**, before reaching the hotel to collect our luggage. The drive from here to our next base beyond Pärnu would take around two hours, but we had a birding stop planned along the way. The temperature gradually rose steadily as we drove south, reaching a crazy 28C by the time we reached Pärnu! We stopped by the coast at a site where **Citrine Wagtail** is known to breed, to see if we could connect with one. There were both Yellow and White Wagtails also breeding around the marshy fields, but soon we heard a raspy song coming from a stand of reeds – it was a dazzling male **Citrine Wagtail**! After initially disappearing giving only half the group a view, it soon returned to the same song perch and showed really well – what a superb bird! Several Sand Martins were also buzzing around here and were new for the trip. Our final leg took another fifty minutes, to reach our accommodation near the Soomaa National Park. A pair of **Lesser Spotted Eagles** soaring over the parking area as we arrived was a nice welcome, and we could also hear **Thrush Nightingale** and **Golden Oriole** singing along the river adjacent to the hotel – it looked a really fantastic spot!

FRIDAY 14TH JUNE – *Calm and overcast day, 15C*

Our best birding of the trip so far was enjoyed today, as we explored the fantastic taiga forests of the Soomaa National Park. We had breakfast at 6am, and as we loaded up the van we saw a pair of **Common Rosefinch**, and could hear a **Marsh Warbler** signing from the lush waterside vegetation. Not far from the hotel, we crossed a river and stopped to listen for warblers. A **Blyth's Reed Warbler** was signing, its distinctive series of rising whistled notes being characteristic. It was too far away to realistically see, so we had to make do instead with a singing **Redwing**, and several Fieldfare which were already feeding fledged young. Just a bit further on, a small meadow with scattered large sallows held another singing **Blyth's Reed Warbler**, and this one could be seen sitting in the open from the vehicle – though not for everyone! We bailed out, and of course this made it more elusive, though it was singing beautifully and doing a circuit of its territory so giving some flight views to most. One to build on! After a drive of about thirty minutes, we reached the approach track to the park and began birding along its length, stopping if we saw anything of interest. One of these stops was for an alarm calling **Green Sandpiper** in a small boggy clearing, classic breeding territory for the species. We got out to scope the bird which was sitting on a small tree, and frequently flying around calling before returning there. While we watched, an almost deafening trumpet from just behind us alerted us to a pair of **Common Cranes**, walking around right beside the road! More subtle was the distinctive 'pleee!' call of a **Black Woodpecker**, which flew in and sat preening in the open on a dead tree – fantastic stuff!

Once in the forest, we parked up and took a marked boardwalk loop trail which would take us through prime mixed forest of spruce and aspen. A **Wood Warbler** was signing by the parking area, and a pair were gathering food in the aspens before dropping down to the ground to feed young in an unseen nesting spot. Another target bird in this area would be **Red-breasted Flycatcher**, but they are incredibly hard to see despite being easy to hear! We heard 3-4 singing males this morning, but not one of them obliged with even so much as a brief flick. A high pitched chattering coming from a hole in a spruce tree by the path alerted us to an active woodpecker nest, and given the size of hole, tree species and fast nature of the begging calls, we thought it could only be Three-toed. We waited overlooking the hole, and sure enough a pair of **Three-toed Woodpeckers** appeared – we watched them coming and going, feeding the chicks at the hole, for several minutes. The views were quite superb, and best most of us had ever had of this often tricky species. A **Crested Tit** showed extremely well from a viewing platform in the forest, calling as it moved around us at eye level. A singing **Greenish Warbler** was more tricky though, and we didn't manage a sighting.

Next we called at a beautiful meadow by the river, and added Garden Warbler (we had heard lots, but not seen any), another **Common Rosefinch** and Tree Pipit. Back on the main track, we walked a

section which looked superb for woodpeckers, with many decaying trees. It turned out to be very good for warblers, with many of the common species here plus singing Icterine and River Warblers, both of which remained unseen. A male **Pied Flycatcher** popped into view, and a **Spotted Flycatcher** perched above us in the open. One of the days highlights came a little further on, as Margus somehow spotted a woodpecker perched in the top of a dead tree about 500m off the road! We got out to check it, and it was a cracking **Grey-headed Woodpecker**! Thankfully it flew closer, and performed really well for us in the open – a new species for some of the group. Soon we reached our lunch stop, at the park visitor centre. Another **Icterine Warbler** was singing here, and this time we had decent views of it up in a big silver birch. The whole place was buzzing with House Martins, Swallows and Swifts, and both **Common Rosefinch** and Fieldfare were in the trees just around the main building. We lunched outside on the picnic benches – a delicious nettle soup with homemade bread – and had good views of a **Greenish Warbler** foraging in alders in the small meadow just adjacent to us. It ended up in song, perched on top of one of the trees in the car park.



Three-toed Woodpecker – one of the encounters of the trip

After lunch we took another loop trail, through mature forest by the river where the activities of European Beaver were clear to be seen, even if the animal itself was not. Still, we heard more singing **Red-breasted Flycatchers**, saw a fledged **Common Goldeneye** chick on the river, and had excellent views of a **Nutcracker** which flew in and perched briefly right on top of a spruce. We also got very, very close to seeing **Hazel Grouse**, as Margus flushed a female shepherding chicks while trying to locate us a Red-breasted Fly! Sadly the rest of us missed out, but we did get to hear the whistling call clearly. **Northern Bullfinch** was added just as we reached the car park clearing again, and a **Redwing** was in full song – such a treat to hear! Our final good bird of a really excellent days birding was in one of the small villages on the way back to the hotel, where a stonking adult **Goshawk** came through hunting feral pigeons and then cruised back over our heads as we stood outside the shop eating chocolate! We reached base around 4pm, and took a couple of hours siesta, ahead of our planned owling session later tonight.

Night tours the world over can often be a bit of a disappointment – the wildlife you are trying to view is by its very nature, elusive, and of course humans aren't very good at seeing in the dark! At least here in Estonia in June, the latter isn't really a problem, since it barely actually gets dark at all! Anyway, tonight was perhaps one of the best night tours we have ever done, anywhere. It was still like a beautiful sunny afternoon when we set off just before 8pm, and our first good bird of the evening was totally unexpected – a male **Merlin** taking a dust bath in the middle of the track, en route back to Soomaa National Park. It took flight, and was pursued by another (we assumed the female, but we they were too quick to be sure). They then broke into an amazing display flight above the distant spruce forest, rocking from side to side in an unusual jinking flight. Margus informed us this was a good record for Estonia as there are not many breeding pairs. Soon we reached the park, and took a track down to a large meadow with a tower hide – this was a place known for a small lek of **Great Snipe**, and while it was now getting late in the season, we wanted to try our luck. **Woodcock** were already roding, and we had fantastic views of several birds low over the trees. We had already had drumming **Common Snipe** too, so we had set ourselves up nicely for the hat-trick! **Corncrake** could be heard calling in the meadows, and then out of the blue, the bizarre clicking song of a **Great Snipe** was heard! The bird was not far away either, and we scanned carefully as it sang two or three more times in succession. Two of the group then saw the bird fly up briefly from the grass – success! We waited another half hour, and heard nothing, but then the bird started calling again. This time it was more sustained, and hope for another sighting grew. The grass was long though, and we were struggling. Eventually, a **Great Snipe** flew up from the grass and headed off across the meadow, soon followed by the second bird. They dropped distantly in an area which Margus told us was the main lek site, but much too distant for any more views. Still, we had good flight views of a stocky snipe with extensive white outer tail and quite distinctly pale greyish upperwings.

Next we would try for owls and other calling nighttime songsters, by heading back into the area of forest we had visited in the morning. We stopped by a spot where a **River Warbler** had sung briefly earlier on, and sure enough it was reeling again, though of course now at twilight, it was far more sustained. We approached slowly, scanning the low bushes in the ditch by the side of the track. The combination of mosquitoes and clouds of midges meant that our resolve was tested, but soon we found the **River Warbler** perched low down, delivering its amazing shuttling song for minutes on end. The bird remained completely still, with its bill wide agape but not turning from side to side as in other *locustalla*. Its tail was vibrating to the throbbing song, which was quite deafening as we were so close to it – what a brilliant bird! It was now finally approaching something resembling dusk, so we tried a spot for owls, with no luck – though the **Red-breasted Flycatcher** we had heard in the morning, was still singing in the same place at 11pm! We started our route back, which took us along various forest tracks, and we kept scanning carefully as we went. **Woodcock** were springing up from the track all over the shop – our count for the evening ended up on 29 birds! Soon we passed a meadow in a clearing, and noticed a large shape perched up on a telegraph pole in the middle – it was only a **Ural Owl**! By positioning the vehicle, we could stay inside and watch this huge owl going about its evening activities. It had clearly focussed in on prey in the grass below, and was intently staring downward. Eventually it plunged down into the grass, returning to the pole with a mouse or vole! Its large head and quite long tail were readily visible features – just brilliant! It was now getting

very late, but there was one more highlight to come, as we chanced on a female **European Nightjar** sitting on the track ahead of us. We sidled up to it carefully, and had outrageous views of it in the headlights. Without a doubt, a night tour to remember!

SATURDAY 15TH JUNE – *Sunny spells and light winds, 20C*

A distinctly more sedate day after yesterdays excursions, but another excellent morning in Soomaa National Park meant we managed to 'upgrade' several heard-only records to sightings, plus add one or two other nice additions. First up was a cracking **Marsh Warbler**, which we had heard singing previously outside the hotel. This morning it was perched as high as it could get in the open on some dead branches, mimicking its heart out! Everyone had a good scope view of this masterful songster as we loaded the van ready for our morning trip. We drove about twenty minutes into the park, and took a hiking trail through mixed forest, in a loop across a fantastic area of raised bog, making a total walk of about 4km. The forest was full of bird song – **Redwing** was in full voice by the parking area, and the sibilant trill of **Wood Warbler** was a constant backdrop among the mixed spruce and aspen of the forest. One species which had eluded us yesterday, but we nailed today, was **Red-breasted Flycatcher**. The males sing from the forest understorey, often on a very open perch but sitting still and with a ventriloquial song, very hard to spot! We picked one up close to the track, and enjoyed it in the scope for several minutes, or until the midges got the better of us! Further on we had excellent sightings of a frosty '**Northern**' **Treecreeper**, and more views of **Wood Warbler**. Out on the bog, the two common passerines were Tree Pipit and Whinchat, while the numerous small pools among the bog pines were attractive to breeding waders, all of which would be on the rare breeding bird list in Britain! A fantastic **Wood Sandpiper** was seen perched on a pine next to the boardwalk, and was the wader highlight – Greenshank, Golden Plover and Whimbrel were all here too, but mainly heard calling. A pair of **Hobby** were seen, there were a few **Raven** about and two of the group saw a distant Black Stork. It was really all about the habitat though – Margus informed us that this bog was around 100sqkm in size! Winding our way back through the forest we heard two **Greenish Warblers** singing, and saw some nice flowering orchids and one or two butterflies too.



Red-breasted Flycatcher – not easy to spot in the dark forest understorey!

From here we returned to the hotel to use the facilities and load our luggage, before making the two hour journey east to Tartu. We arrived there at 1330, and had an elaborate and delicious restaurant lunch (they don't like you to go hungry in Estonia!) before driving out to the edge of the town to check some spots for Booted Warbler. Areas of lush willow herb with scattered willows held several singing **Marsh Warblers**, **Whinchats**, **Wheatears** and **Tree Sparrows**, a quartering male **Marsh Harrier** and numerous **Common Whitethroats**, but not our target. It came on to rain, so we opted to continue to the hotel, adding a stunning view of a female **Honey Buzzard** circling low over the road along the way. The hotel was a lovely place set in wooded parkland by a small lake and reedbed. Most of the group opted for some downtime, before meeting up later for dinner, while others went for a wander around the verdant grounds.

SUNDAY 16TH JUUNE – *Hot and sunny with no wind, 25C*

We started early this morning, meeting at 0530 in the car park where a reeling **Grasshopper Warbler** was our first new bird of the day. It was also possible to hear **Savi's**, **Marsh** and **Icterine Warblers** from the same spot, and bugling **Common Cranes**. A **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** called several times, from trees right outside the hotel entrance, but we didn't see it. Our morning would be spent birding around a large lake which forms the border with neighbouring Russia, near the village of Luubnitsa. This proved to be a superb area, and we reached the lake for breakfast and coffee at the picnic tables overlooking the water. Two adult **Little Gulls** were hawking over the water, and several **Black Terns** too. A **Great Reed Warbler** was singing and showed a few times, and we also heard booming **Bittern** and saw **Great White Egret**, **Goldeneye**, **Fieldfare**, **Lesser Whitethroat**, **Garden Warbler** and a brief **Black Stork** which flew off into Russia! **Common Terns** were noisy and plentiful along the shore here, and a **Common Snipe** was seen in drumming display flight.



River Warbler – amazing views of this perennial skulker today!

Next we drove a short distance to an open area of scattered low bushes and reeds, which looked good habitat for a number of exciting species! A **Thrush Nightingale** sang out in the open here, and everyone had another chance for a great view in the scope. At the same time, a **River Warbler** began reeling and we were gobsmacked to see it perched right on the very top of a bush by the road! Over the next twenty minutes or so, it would periodically climb back down inside the bush, only to return moments later and start reeling again. Far superior views to those a few evenings ago on the night tour, and really close too. Nearby, we parked in the shade of a stand of large trees to bird another small lake. **Black Terns** were breeding here, and now we had truly excellent close views of them in perfect light. A drake **Smew** was also present, and we added Common Pochard and saw a brood of young Goldeneye. A **Hobby** was perched, and showing very nicely, and two **Golden Orioles** called before flying out over our heads and across the marsh. Amazingly, the female perched right on the top of a lone dead tree in the middle of the reedbed! In the grove of trees behind us, we heard some weak drumming. Closer investigation revealed a pair of **Nuthatch** of the northern race *europa*, but that was not what had made the sound we had heard. Convinced there was a woodpecker there somewhere, we stood and waited and then saw a movement low down in the thicket at the back – it was a **White-backed Woodpecker**! This bird proved very elusive, and most people only saw the shape of it moving, though some did get good clear sightings as it moved between clumps of branches. Eventually it flew out, and off to another stand of trees some distance away, so at least everyone got to see it fly and could see its extensive white lower back.



Middle Spotted Woodpecker – a juvenile, recently fledged and still begging from its parents

From here we drove ten minutes or so to a village and visited a park which had lots of big mature trees among landscaped gardens. The target here was **Middle Spotted Woodpecker**, and we could hear one almost immediately. Moving closer, we discovered adults were feeding fledged young, and we watched them on and off for over half an hour, often at point blank range. There was a really good selection of other woodland birds on offer here too, including more views of the *europa* Nuthatch, a

female **Pied Flycatcher**, **Common Redstart**, **Icterine Warbler**, **Spotted Flycatcher** and a lovely **Red Squirrel**. It had been a really superb morning, and we headed wearily back to the hotel for lunch, followed by a couple of hours break to recuperate from the early start. Around 1630, we reconvened and headed out to check a couple more sites for **Booted Warbler**, one of the only species we were now missing. Margus saw a couple of pallid warblers at the first place we checked, but we couldn't relocate them – **Marsh Tit**, **Common Rosefinch** and **Whinchat** were scant compensation. We listened at two more spots, picking up several singing **Marsh Warblers**, but no *iduna*. Reaching the village of Mehikoorma, we had another opportunity to scan Lake Pihkva, looking across to Russia on the far side. A **Great White Egret** could be seen on the far shore, while a superb adult **Little Gull** and a **Black Tern** were over the water. The most bizarre sighting of the trip was then added, as we picked up an **Elk** halfway across the lake, swimming parallel to the shore! We watched the beast for twenty minutes, as it gradually turned towards the Estonian side of the lake and headed for land. We couldn't hag around to watch it complete its journey, but we had good views anyway – not the way we were expecting to see an **Elk**! A pair of **White-tailed Eagles** rounded off our afternoon, flying across from the Russian side and giving excellent views – birds do not worry about national borders!

After dinner, we took a short stroll around the extensive hotel grounds to let dinner go down. A male **Pied Flycatcher** was just outside, and we also saw **Wheatear**, **Common Rosefinch**, **Spotted Flycatcher**, **Nuthatch** and **Reed Bunting**. A **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** was heard calling, and then two flew out over our heads and off towards the lake. Thankfully, we found another one in the adjacent trees and had really good scope views – one of the birds we saw was a juvenile, so clearly just fledged from the area. The **Icterine Warbler** which we had heard singing every time we stepped outside the front door finally gave itself up here, and everyone had a good long scope view and could see its lemon yellow underparts, pale wing panel and long primaries. With several **Fieldfare** flitting among the trees, from a loose breeding colony in the grounds, we had rounded off the day just brilliantly.

MONDAY 17TH JUNE – *Overcast and calm, 20C*

We rose early again to make the most of our last morning, as this would be our final chance to head into prime taiga forest habitat and search for elusive species such as **Hazel Grouse**. We arrived in the ancient forest at Jarvselja after a thirty minute drive, and had coffee and snacks as a light first breakfast, before setting off on a 2km loop trail. A **Northern Bullfinch** was giving its distinctive 'toy trumpet' call from above the parking area, and proved to be the first of this species actually seen by everyone in the group. The walk was somewhat typical of birding in dense forest – we heard an awful lot of birds, but actually saw very few! Species which remained 'heard only' included **Wood & Greenish Warblers**, **Red-breasted Flycatcher**, **Marsh Tit**, **Black Woodpecker**, **Crested Tit**, **Goldcrest**, **Treecreeper** and unfortunately, **Hazel Grouse**! The latter was whistling in response to Margus calling it with his **Hazel Grouse** whistle, but it didn't move any closer. A **Three-toed Woodpecker** landed above our heads while we were searching though, and we heard another drumming too – a very slow and distinctive drum. A pair of **Pied Flycatchers** nesting in a tree hole beside the track were nice to see, and we had glimpses of **Nuthatch** and **Blackcap** too. Winding our way back to base through the woods, we had some great views of male **Red-backed Shrikes**, a couple of **Green Sandpipers** (one sitting on a wire calling!), **Spotted Flycatcher** and a female **Common Redstart**. Another quick stop produced singing **Marsh** and **River Warblers** too, while the **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** was also glimpsed again, in the hotel garden.

After a leisurely second breakfast around 0930, we took a bit of time to pack our gear and load up for one last drive back to Tallinn, which took around 3hrs. We stopped en route around the outskirts of Tartu, at one of the spots where we had looked unsuccessfully for **Booted Warbler** two days ago. We tried a different street this time, which took us to the same area of bushes from a slightly different angle. Immediately as we disembarked, this scrubby bit of marginal habitat felt 'birdy' – there was a couple of **Whinchats**, **Linnets**, several **Common Whitethroats** and three different singing **Marsh Warblers** all within one small area of rough ground containing three small **sallow bushes**! We found a good spot where we could view the bushes with the sun behind us, and set up a scope. After a few

minutes, a pallid warbler appeared in the front of the bushes, perched up in the open. It immediately felt more 'flimsy' and *phylloscopus*-like compared to the rather robust, long looking and stout-billed **Marsh Warblers** that were bouncing around. Focussing in, we could see tell-tale short primaries, and a nice pale supercilium broadening behind the eye, and exaggerated by a dark shading along its upper border – it was indeed a **Booted Warbler**! Over the next twenty minutes the bird showed very well on and off, preferring to perch up in the open and look around in between bouts of feeding down low in the grass. It was a superb view, and all the more instructive given that the other warblers would frequently appear alongside it for comparison. This proved to be our last 'tick' of the tour, a lifer for all and a very pleasing way to finish as we had been looking for this bird for several days! From here we drove to Tallinn (seeing a lovely red male **Common Rosefinch** in a service area!) and checked in for our last night, in the old town at a very nice hotel.

TUESDAY 18TH JUNE

Today was a free day which we added to the tour due to changes to the flight schedule. We had a leisurely breakfast followed by a walking tour of Tallinn old town during the morning. After a pleasant lunch in the old town we had a few free hours before taking a taxi to the airport in the evening for our flight back to Gatwick where the tour concluded.



Wood Sandpiper – one of the birding highlights of Estonia was seeing many species in breeding habitats that we are only used to seeing in Britain as passage migrants.

#	Common name	Scientific name		11	12	13	14	15	16	17		
Anatidae (Ducks, Geese, and Waterfowl)												
1	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>			▪							
2	Greater White-fronted Goose	<i>Anser albifrons</i>										
3	Taiga Bean Goose	<i>Anser fabalis</i>										
4	Tundra Bean Goose	<i>Anser serrirostris</i>										
5	Brent Goose	<i>Branta bernicla</i>										
6	Barnacle Goose	<i>Branta leucopsis</i>			▪							
7	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>			▪	▪			▪			
8	Bewick's Swan	<i>Cygnus columbianus</i>										
9	Whooper Swan	<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>			▪							
10	Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>										
11	Garganey	<i>Spatula querquedula</i>										
12	Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>			▪							
13	Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>			▪				▪			
14	Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Mareca penelope</i>			▪				▪			
15	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>			▪	▪	▪	▪	▪			
16	Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>										
17	Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>			▪							
18	Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>							▪			
19	Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>			▪							
20	Greater Scaup	<i>Aythya marila</i>										
21	Common Eider	<i>Somateria mollissima</i>				▪						
22	Velvet Scoter	<i>Melanitta fusca</i>										
23	Common Scoter	<i>Melanitta nigra</i>				▪						
#	Common name	Scientific name		11	12	13	14	15	16	17		C
24	Long-tailed Duck	<i>Clangula hyemalis</i>				▪						
25	Common Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>			▪	▪	▪	▪	▪			
26	Goosander	<i>Mergus merganser</i>			▪	▪						
27	Red-breasted Merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>			▪	▪						
Phasianidae (Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies)												
28	Grey Partridge	<i>Perdix perdix</i>										
29	Western Capercaillie	<i>Tetrao urogallus</i>										
30	Black Grouse	<i>Tetrao tetrix</i>				▪						
31	Hazel Grouse	<i>Tetrastes bonasia</i>					H			H		
Podicipedidae (Grebes)												
32	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>										
33	Red-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps grisegena</i>										
34	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>			▪	▪			▪			
Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)												
35	Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>										
36	Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>				▪		▪				
37	Common Woodpigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>			▪	▪	▪	▪	▪	▪		
38	European Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>										
39	Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>										
Cuculidae and Apodidae (Cuckoos and Swifts)												

40	Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>			▪	▪	H	H	H	H		
41	Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>			▪	▪	▪	▪	▪	▪		
<i>Rallidae and Gruidae (Rails, Coots and Cranes)</i>												
42	Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>										
43	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>										
44	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>			▪							
45	Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>			▪	▪	▪		▪	▪		
<i>Recurvirostridae and Charadriidae (Stilts, Avocets, Plovers and allies)</i>												
46	Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>			▪	▪						
47	Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>										
48	European Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>				▪		▪				
49	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>			▪	▪	▪	▪	▪	▪		
#	Common name	Scientific name		11	12	13	14	15	16	17		
50	Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>			▪							
51	Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>										
<i>Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)</i>												
52	Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>				▪		H				
53	Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>			▪	▪						
54	Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>										
55	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>			▪							
56	Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>										
57	Red Knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i>										
58	Ruff	<i>Calidris pugnax</i>										
59	Temminck's Stint	<i>Calidris temminckii</i>										
60	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>										
61	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>			▪							
62	Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>										
63	Jack Snipe	<i>Lymnocyrtus minimus</i>										
64	Eurasian Woodcock	<i>Scolopax rusticola</i>		▪			▪					
65	Great Snipe	<i>Gallinago media</i>					▪					
66	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>					▪		▪			
67	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>					▪	▪				
68	Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>					▪	▪		▪		
69	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>						H				
70	Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>						▪	H			
71	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>			▪							
<i>Stercoraridae, Alcidae and Laridae (Skuas, Auks, Gulls and Terns)</i>												
72	Arctic Skua	<i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>										
73	Razorbill	<i>Alca torda</i>										
74	Black Guillemot	<i>Cephus grylle</i>										
75	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>			▪	▪		▪	▪	▪		
76	Little Gull	<i>Hydrocoloeus minutus</i>							▪			
77	Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>			▪	▪	▪	▪	▪	▪		
78	Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>			▪	▪			▪	▪		
79	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>										
#	Common name	Scientific name		11	12	13	14	15	16	17		

80	Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>			■	■							
81	Little Tern	<i>Sternula albifrons</i>			■								
82	Caspian Tern	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>			■	■							
83	Black Tern	<i>Chlidonias niger</i>							■				
84	Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>			■	■			■	■			
85	Arctic Tern	<i>Sterna paradisaea</i>			■								
86	Sandwich Tern	<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>				■							
Gaviidae (Divers)													
87	Red-throated Diver	<i>Gavia stellata</i>											
88	Black-throated Diver	<i>Gavia arctica</i>											
Ciconiidae and Phalacrocoracidae (Storks, Cormorants and Shags)													
89	Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>							■				
90	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>		■	■	■	■	■	■	■			
91	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>			■	■			■				
Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)													
92	Great Bittern	<i>Botaurus stellaris</i>							H				
93	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>			■	■	■	■	■	■			
94	Great White Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>			■	■			■	■			
Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)													
95	Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>											
96	European Honey-buzzard	<i>Pernis apivorus</i>			■			■					
97	Lesser Spotted Eagle	<i>Clanga pomarina</i>			■	■							
98	Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>											
99	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>			■	■		■	■	■			
100	Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>											
101	Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>			■	■							
102	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>			■		■		■				
103	Northern Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>					■						
104	White-tailed Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>			■				■				
105	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>			■	■	■	■	■	■			
Tytonidae and Strigidae (Owls)													
106	Eurasian Pygmy-Owl	<i>Glaucidium passerinum</i>											
#	Common name	Scientific name		11	12	13	14	15	16	17			
107	Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>											
108	Ural Owl	<i>Strix uralensis</i>					■						
109	Long-eared Owl	<i>Asio otus</i>		■									
110	Short-eared Owl	<i>Asio flammeus</i>											
111	Tengmalm's Owl	<i>Aegolius funereus</i>											
Alcedidae and Picidae (Kingfishers and Woodpeckers)													
112	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>											
113	Eurasian Wryneck	<i>Jynx torquilla</i>											
114	Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker	<i>Picoides tridactylus</i>					■			■			
115	Middle Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocoptes medius</i>							■				
116	White-backed Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos leucotos</i>							■				
117	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>				■	■	H					

118	Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dryobates minor</i>							■	■		
119	Grey-headed Woodpecker	<i>Picus canus</i>					■					
120	Black Woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus martius</i>					■				H	
Falconidae (Falcons)												
121	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>				■		■				
122	Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>					■					
123	Eurasian Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>				■		■	■			
Laniidae (Shrikes)												
124	Red-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius collurio</i>			■					■		
125	Great Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius excubitor</i>										
74	Oriolidae and Corvidae (Orioles, Crows, Jays, and Magpies)											
126	Eurasian Golden Oriole	<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>				H		H	■			
127	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>					■	■	■	■		
128	Common Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>			■	■	■	■	■	■		
129	Spotted Nutcracker	<i>Nucifraga caryocatactes</i>				■	■					
130	Eurasian Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>			■	■	■	■	■	■		
131	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>			■	■		■				
132	Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>			■	■	■	■	■	■		
133	Common Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>			■	■	■	■	■	■		
#	Common name	Scientific name		11	12	13	14	15	16	17		
Panuridae (Bearded Reedling)												
134	Bearded Tit	<i>Panurus biarmicus</i>										
Alaudidae (Larks)												
135	Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>				■						
136	Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>			■	■		■	■	■		
Hirundinidae (Swallows)												
137	Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>				■						
138	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>			■	■	■	■	■	■		
139	Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>			■	■	■	■	■	■		
Paridae (Tits)												
140	Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>					■	H				
141	Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>				■	■	H		■		
142	Marsh Tit	<i>Poecile palustris</i>							H			
143	Willow Tit	<i>Poecile montanus</i>										
144	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>				H	H		■	■		
145	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>					H		■	■		
146	Eurasian Penduline Tit	<i>Remiz pendulinus</i>										
147	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>								■		
Sittidae and Certhiidae (Nuthatches and Treecreepers)												
148	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>						H	■	■		
149	Eurasian Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>						■		H		
Troglodytidae, Cinclodidae and Regulidae (Wrens, Dippers and Kinglets)												
150	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>					■	H		H		
151	White-throated Dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>										
152	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>					H	H		H		

	Phylloscopidae (Leaf Warblers)										
153	Wood Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus sibilatrix</i>					▪	▪	H	H	
154	Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>			▪	▪	▪	H	▪	▪	
155	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>				H	▪	H	H	H	
156	Greenish Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochiloides</i>					▪	H		▪	
	Sylviidae (Sylviid Warblers)										
157	Icterine Warbler	<i>Hippolais icterina</i>					▪		▪	H	
#	Common name	Scientific name		11	12	13	14	15	16	17	
158	Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>			▪		▪		▪		
159	Blyth's Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus dumetorum</i>					▪				
160	Marsh Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus palustris</i>					H	▪	H	▪	
161	Eurasian Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>							H		
162	Great Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i>							▪		
163	River Warbler	<i>Locustella fluviatilis</i>					▪		▪	H	
164	Savi's Warbler	<i>Locustella luscinioides</i>				▪			▪		
165	Common Grasshopper Warbler	<i>Locustella naevia</i>							▪	H	
166	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>			▪	H	▪	H		▪	
167	Garden Warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>			H		▪	H	▪	H	
168	Barred Warbler	<i>Sylvia nisoria</i>			▪						
169	Lesser Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia curruca</i>			H		▪		▪		
170	Common Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>			▪	▪	▪	▪	▪	▪	
	Muscicapidae (Old World Flycatchers)										
171	Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>					▪	▪	▪	▪	
172	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>					▪		▪		
173	Thrush Nightingale	<i>Luscinia luscinia</i>			▪	H	H		▪		
174	Bluethroat	<i>Luscinia svecica</i>									
175	Red-breasted Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula parva</i>					H	▪		H	
176	European Pied Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>					▪		▪	▪	
177	Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>						H	▪	▪	
178	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>			▪			H			
179	Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>			▪	▪		▪	▪	▪	
180	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>			▪	▪		▪	▪	▪	
	Turdidae and Sturnidae (Thrushes and Starlings)										
181	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>				▪			▪		
182	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>					▪	▪		▪	
183	Redwing	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>					▪	▪		H	
184	Eurasian Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>			▪	▪	▪	▪	▪	▪	
185	Fieldfare	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>			▪	▪	▪	▪	▪	▪	
186	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>			▪	▪	▪	▪	▪	▪	
#	Common name	Scientific name		11	12	13	14	15	16	17	
	Prunellidae (Accentors)										
187	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>					▪			▪	
	Motacillidae (Wagtails and Pipits)										
188	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>									

189	Western Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>			■	■			■			
190	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>			■	■	■	■	■	■		
191	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>			■	■						
192	Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>			■	■	■	■	■	H		
193	Rock Pipit	<i>Anthus petrosus</i>										
Fringillidae (Finches)												
194	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>			■	■	■	■	■	■		
195	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>			■	■	■					
196	Common Rosefinch	<i>Carpodacus erythrinus</i>			■		■	H	■	■		
197	Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>					■			■		
198	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>			■	■	■	H	■			
199	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>			■	■			■	■		
200	Common Redpoll	<i>Acanthis flammea</i>			■							
201	Parrot Crossbill	<i>Loxia pytyopsittacus</i>										
202	Common Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>										
203	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>			■	■	■		■			
204	Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>					■		■			
Emberizidae (Old World Buntings)												
205	Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>			■	■	■		■	■		
206	Ortolan Bunting	<i>Emberiza hortulana</i>										
207	Common Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>			■	■	■	■	■	■		
Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)												
208	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>			■	■		■	■	■		
209	Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>			■	■	■	■	■	■		
ADDITIONAL SPECIES												
210	Spotted Redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>			■							
211	Slavonian Grebe	<i>Podiceps auritus</i>			■							
212	Citrine Wagtail	<i>Motacilla citreola</i>				■						
213	Corncrake	<i>Crex crex</i>					H			H		
214	European Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus europaeus</i>					■					
215	Smew	<i>Mergellus albellus</i>							■			
216	Booted Warbler	<i>Iduna calgata</i>								■		

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