

Spring Birding in Lithuania

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1 Fly Palanga & transfer Vente Cape.

Day 2/3 Nemunas Delta from Vente Cape.

Day 4/5 Curonian Spit from Nida.

Day 6/8 East Lithuania.

Day 9 Fly London.

Departs

May or June.

Focus

Birds and other wildlife.

Grading

Grade A/B. Easy to moderate day walks only.

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code LTU01) or our latest brochure

Highlights:

- Explore Lithuania's famous Nemunas Delta in search of Citrine Wagtail and Greater Spotted Eagle.
- Rich diversity of habitats, including coastal delta, meadows, raised bogs and taiga forest.
- Up to 9 species of woodpecker (including Wryneck).
- Boat ride to the Curonian Spit.
- Superb lakeland scenery with breeding Black-throated Divers and Slavonian Grebes.
- Explore the taiga forests of Aukštaitija National Park.
- Tawny Pipit, Aquatic Warbler & Red-breasted Flycatcher.
- Led by expert naturalist guides.



*From top: Grey-headed Woodpecker, Citrine Wagtail & Miškininkės
Photos courtesy of Shutterstock, M. Karlonas & A. Naudžiaus.*



Naturetrek

Mingledown Barn

Wolf's Lane

Chawton

Alton

Hampshire

GU34 3HJ

UK

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

E: info@naturetrek.co.uk

W: www.naturetrek.co.uk

Introduction

Lithuania is a surprisingly beautiful country, as well as a wonderful location in which to watch wildlife throughout the year. Its landscapes comprise a diverse mix of lowland bogs, river valleys, agricultural fields, lake systems and vast tracts of taiga forest. On this new tour we will explore both the coastal habitats in the west of the country and the forests of the east, aiming to experience the best spring birding that Lithuania has to offer.

Ventė Cape will be our base for the first three nights of the holiday, as we explore the Nemunas Delta. During early morning walks from our hotel we will look for such species as Barred Warbler and White Stork, whilst excursions further afield to the delta's islands, marshlands, raised bogs and meadows may yield Citrine Wagtail, Whiskered Tern, Montagu's Harrier and Greater Spotted Eagle. Near Rusne Island we will look for some of eastern Europe's most sought-after species, including Aquatic Warbler. Leaving the delta, we will head for Curonian Spit, where we will stay for two nights near the village of Nida. To get there, a lagoon-crossing by boat will give us the chance to look for White-tailed Eagles. The spit offers us some interesting landscapes to explore. Tawny Pipit, Hobby and Velvet Scoter may often be seen near the Juodkrantė ringing station and the nearby woodlands are home Red-breasted Flycatcher. Elk, the largest of the world's cervids, are also regularly seen here, and we will be looking out for this impressive mammal as we explore the Grey Dunes.



Moving on, we next travel across Lithuania from west to east, appreciating the diversity of the countryside en route. The destination for our final three nights is Aukštaitija National Park, a region clothed in taiga forest, wetlands and meadows dotted with quaint old villages. Morning walks from our characterful accommodation may produce Black, Grey-headed, White-backed and Three-toed Woodpeckers, whilst an evening visit to the forests may reveal a diminutive Pygmy Owl. Black-throated Divers and Slavonian Grebes breed on the nearby lakes and wetlands and Corncrakes call from the adjacent meadows. Finally, we will make our way back to Vilnius for our flight home.

Itinerary

NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Day 1

Fly Palanga, transfer Ventė Cape

We fly from London's Stansted Airport to the town of Palanga, on the west coast of Lithuania. (If there are no suitable flights to Palanga, we will fly into Vilnius instead and drive to the coast.) Here we meet our local guide and transfer by road to the Kalviai Ponds in search of Slavonian and Red-necked Grebe, Common Pochard,

Tufted Duck and other wildfowl. The island in the centre of the lake us home to a large gull colony and the booming call of the Great Bittern is often heard drifting through the reedbeds. We will also looked out for Hoopoe, Grey Partridge, Grasshopper Warbler, Common Rosefinch, Black Kite and Hobby.

At the end of the afternoon we will make our way to Ventė Cape, where we will spend the next three nights in a comfortable hotel.

Day 2

Nemunas Delta, from Ventė Cape

We begin today with a bird walk close to our hotel. Starting in hotel gardens, we will then head along the Ventė Cape - by the shores of the Curonian Lagoon - towards the Ventės Ragas ringing station, which is located next to the Vente Lighthouse. This is a great place to look for migrants, along with some of the birds typical of the surrounding farmland which is dotted with areas of scrub and small copses, such as White Stork, Barred Warbler, Hawfinch and Lesser Redpoll. We may also find a few Caspian Gulls on their favourite resting place, the Ventė Pier.



Ventė Lighthouse

In the afternoon we will make our way towards Rusnė Island, part of the Nemunas Delta Regional Park where we are likely to find Citrine Wagtail, Black Tern, Little Gull, Black-tailed Godwit and Montagu's Harrier. We will then remain in the area for dinner, before venturing out in the evening to the Rupkalviai Ornithological Reserve for Aquatic Warbler. This area of wet meadow, ponds and sedge beds also attracts a variety of other birds and other wildlife including Bluethroat, Spotted Crake, Ruff, Common Snipe and Eurasian Elk. Corncrake can often be heard calling from the meadows, but seeing this elusive crake will require a degree of luck! Please note that while Great Snipe also occur here, we will not be actively looking for them as they are sensitive to disturbance, particularly during the breeding season.

Day 3

Nemunas Delta, from Ventė Cape

A pre-breakfast bird walk around the hotel and along the shoreline will offer us the chance to look for species



Greater Spotted Eagle

that we may have missed yesterday. We will then make our way to another part of the Nemunas Delta known as the Aukštumala raised bog. Here we will wander along the boardwalk that cuts through the centre of the wetland and offers access to such contrasting species as breeding Golden Plover and Great Grey Shrike. We may also hear the trumpeting call of the Common Crane. The surrounding birch woodland is home to a variety of other species such as Wood Warbler, Golden Oriole, Tree Pipit and Black Woodpecker.

From Aukštumala, we will travel south to the Saugaviai meadows and Žalgiriai Forest. This is a favoured hunting area for the local raptors and, as we enjoy our picnic, we will be scanning the skies for Greater and Lesser Spotted Eagles, Marsh and Montagu's Harriers, Black and Red Kites and White-tailed Eagle. The forest edge is also a great place (if they've arrived) for River Warbler, often located by listening out for their cicada-like song.

We will finish the day at the Kintai Fishponds. This part of the delta is excellent for waders and wildfowl. Hundreds of migrating waders such as Curlew Sandpiper, Little Stint and Spotted Redshank, stop off at these ponds to rest before continuing further north to their breeding grounds. A few remain to breed, including Avocet and Black-tailed Godwit. This is also a reliable site for White-tailed Eagle and there is likely to be a number of them in the skies above the ponds.

Day 4

Curonian Spit from Nida

After a final morning's birding at Ventė Cape, we will drive to Rusnė Island again, but this time heading for the Skirvytė River in search of some more waders such as Little Ringed Plover and Ruff, plus Marsh Harrier and Kingfisher. Next we will board a small boat for a cruise of around three hours through the channels, bays and reed-fringed waterways of the Nemunas Delta, home to thousands of breeding birds including Whiskered and Black Terns, Little Gull, Pintail and Goldeneye. There is also a chance of a Citrine Wagtail or two on the islands and Penduline Tit in the willows.

To reach the village of Nida on the Curonian Spit, our base for the following two nights, we will remain on the boat for the two hour crossing of the Curonian Lagoon. On arrival we will explore around this attractive village, where there are often surprises to be found. We will also visit the Parnidis Dunes whose name is thought to mean 'passed over Nida' ... the wind having moved the dune through the village on several occasions! An observation deck here offers spectacular views across Nida and the surrounding area. The dunes are a very fragile environment and access here is strictly controlled via a series of steps and a boardwalk. The remains of a 13-metre-high granite sundial can still be found amongst the sand.

Day 5

Curonian Spit from Nida

Today we will be visiting the Juodkrantė ringing station which is located on the dunes by the Baltic Sea in the central part of the Curonian Spit. This is a productive spot for seawatching with both Common and Velvet Scoter possible, whilst a walk around the station itself often produces Tawny Pipit and Hobby. If the nets are open we will visit the ringers to see what they are catching and end our visit here with a picnic lunch.

In the afternoon we will explore the woodlands around Juodkrantė in search of Wood Warbler, Red-breasted Flycatcher and Black Woodpecker. There is also a chance of Greenish Warbler here, although they are rare and tricky to find. En route back to Nida, we will stop at the Nagliai Nature Reserve for a walk to the Grey Dunes. This interesting area is favoured by Tawny Pipit and is also a good place to look for Eurasian Elk.



Day 6

Transfer to East Lithuania

After a final morning's birding around Nida, we must leave the beautiful west coast of Lithuania and make our way east. The journey will take us most of the day, although we will stop from time to time to look for birds and see some of the glacial landforms that remain from the last Ice Age. We will have a lunch at the Raseiniai fishponds to look for grebes, wildfowl and waders. It's a good place for Whooper Swan and Black Stork, with the possibility of breeding Slavonian Grebe.

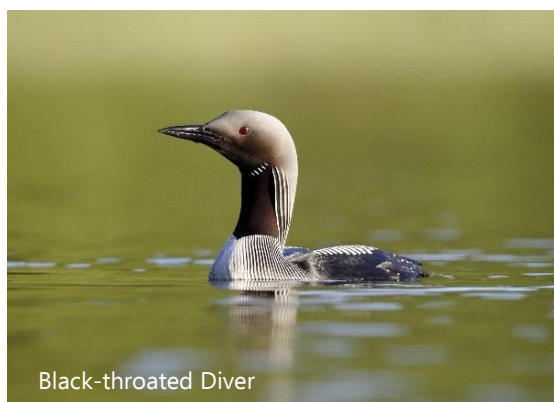
It will be early evening when we arrive at Miškiniskės our accommodation for the next three nights in Aukštaitija National Park. Miškiniskės is surrounded by huge tracts of Taiga forest and after settling in and having dinner, we will head out for an evening walk. Just a few minutes away from the hotel, Pygmy Owl, Nightjar and Woodcock can be found.



Pygmy Owl

Day 7

East Lithuania, from Miškiniskės



Black-throated Diver

Your guide will offer a pre-breakfast walk around the hotel this morning in search of woodpeckers such as Black, Grey-headed, White-backed and Three-toed, and, if fortunate, perhaps a Hazel Grouse. During the rest of the day we will explore the Gražutė Regional Park. More than 50% of the park is clothed in forest which is dotted with over 70 lakes of varying sizes (Lithuania, as a whole, had over 6,000 lakes). It is an important breeding area for Black-throated Diver, which may already have young in May, along with Slavonian Grebe and Goldeneye.

Around 190 bird species have been recorded in this small park in the last 25 years. The park flora is even more diverse with nearly 400 species of lichen or fungi found here alone! The Gražutė Forest is the largest remaining tract of woodland in the area, but was once part of a more extensive forest. It still provides excellent habitat for a number of birds of prey, including Lesser Spotted Eagle and Honey Buzzard, both of which can be seen soaring over the trees. Small passerines such as Red-breasted Flycatcher and Blyth's Reed Warbler sing from within the vegetation.

Day 8

East Lithuania, from Miškiniskės

Today we will spend more time within the Gražutė Regional Park, but also explore the larger Aukštaitija National Park. Both areas comprise of a mix of woodland with lakes, meadows, ponds and bogs and we will be able to look for an interesting variety of birds here including Nutcracker, Black Grouse, Corncrake and Red-breasted Flycatcher. The wetland areas around Apvardai Lake – situated near the border with Belarus – is a good site to look for Marsh Sandpiper, whose breeding range just extends west into Lithuania.

At the end of the day we will return to Miškiniskės for dinner and a final night in Lithuania.

Day 9

Fly London

After a final birding walk around Miškiniskės, we must way our way towards Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania for our flight home. On arrival, we will meet up with a guide for a tour of the city and, following lunch in the Old Town, we must leave for the airport to catch our return flight to London Stansted, arriving early evening.

Grading

This tour is graded A/B, consisting of easy to moderate day walks only, and is suitable for those of all ages, with a reasonable degree of fitness.

Weather

Weather conditions in May are usually warm, somewhere between 15-25°C in the middle of the day. It can be windy along the coast so a windproof jacket and hat are advisable. There is also the possibility of rain on some days, so waterproof clothing and footwear are also recommended.

Food & accommodation

All food and accommodation is included in the holiday cost, from lunch on Day 1 to lunch on Day 9. Lunches will either be picnic lunches or taken a small restaurants.

Accommodation will be in comfortable tourist hotels with private facilities during the coastal part of the tour. These will not be luxurious, but will be clean and perfectly adequate for our needs.

In the east we will stay at Miškiniskės, in traditional style, hand built forest village houses, with a mixture of private and shared facilities. Miškiniskės is designed to meld the traditional style with modern installations. The timber houses contain a variety of rooms, each a slightly different style. Set within Aukštaitija National Park, it is a lovely, peaceful place and an excellent place to base ourselves from.

Flights

For this tour, the only direct flights that are available are from either Stansted or Luton with Ryanair or Wizzair. The option we use will depend on the scheduled times of the available flights.

It may be possible to travel from a regional airport, however flights are unlikely to be direct and may involve one or more additional nights in country before or after the tour. Please contact the Naturetrek office for information on possible flight routes.

Extensions

Subject to availability on flights, the tour may be extended for a longer stay in Lithuania and an option is to spend a few days sightseeing in Vilnius. We will gladly obtain a quotation for such extensions.

Your safety & security

You have chosen to travel to Lithuania. Risks to your safety and security are an unavoidable aspect of all travel and the best current advice on such risks is provided for you by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. In order to assess and protect against any risks in your chosen destination, it is essential that you refer to the Foreign Office website – www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice prior to travel.

How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website.

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