

Estonia in Autumn

Naturetrek Tour Report

13th – 20th September 2025



Ural Owl



Eurasian Pygmy Owl



Common Cranes



Red-footed Falcon

Tour report by Tarvo Valker



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

Tour participants: Tarvo Valker (leader) with six Naturetrek clients

Day 1

Saturday 13th September

Our flight was a little late, but just after midnight we met our guide Tarvo at Tallinn airport. After a five-minute drive to the hotel, we all had a good sleep.

Day 2

Sunday 14th September

We departed Tallinn after breakfast at 8.30am. Tarvo drove us to the Variku fields, hoping to locate some Black Grouse. Shortly after leaving the city, we spotted a Black Woodpecker by the roadside. Fortunately, it perched in a small clearing, allowing for excellent views of this striking species.

Although no Black Grouse were seen at Variku, the area was far from disappointing. We recorded our first White-tailed Eagles of the tour, and a Great Grey Shrike provided prolonged views. As we set off again, a brief stop to check a bird on a track produced a surprise: a Corncrake! A young bird was standing on a farm track, offering superb views of this usually elusive species; it was a rare sighting for September.

Before heading to Haapsalu, we made a short detour around the Linnamäe area, which soon rewarded us with two male Black Grouse feeding in a field. We arrived in Haapsalu in time for lunch. Scanning of the bay from the Haapsalu Promenade yielded further White-tailed Eagles and at least 100 Great Egrets feeding in the shallow waters.

In the afternoon, we came across several groups of Cranes in the fields, with around 280 individuals feeding, and another 300 coming to roost near our guesthouse later in the evening. The day concluded with some birding at Põgari, close to our accommodation, where the coastal meadows held two Little Stints, two Spotted Redshanks, several Wood Sandpipers, and an impressive 1100 Lapwings.

Day 3

Monday 15th September

Our main target today was Spithami, a well-known seawatching site, where up to three million wildfowl pass each autumn. The one-hour drive produced a brief flight view of a late Cuckoo. The morning proved rather challenging, as rain covered much of northern Estonia, and the seawatch at Spithami was generally quiet. Nevertheless, we added several new species, including a Hobby and a few Arctic Skuas passing close to the spit.

After lunch, the weather improved, and we explored the forests around Roosta. Our patience was rewarded with excellent views of a Eurasian Pygmy Owl perched in a conifer, being mobbed by flocks of Crested and Willow Tits. On the drive back to the guest house for a short rest, we spotted a Hen Harrier hunting over a roadside field.

We finished the day with evening birding in the Marimetsa forests, hoping to locate some owls. Although none was found, we did see our only Mountain Hare of the trip, and flushed several Woodcocks.

Day 4

Tuesday 16th September

After a pleasant breakfast, we drove to the Haeska birdwatching tower, one of the best birding sites in Matsalu National Park. Among the numerous Greylag Geese, we noted four Tundra Bean Geese (the first of the season), and several Whooper Swans landing on the bay.

As we were driving back to the main road, Tarvo suddenly shouted, “Lynx crossing the road!” We slowly approached the spot, stopped the van, and waited patiently. The alarm calls of nearby Robins indicated the Lynx was still close. After a few long minutes, the Lynx reappeared and calmly crossed the road just twenty metres in front of us: it was an unforgettable daylight encounter, and an extraordinary highlight for a birding tour.

Still amazed by our luck, we continued towards Saaremaa Island, noting a fine male Hen Harrier, a flock of Ruffs in a roadside field, and small groups of Cranes along the way. We checked into our hotel in Kuressaare in the early evening, and enjoyed a pleasant dinner after a short rest.

Day 5

Wednesday 17th September

After breakfast, we headed straight to the Sõrve lighthouse, a well-known migration hotspot on the southwestern tip of Saaremaa, famous for its passage of passerines and raptors. Strong southwesterly winds had largely halted migration, but there were still plenty of birds around the peninsula. We were treated to several White-tailed Eagles, while a Honey Buzzard glided overhead and a few Hobbies hunted nearby.

Soon, news reached us that three Red-footed Falcons had been found near the bird station. It didn’t take long to locate these confiding juveniles. The warm autumn sun lit up the birds beautifully, and one even perched on a pole almost at eye level, offering truly stunning, close views of this elegant falcon.

Northern Wheatears were abundant around the area, and as we drove on to the Rahuste coastal meadows, we counted another 30+ Wheatears, bringing the day’s total to over 50 individuals. Rahuste also held over 100 Barnacle Geese, several Grey Plovers, and, once again, a pair of White-tailed Eagles patrolling the coast.

Day 6

Thursday 18th September

We began the day with another visit to the Sõrve peninsula. The wind had dropped completely, creating a totally different atmosphere from the previous day, and an incredible morning of visible migration. With the calmer conditions, Chaffinches and Blue Tits filled the sky. An estimated 45000 Chaffinches and over 2000 Blue Tits were counted migrating past the Sõrve lighthouse, figures hard to imagine anywhere in the UK.

By late morning, migration activity had slowed, and we took a final walk towards the bird station. A late Common Whitethroat showed briefly, and a small flock of Woodlarks was a welcome addition to the trip list. The bird station garden was alive with Goldcrests, with over fifty individuals flitting around us, although we couldn’t pick out any Firecrests among them.

It was time to return to the mainland in search of woodpeckers and owls. We reached Pärnu by early evening and, after a quick dinner, headed into the forests near Soomaa National Park. As dusk approached, we hurried to one

of Tarvo's best Ural Owl sites. Suddenly, someone called out that they had seen a large owl perched beside the forest road. Tarvo quickly turned the van around, and there it was: a Ural Owl perched on a branch. Because the bird was close, we stayed inside the van to avoid disturbance. After a few minutes, the owl silently glided into the forest, only to return briefly about ten minutes later, when it was seen in the spotlight, perched atop a spruce. When Tarvo whistled for Pygmy Owl, one replied faintly from within the forest.

It was a fine evening, though as we returned to the van, we discovered a punctured tyre. Extracting the spare from underneath the van wasn't easy, but with teamwork, everything was soon sorted out, and by 10.30pm we were back at the hotel for a well-earned rest.

Day 7

Friday 19th September

After breakfast, we headed to the Soometsa forests, with our main targets being Nutcracker and various woodpeckers. The drive through farmland produced a Great Grey Shrike, showing well by the roadside. Although it was sunny, a fresh breeze made forest birding somewhat challenging.

Nutcrackers were seen a few times in flight but, unfortunately, most of the group missed them. Another Pygmy Owl made a brief appearance, while we all enjoyed good views of Crested and Willow Tits. Even better was a delightful flock of Northern Long-tailed Tits, their striking white heads making them real beauties.

After working hard in the forest, we made a short visit to the Kabli bird station, where birds have been ringed annually since 1968. This is the only bird station in Estonia equipped with a Heligoland trap.

Following lunch, we had a short rest before heading back to the Soometsa forests for an early evening session. Thanks to calmer conditions, birding was far more productive. Soon we heard a Grey-headed Woodpecker, and it didn't take long to locate it perched on an Aspen. The bird gave excellent views, both on the tree and in flight, during its ten-minute performance.

Later, we drove another forest track hoping for Ural Owl. Tarvo stopped the van, and just as we stepped out, a male Capercaillie suddenly took off from a nearby tree. The bird flew low across the clearing, though only half of the group managed to see it before it disappeared into the forest.

Day 8

Saturday 20th September

As it was raining, we didn't rush out for an early morning birding session. Instead, we enjoyed a relaxed breakfast, packed our luggage, and began the journey back towards Tallinn.

After a short drive, we stopped to admire our final flock of Cranes, with over fifty birds feeding beside the roadside. A little further on, near a large farm, Tarvo stopped again after noticing panicking Feral Pigeons, a clear sign that a Goshawk was nearby. Although many birds were visibly alarmed, the raptor itself remained hidden. However, we were rewarded instead with our first male Black Redstart of the trip.

As we approached Tallinn, someone spotted a White Stork on its nest. We stopped once more to enjoy this final addition to our bird list. It made a fitting end to an excellent week of birding in western Estonia.

Receive our e-newsletter

Join the Naturetrek email list and be the first to hear about new tours, additional departures and new dates, tour reports and special offers.

naturetrek.co.uk/e-newsletter-signup

Scan to
sign up!



Social Media

We're social! Follow us on Instagram, Facebook, Bluesky and X and be the first to hear about the launch of new tours, offers, exciting sightings and photos from our recently returned holidays.



[instagram.com/naturetrek_wildlife_holidays](https://www.instagram.com/naturetrek_wildlife_holidays)



facebook.com/naturetrekwildlifeholidays



naturetrek.bsky.social



x.com/naturetrektours (formerly Twitter)

Species lists

Birds

Common name	Scientific name	September 2025						
		14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Barnacle Goose	<i>Branta leucopsis</i>				✓			
Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Tundra Bean Goose	<i>Anser serrirostris</i>			✓				
Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Whooper Swan	<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>			20		✓		
Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>			✓	✓			
Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓		
Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Mareca penelope</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>			✓	✓			
Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>	✓						
Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>					✓		
Common Eider	<i>Somateria mollissima</i>					✓		
Common Scoter	<i>Melanitta nigra</i>		✓					
Common Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>		✓	✓		✓		
Goosander	<i>Mergus merganser</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Red-breasted Merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>		✓		✓			
Western Capercaillie	<i>Tetrao urogallus</i>						1	
Black Grouse	<i>Lyrurus tetrix</i>	2						
Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>		1		1			
Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>		✓					
Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Corn Crake	<i>Crex crex</i>	1						
Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓		
Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>	500+	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Red-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps grisegena</i>		1					
Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓		
Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>				✓			
European Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>	400						
Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>				✓			
Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	1100	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>				1			
Eurasian Woodcock	<i>Scolopax rusticola</i>		1					
Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>	2	1					
Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>		1					
Spotted Redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>	2						
Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	3	2		✓	✓		
Ruff	<i>Calidris pugnax</i>	10	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	✓			✓			
Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>	2						
Black Tern	<i>Chlidonias niger</i>			✓				
Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>				✓			
Sandwich Tern	<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>		✓		✓			
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>				✓			

Common name	Scientific name	September 2025						
		14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Arctic Skua	<i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>		4					
Red-throated Diver	<i>Gavia stellata</i>		2		✓			
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
European Honey Buzzard	<i>Pernis apivorus</i>				2	1		
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>		✓	✓		✓		
Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
White-tailed Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>	5	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Pygmy Owl	<i>Glaucidium passerinum</i>		1			1	1	
Ural Owl	<i>Strix uralensis</i>					1		
Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	1						
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	✓		✓		✓	✓	
Black Woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus martius</i>	2					✓	
Grey-headed Woodpecker	<i>Picus canus</i>	1					1	
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	14	✓		✓	✓		✓
Red-footed Falcon	<i>Falco vespertinus</i>				3			
Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>				✓			
Eurasian Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>			2		✓	✓	
Great Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius excubitor</i>	1					✓	
Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Northern Nutcracker	<i>Nucifraga caryocatactes</i>						✓	
Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>		✓			✓		
Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>		✓			✓	✓	
Marsh Tit	<i>Poecile palustris</i>		✓	✓			✓	
Willow Tit	<i>Poecile montanus</i>	✓		✓		✓	✓	
Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>					✓		
Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>			1	1			
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Western House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>		✓		✓			
Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>						✓	
Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>				1			
Common Whitethroat	<i>Curruca communis</i>				1			
Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>			✓		✓	✓	
Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>	✓					✓	
Eurasian Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>			✓		✓	✓	
Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	✓	✓			✓	✓	
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓		✓		✓		
Fieldfare	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>				✓			
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>			✓		✓	✓	
Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>							✓

Common name	Scientific name	September 2025						
		14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>	3		1				
Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>	4	✓	✓				
Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>	✓				✓		
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓				
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>	✓		✓				
Eurasian Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>	6				✓		
European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>							✓
Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓		
Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>					✓		
Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Common Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	✓		✓		✓		

Mammals

Common name	Scientific name
European Hare	<i>Lepus europaeus</i>
Mountain Hare	<i>Lepus timidus</i>
Eurasian Red Squirrel	<i>Sciurus vulgaris</i>
Western Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>
Eurasian Lynx	<i>Lynx lynx</i>
Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>