



Wild Globe Travel Consultancy

Tailored Wildlife, Wilderness and Adventure Travel Across the Globe.

14 Greenfield Road, Eastbourne,
East Sussex BN21 1JJ, UK

Tel: +44 (0)1323 731865
Mob: +44 (0)7821 640118

Email: jason.woolgar@btinternet.com
Website: www.wildglobetours.com



ESTONIA

Date - April 2015

Duration - 9 Days

Destinations

Tallinn - Matsalu National Park - Leidisoo Nature Reserve - Risti - Paide - Muraka Nature Reserve - Rakvere

Trip Overview

Estonia is one of the great European wildlife destinations and although I had been looking for an opportunity to return for some time, I did not expect to be able to do so this year, as my schedule is already fairly full for the next eighteen months or so, with a number of extensive and exciting trips planned. However, for more than twenty years I have wanted to see a Eurasian lynx in the wild and two unanticipated events involving this elusive animal prompted a rapid rethink and some last minute rescheduling. Firstly, I was informed that a team of ecologists had built a hide on a small reserve in the west of the country and that they had enjoyed some initial success in terms of several camera trap photographs of lynx around the reserve. Secondly, and within two days of learning about the hide, a friend of mine saw her first ever Eurasian lynx in Estonia, which, as I was already aware, has the highest density of lynx in all of Europe. As tenuous as each of these incidents may well have been, they were encouraging enough for a man who has 'missed' this animal across about twelve different countries over two decades and within 24-hours I had arranged an eight-night tour for James and I. Of course I realised that the prospect of seeing a lynx still remained unlikely, as you cannot simply pursue creatures that have such large territories and it is usually more a case of encountering this type of animal when you least expect to. You can certainly increase your chances by searching in the right areas for extended periods, but there are no guarantees and currently no reliable destinations



where sightings can even be categorised as likely. This was why the hide that I had been informed of was so intriguing, as I have been looking at creating a very special mammal tour in Estonia for a while now and the possibility of including one reliable site for an animal as rare as a Eurasian lynx, was just too good to ignore. Unless I am assessing them for prospective guests, I very rarely use hides, or at least not the ones that attract animals with food, but they are common in some parts of Europe and are becoming more popular with wildlife tour companies, who use them as an easy way to guarantee sightings, albeit highly compromised ones, for their clients. The beauty of this hide is that it is being run by qualified ecologists who know better than to attract large carnivores with food and have been experimenting with various lures and attractants for more than a year. The advantage of using scent as opposed to food, is that the target animal will not become habituated to one artificial feeding area or to a controlled feeding time and will instead simply pause to investigate the unidentified smell, as it would investigate any naturally occurring odour within its territory. Although the hide was not due to be officially opened until the beginning of May, the initial trials had produced some encouraging results, including camera trap photographs of one adult lynx returning to the same area on several occasions, and I was extremely grateful that the owners of the reserve were allowing me to use the hide before it had even been opened, particularly as I would not be visiting at the best time of year to search for such a difficult animal. I would be too late for the mating season, but too early to encounter the resulting young and there would be no snow on the ground, which makes it almost impossible to track the movements of such stealthy creatures and often you do not know whether you are even searching in the right areas. So all in all, my expectations were not actually that high, but I knew that James and I would thoroughly enjoy exploring what is an exceptionally beautiful country, regardless of whether we were ultimately successful or not, and that we were likely to encounter a number of other captivating animals. In fact, Estonia is probably one of the best destinations in Europe for a mammal tour, particularly a brief one, as it is a relatively small country, which can be traversed effortlessly, and the vast majority of the major animals are reasonably easy to find. Of the 28 species listed at the end of this report, only a handful could be classified as challenging to observe and my local guide informed me that the dedicated mammal tours that he has led have resulted in sightings of between twelve and seventeen different species, which is fairly impressive when you consider that his company mainly concentrate on the larger mammals and have no real expertise or interest regarding bats or small rodents. With sufficient time, the right programme and knowledgeable local assistance, it would certainly be possible to improve on those figures and I would expect a carefully planned and highly focused tour to yield at least twenty species and probably more. Having said that, the number of mammals that can be encountered is only a small part of the story, as Estonia is

home to some of Europe's most iconic creatures, including grey wolf, brown bear, European elk, Eurasian beaver, racoon dog, wild boar and of course Eurasian lynx. Many of these magnificent animals once roamed the ancient forests of my own country and several sources have recently suggested that the lynx should be reintroduced to the United Kingdom, primarily to control the burgeoning deer numbers. Perversely, as I would ideally love to walk in a land where wild lynx roam free, I hope that this does not occur, as we have an inexcusable record of cruelty and intolerance in the UK and our witless politicians should not be allowed to play god with yet another innocent species. As it is, farmers and large country estates dictate the wildlife policies of the land and it would only be a matter of time before lynx were being persecuted in the same way that the red fox, our largest surviving predator, is currently persecuted. We have no major predators remaining in Britain, having exterminated our wolves, bears and lynx centuries ago, and yet



the red fox is classified as vermin and is shot by the same farmers who complain of the damage caused by out of control rabbit and deer populations. Our badgers are still being indiscriminately culled just in case they carry bovine tuberculosis and we find it necessary to run trials to determine whether the beavers that lived on these isles for thousands of years should be allowed to stay in the few areas they have successfully returned to. In addition, with an expanding population already in excess of 63 million, the United Kingdom is actually one of the most densely populated nations on the planet and whereas we have almost no intact areas of primary forest remaining, Estonia is covered in various types of forest and supports just 1.3 million people, despite being approximately a fifth of the size of the UK. In stark contrast to the claustrophobic equatorial rainforests

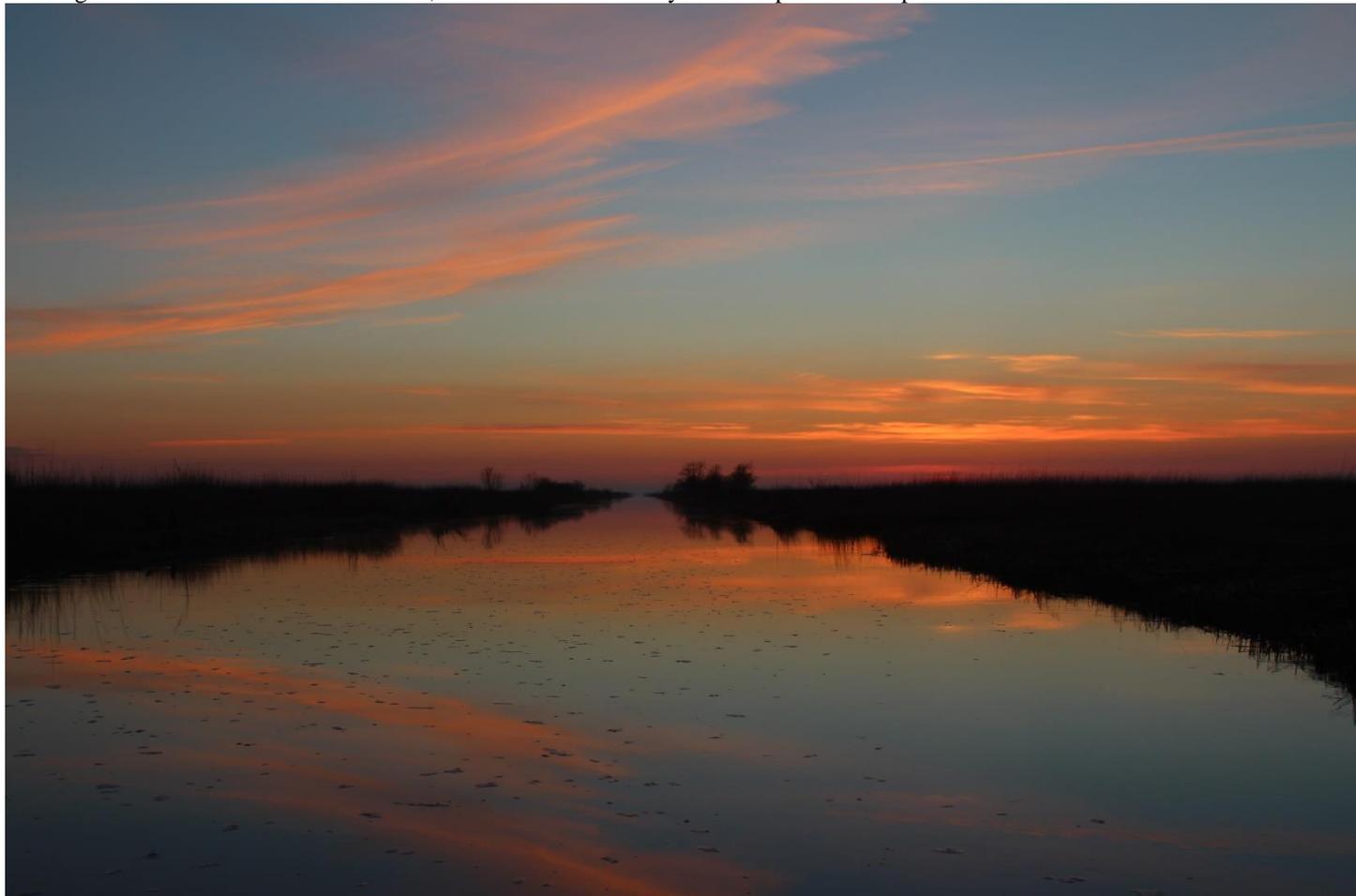
that I spend so much of my time in, the light and spacious forests of the northern hemisphere are an absolute joy to explore and more than half of Estonia remains carpeted in mixed deciduous and coniferous forest. Wetlands, floodplains and swamps also dominate much of a principally flat landscape and these diverse ecosystems, as well as a unique position on the Baltic Sea between Russia to the east and the rest of Europe to the southwest, provide Estonia with a distinct collection of wildlife, including large numbers of migratory birds and an amazing variety of wildflowers. Around 70% of the remaining forest is utilised in the apparently sustainable production of timber, which is Estonia's largest export, but I witnessed a massive amount of logging during my visit and it was difficult to ascertain exactly how much of it was from sustainable sources and what the actual levels of protection were for each forest management area. I was informed that quotas were generally strictly enforced on government land, but that elsewhere the industry

was less well controlled and that although trees had to be planted to replace those felled, the more valuable hardwoods were being replaced by less suitable species that grow quickly and can therefore be harvested much sooner. This type of mismanagement will of course destroy an entire ecosystem and hopefully the authorities will ultimately ensure that these precious forests survive, as Estonia is not a country that needs to excessively deplete its natural resources and has a strong economy that more resembles a successful Scandinavian nation, Finland lies just 70 kilometres to the north, than the other Baltic States of Latvia and Lithuania. Technology has been voraciously embraced, most of the nation has free Wi-Fi access and Skype, Fortumo and TransferWise were all developed in Estonia, and one



of the lowest national debts on earth has helped to stabilise a country under harsh Soviet rule from 1944 until independence in 1991. Thousands of Estonians died within Joseph Stalin's infamous Gulag camps and even now much of the land is only just beginning to recover from the severe pollution left behind by the Soviet army. Deserted military installations and farming collectives, disused airstrips and military roads are all constant reminders of a recent past dominated by the once mighty USSR and today around 30% of the population speak Russian as their native language. For a tiny country with such a turbulent history, it is perhaps surprising that so much wildlife has not only endured, but has positively flourished. In addition to approaching 20,000 beavers and approximately the

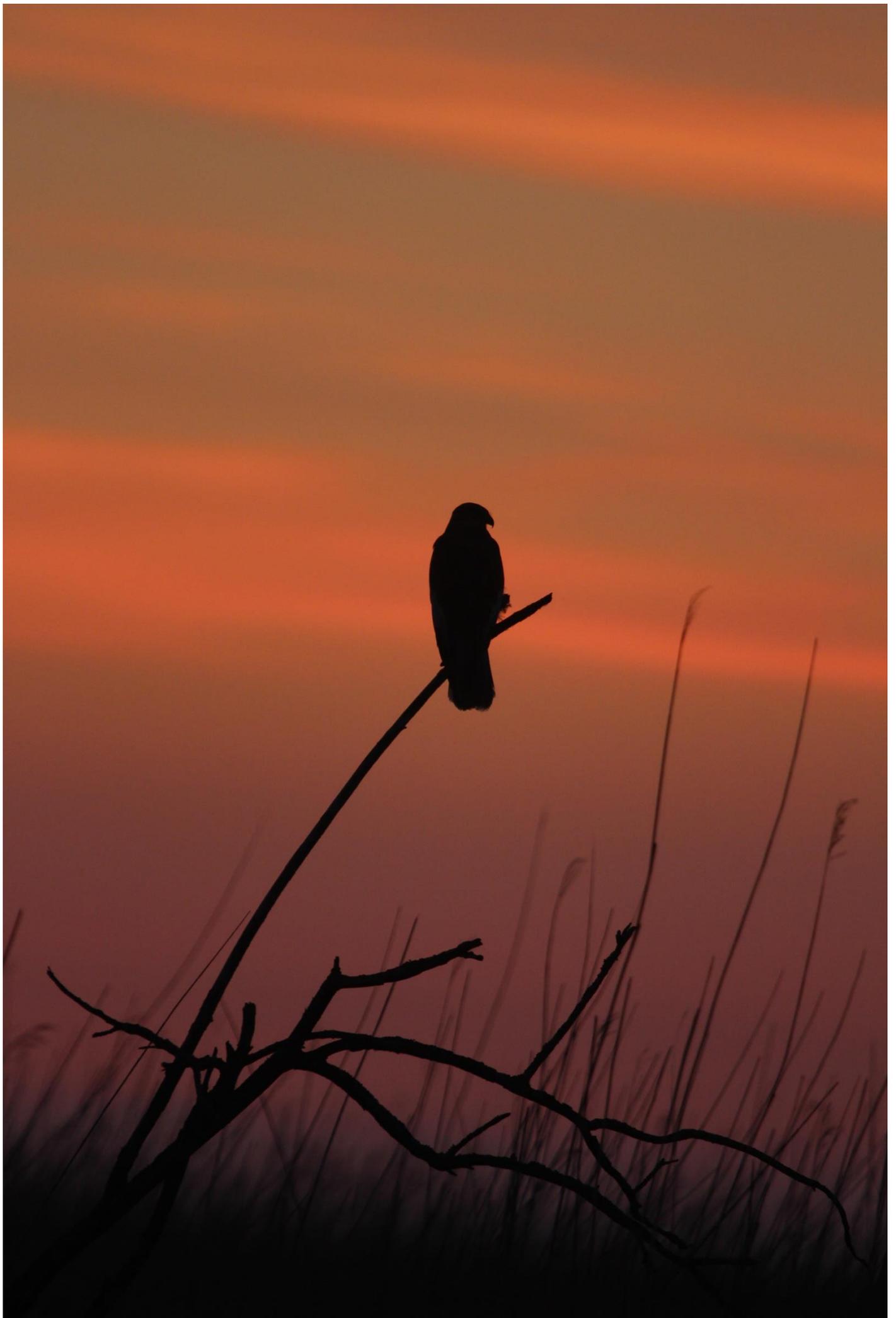
same number of wild boar, there are thought to be around six hundred brown bears in Estonia and between 150 to 200 wolves. Until the last year or so, the lynx population was believed to exceed 800, an incredible figure for such a small territory, but lynx numbers ultimately depend on the health of their main prey species the roe deer and two severe winters in succession dramatically reduced the roe deer population. Consequently, the lynx population crashed to around 400, but thankfully the situation is likely to be reversed in the short term, as the recent winter in Estonia was unusually mild and we encountered a significant number of roe deer during our trip. Although we visited four locations in all, the last two were only brief stops and we spent most of our time in or around Matsalu



National Park and Leidisoo Nature Reserve, in the west and northwest of the country respectively. Both reserves fall within Laane County, which sits on the Baltic Sea directly opposite the Hiiumaa and Saaremaa islands, and both are recorded by the Ramsar Convention as Wetlands of International Importance. Each area features extensive sections of forest, ideal habitat for roe deer and the lynx that hunt them, and the hide that we would be trying was situated on a private reserve to the south of Matsalu, which was our first destination. The hide had been booked for our second and third evenings and so on our first, we took a boat out on the Kasari River to look for beavers. Although this is a great spot for observing beaver activity and we did briefly encounter a pair on land, the views were not as good as I had hoped or our guide had expected, which may have been due to the fact that we were the second party out that evening and were following a larger boat with a birding group. We did have the option of trying again on our own the next morning, which would have almost certainly resulted in better sightings, but I declined in order to concentrate our efforts on our



number one priority, a lynx. A visit to a bear hide at the end of the trip aside, this was the only activity that was not at least partially devoted to our search for this mysterious cat and whilst it would have been lovely to have experienced better views of the beavers, the boat ride itself was a perfect and magical introduction to the country. It had rained for most of the afternoon, but the sun appeared as we took to the water and the views across the floodplains of the Kasari Delta were simply ravishing. Marsh harriers soared above the picturesque countryside, bathed in the most superb light, whilst burnished reds and golds set the evening sky ablaze and a thousand shades of sunset glistened across the surface of the water. It was an idyllic scene and almost more reminiscent of one of Thomas Hardy's sumptuous Wessex landscapes, than the most northerly of Baltic outposts. It certainly set the mood for a wonderful first night and by the time we crawled happily into bed after our initial spotlighting session, we had already encountered several roe deer and brown hares, as well as a couple of red foxes and three racoon dogs, one of which was just a few metres from our car. Matsalu turned out to be the best spotlighting destination of the trip, as we saw very little at night when we moved on, but added a number of mountain hares on our second excursion, as well as a European polecat. This was the highlight of the trip for me, as these animals are incredibly difficult to observe and I believe that this is only the third that I have ever encountered. I have certainly never seen any in my own country and I have never previously been able to photograph one, which is principally why I have included such



an admittedly awful picture on this report. I am actually fairly pleased to have a picture at all, for although we were amazed to watch this rare mustelid bouncing along the road directly towards us, it simply did not stop moving and we more had to enjoy a spectacular sighting than worry about attempting to take the perfect photograph, particularly as it was raining fairly heavily. Sadly, Matsalu was less successful for us in terms of the hide, as our two evening vigils produced precisely no mammals and barely even a bird. I had feared this might be the case and do not believe that our lack of success is actually a reflection on the hide itself or the area that it sits within, as it is brand new and was still being worked on the day before we first used it. The disruption was therefore always likely to disturb the resident wildlife and I was so concerned that it would take a matter of weeks or even months for the area to settle, as



opposed to days, that we left after just three hours of our second visit to spotlight instead. I hope to return as soon as possible and am meanwhile in contact with the ecologists who own the reserve, as they intend to monitor the activity around the hide and we should know within a few months whether one or more lynx are using the area as part of their territory. The long-term prognosis, whether hopeful or otherwise, did not help us on this trip of course and after only three days I sensed that we were in trouble. It was not so much that we had not spotted a lynx by this stage, but more that we had not seen a single indication that we were even searching in an appropriate or active area. There were no tracks, no scat and no carcasses old or new and whilst lynx had previously been encountered in the area that we were exploring, that did not guarantee that one or more cats were still using the territory or that, even if they were, they were likely to return during our brief visit. Many mammals are relatively easy to find when you know how and where to look, but with a highly secretive animal like a lynx, there are so many variables at play, that finding one generally still involves a massive amount of good fortune. Firstly, their territories are generally very large and it is thought that many lynx probably never visit the same location twice in their entire lives. If this does not make the proposition of finding one difficult enough, then consider that they only have to hunt every few days and are unlikely to kill in exactly the same place on a regular basis, as many prey species become used to these patterns and quickly abandon areas where they feel threatened. Whilst a lynx will have a number of favoured stalking grounds across their territory, they are also versatile, opportunistic hunters and will usually attempt to take advantage of any opportunity that unwittingly presents itself. The weather is another factor that will often determine if you are successful or not, as rain, low temperatures and even wind velocity can all affect your chances of encountering certain animals. The cycles of the moon can even play a part, as many species appear much more difficult to observe during the full moon, which makes perfect sense in many ways, as the full moon is also known as a hunters moon and there is no doubt in my mind that the number one reason why most animals are so difficult to find, is because so many people like to shoot them. When you study the behaviour of various cats in the areas where they are not hunted, it is in stark contrast to their behaviour in the regions where they have been historically persecuted. They clearly have no fear of humans in general and often make little effort to conceal themselves. However, the story is entirely different where they are killed for the entertainment of a few and although hunters usually deny this, if lynx were not hunted at all, they would be observed almost as routinely as leopards are in the reserves where they receive full protection. Despite being the third largest carnivore in

Europe, smaller only than brown bears and grey wolves, lynx move with a grace, speed and stealth that belies their powerful frame and should consequently be very difficult to locate and track. Sadly, they lack stamina and hunters ruthlessly exploit this weakness by pursuing them with packs of dogs. In my mind this is a particularly abhorrent and cowardly way of hunting, as the terrified cats are chased to exhaustion and ultimately have to seek refuge in a tree. As the frantic dogs bay and snarl at the cornered animal from below, the heroic hunters only involvement in the whole process is to step up and shoot the entirely defenceless animal from a range of just a few metres. I have longed to see a Eurasian lynx for more than twenty years and I could do so at my leisure if I was prepared to use dogs in this way, as I have been offered the opportunity on a number of occasions, including in North America where Canadian lynx and pumas are also hunted in this appalling manner. I could always justify my involvement by reasoning that I would ultimately be using a camera instead of a gun and that the animal would not be killed, but the encounter would be an unnatural travesty and I would rather never see this beautiful creature face to face, than cause it that level of distress simply for a photograph. In the same way that I believe trapping an animal just to say that you have seen it is no better than seeing one caged in a zoo, so I believe that wildlife tourists have a responsibility to behave ethically and that does very occasionally mean that you return home slightly disappointed. This was one such occasion, for although we all worked extremely hard and persevered to the very end, our prospects looked even less likely when we moved on to the second destination and this was not to be the trip where I finally saw my first Eurasian lynx. No one was at fault, as the tour had been well organised despite the short notice and our guide was extremely helpful and worked very hard on our behalf. We started each morning at 5am, which was just before first light, and generally did not finish until between midnight and 1am. Our guide would take a deserved rest each afternoon and although we did so as well on a couple of occasions, generally James and I continued to search throughout the entire day, which meant that we were commonly spending around twenty hours in the field every day. As is the case in so many countries, our guide was primarily a birder, but he also has a keen interest in mammals and he mentioned that he saw his first lynx in April 2010 and had encountered ten in all during the five-year period to April 2015. This almost certainly means that his estimate of a 30% to 40% chance of observing a lynx on each mammal tour was not entirely realistic, particularly given that his ten sightings also included birding tours and his own field work. Having said that, his rather generous appraisal made no real difference to me, as I had committed myself to the trip regardless of the odds and ten encounters with such a rare animal is still not bad during that period of time. I also expect that these figures are likely to improve as more time is dedicated purely to this one animal and we learn more about their territories and behaviour. My problem is not being able to devote sufficient time to the cause, as I have very little doubt that if I followed my own advice and spent longer in the areas that they occur, it would only be a matter of time before I stumbled across one. I always tell people that they should spend as long as possible in a region or a country to really begin to appreciate the resident wildlife, but unfortunately I never seem to be able to devote more than a week or two to my European trips and I will probably need to rectify this if I am going to see one of the few animals to have eluded me over the years. I keep telling myself that the numerous disappointments will only make the eventual success all the more satisfying and meanwhile, I continue to enjoy a vast array of truly rewarding compensations. The irreplaceable time in the field with my son is certainly one of them and every tour produces a host of memorable experiences. On this particular trip the polecat encounter was probably the most unforgettable moment, for me at least, but we also had outstanding views of majestic Eurasian elk, or European moose as I prefer to call them, as well as close encounters with several racoon dogs, which must be one of the most endearing species on the planet and barely justify their classification as predators. During our time in and around Leidissoo Nature Reserve, a pine marten ran across the road in front of our vehicle and we also had the great pleasure of following a hedgehog on foot in excellent morning light. Three grey seals appeared around the returning fishing boats at Dirhami and we surprised several herds of wild boar at every destination. The tour should have also ended with at least one brown bear sighting, as I drove across half



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the country to assess a hide near Muraka Nature Reserve, but the previous visitor had decided that it was a good idea to walk around outside the hide on the morning before we arrived and, hardly surprisingly, we did not see anything that evening as a result of his stupidity. This was a baited hide in any case and although the bears here are obviously not as tame as at other locations across Europe, watching such magnificent creatures at a hide still feels a little like feeding time at a zoo to me and I always prefer my guests to encounter bears in an authentically wild setting. Hides can be extremely useful for a number of reasons, including photography,



tourism and even conservation, but as land, largely agricultural, continues to be abandoned across Europe on a massive scale, there has been a huge growth in the construction of commercial hides. Some are fine and ethically managed, but far too many are owned by unscrupulous local operators who are only interested in making a quick profit and have no regard for the wildlife they are profiting from. Some sites even have multiple hides, all of which use food to attract animals, and guests basically traipse from one feeding station to another, as they would from one enclosure to another at the zoo. This type of depressing experience is as far removed as I can imagine from the authentic wilderness encounters that I want my guests to be able to cherish for years to come and whilst I am

happy to use certain hides where bait is not utilised, there is still nothing quite like the thrill of searching for and finding an animal in the wild. In all the trip yielded a final total of twelve mammals, ten of which were observed whilst we searched exclusively for lynx, or fourteen if you include the two different bat species that I did not attempt to identify. Although twelve was a reasonable tally given the amount of time we devoted to one animal, strangely, the tour almost felt as if it was more about the mammals that we did not see, than those we did, as we turned down opportunities to search for several additional species and it quickly become apparent that it would be possible to arrange a superb mammal tour in Estonia. Although they can be difficult to glimpse in the forest, red squirrels are common in many of Tallinn's city parks and Siberian flying squirrels are easily encountered with the assistance of a researcher in the northeast of the country, which is also a good area for brown bears. Ringed seals are more or less guaranteed on a boat trip from Hiiumaa Island and the island itself is home to healthy populations of red deer, as well as low numbers of the critically endangered European mink, which are bred at Tallinn Zoo as part of a captive breeding programme before being released on the island. Although the introduction of the larger American mink has always been blamed for the rapid decline of its European counterpart, the reality is far more complicated and whilst it is almost certainly correct that the invasive American mink has probably had a negative impact on

the native European species, the truth is that European mink numbers were in serious decline long before the American version ever reached mainland Europe. Furthermore, the European populations have experienced alarming declines in regions where the American mink is not yet present and it is far more likely that their widespread decline has been caused by a combination of several different factors, including habitat loss and overhunting, as tens of thousands of minks were killed annually across Europe throughout much of the 20th century. Towards the end of the 1990's, the alien American mink population was in turn exterminated on Hiiumaa Island to make way for the reintroduction of the indigenous European species and I am hoping that I will eventually be



able to take small groups to Hiiumaa in order to see this remarkable animal and to provide financial support for the vital conservation work taking place there. I had intended to meet one of the biologists involved in the project on this trip, but that did not prove to be possible and I will therefore arrange to visit Hiiumaa with one of the researchers on my next trip, as this is a project that I would very much like Wild Globe to actively support. Back on the mainland, the notorious American mink is apparently reasonably easy to find and our guide informed us that Eurasian otters are also seen fairly regularly. The one animal that I did not expect to be able to find, indeed I was not even aware that it existed in Estonia, was a golden jackal and I was astonished when our guide mentioned that they had been recorded on several occasions in the Matsalu area. In fact, I was so surprised that I initially suspected that they had probably been misidentified, but this does not appear to be the case and the local photographs that I have seen are certainly of golden jackals.

When you look at the historical range of this animal, which does not really extend any further north than Hungary and the extreme south of the Ukraine, I find it difficult to believe that this is a naturally occurring population and am fairly convinced that they must have been introduced, although I have no idea why. Perhaps they are escapees from a private collection, as these jackals, although highly adaptable animals that can survive and even thrive in various diverse environments, are simply not designed to withstand the extreme winters of northern Europe. They are not naturally adapted to deep snow or extremely low temperatures, but, introduced or not, they certainly appear to be surviving and even colonising new territory, as they have been recorded in Estonia for several years



and it also appears that they have now been documented in Latvia, which lies directly to the south of Estonia. Whether future tour groups will be fortunate enough to see them or not, there is little doubt that Estonia has the potential to be one of the top wildlife destinations in Europe and the only real problem that we encountered was with a few hunters whilst spotlighting. I was informed at the very beginning of our tour that hunters do not use lights in Estonia, dogs, bait and automatic rifles are fine of course, but lights apparently are not sporting, and anyone using a spotlight is therefore automatically assumed to be a poacher, which is a fairly major problem when you consider that lynx are largely nocturnal and that the only way to find them at night is with a spotlight. I did not initially suppose that the issue was a serious one, until we moved on to our third destination for a single night and the individual who arranged our tour informed me that we would not be searching the area where the last lynx had been seen back in March, as the local hunters were angry that wildlife enthusiasts were disturbing the animals they wanted to shoot, which may well be the definition of ironic. This was certainly far more disturbing, as I had been searching unsuccessfully for a lynx for seven days by this stage and was suddenly being informed that we were not going to spotlight where the very last lynx had been seen, purely because hunters in that area had complained and thrown their collective weight around, as they have a tendency to do whenever they feel that their entitlement to kill something beautiful is being threatened. They had no right to stop us of course, as we were on public roads and there is no law against using lights to look for wildlife, but the company that I was using did not want to upset the local community for obvious reasons and we were subsequently denied the opportunity to explore a promising area, which was far from ideal and needs looking at for future tours. Fortunately, hunting is fairly strictly regulated in Estonia and although the usual horse trading always takes place between the conservation groups attempting to limit the number of hunting permits issued each year and the hunters who always demand the highest possible number, generally hunting licences are issued based on population figures and reasonably sound scientific evidence. This year for example, because the lynx population has recently crashed, only two permits were allowed for this species and apparently these were issued on one of the islands to reduce the number of lambs being killed by several lynx with overlapping territories. Of course, even two lynx is too many as far as I am concerned, but at least the hunting is not as totally indiscriminate as it is in North America and the common argument is that the country is simply too small to be able to sustain huge predator populations, which is slightly tenuous given the current numbers, but would eventually be difficult to argue against unless animals can be moved to other less populated regions across Europe. The spotlighting issue in this one area aside, hunting did not impact our trip a great deal and whilst the tour was ostensibly a failure, given that we did not encounter our main target species, it certainly did not feel like one. That is the great beauty of wildlife travel, as very little is entirely predictable and you never know exactly what you will find around the next corner. There is always something special to savour and every drive or hike becomes an exciting adventure when you are interested in absolutely everything. The lynx may have eluded us yet again, but we were able to share many other memorable experiences and while the sight of a tiny hedgehog continues to both thrill and inspire me, then it is very difficult to actually fail.



Principally because I spent the vast majority of my time looking for just one animal, I have expanded the mammal list for this trip report to include the other major mammal species that it is possible to see on a more comprehensive wildlife tour of Estonia.

No.	Species	Scientific Name	Notes
1	Raccoon Dog	Nyctereutes procyonoides	Around six at the first two destinations and two at the bear hide near Muraka Nature Reserve.
2	Red Fox	Vulpes vulpes	Low numbers at every location.
3	European Pine Marten	Martes martes	One running across the road near Leidissoo.
4	European Polecat	Mustela putorius	One running towards and then behind our car in the Matsalu region.
5	Roe Deer	Capreolus capreolus	Common at every destination.
6	Eurasian Elk	Alces alces	Around twenty at the first two locations.
7	Wild Boar	Sus scrofa	Common in small herds at all four locations.
8	Western European Hedgehog	Erinaceus europaeus	One in daylight near Leidissoo.
9	Mountain Hare	Lepus timidus	Relatively common at night at the first two destinations.
10	European Hare	Lepus europaeus	Routinely encountered at every destination.
11	Eurasian Beaver	Castor fiber	Two on the Kasari River trip.
12	Grey Seal	Halichoerus grypus	Three at the harbour at Dirhami.
13	Eurasian Lynx	Lynx lynx	Remains a difficult animal to observe, but probably easier in Estonia than elsewhere.
14	Grey Wolf	Canis lupus	Occasional sightings, usually of individuals.
15	Golden Jackal	Canis aureus	Small population of unknown origin in western Estonia.
16	Brown Bear	Ursus arctos	Natural encounters are relatively common in certain areas and a visit to a hide will generally guarantee a sighting.
17	Eurasian Otter	Lutra lutra	There are thought to be around 2000 otters in Estonia and they are observed regularly in certain areas.
18	Eurasian Badger	Meles meles	Rarely encountered in Estonia and seeing one would involve finding an active sett.

19	European Mink	<i>Mustela lutreola</i>	To be assessed on Hiiumaa Island.
20	American Mink	<i>Neovison vison</i>	Relatively common in certain areas.
21	Stoat or Ermine	<i>Mustela ermine</i>	Purely a chance encounter.
22	Least Weasel	<i>Mustela nivalis</i>	Again a chance encounter, but more common than the stoat.
23	Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>	Easily encountered on Hiiumaa Island.
24	Northern White-breasted Hedgehog	<i>Erinaceus roumanicus</i>	Only found within the extreme south of the country.
25	European Mole	<i>Talpa europaea</i>	Extremely common, but very difficult to observe.
26	Eurasian Red Squirrel	<i>Sciurus vulgaris</i>	Irregularly observed in the forest, but routinely encountered in a number of Tallinn city parks.
27	Siberian Flying Squirrel	<i>Pteromys volans</i>	Difficult to see on your own, but more or less guaranteed with a researcher at the right time of year.
28	Ringed Seal	<i>Phoca vitulina</i>	Routinely encountered on a boat tour from Hiiumaa Island.





14 Greenfield Road, Eastbourne,
East Sussex BN21 1JJ, UK

Tel: +44 (0)1323 731865
Mob: +44 (0)7821 640118

Email: jason.woolgar@btinternet.com
Website: www.wildglobetours.com

