

Lynx in Estonia

Mammal-watching

A Greentours Itinerary

Estonia has an estimated population of more than five hundred Lynx and they are increasing alongside a substantive increase in their main prey, the Roe Deer. Estonia is a small country, but not that small! So finding even one of these creatures would require a lot of luck unless one has the help of researchers who have been studying these fabulous animals for many years in a rather special national park, Lahemaa. Lahemaa's atmospheric landscape of bogs, forests and unspoilt bays with still traditional fishing villages has been spared the ravages of the past century by dint of being the first national park designated in the former Soviet Union.

Day 1

Arrival and drive to Lahemaa National Park

Our target area, Lahemaa National Park, is just seventy kilometres east of the airport and so we'll soon be there, driving through the boglands and forests to the Sagadi Mois, a large former manor house situated on the eastern borders of the national park. During the first evening, we will meet the other local guide, who will give a more precise overview of the local Lynx situation, their behaviour, and how we will start looking for them. Of course, we won't waste any time on the first evening and we'll be right out after dinner for our first attempt to find the Lynx.

Days 2 - 5

Lahemaa National Park and the search for Lynx

As with the first night, we will concentrate mainly on looking for Lynx, and the best time to see them is early morning before dawn, late evenings, and night time. For us, daytime will be used for recovery and on day tours to get the blood going and experience the beauty of Estonian spring. Lahemaa's extensive unspoilt bays, bogs, mires and forests was the very first national park created in the old Soviet Union and has thus been under protection for eighty years or so. Pine and spruce form Lahemaa's extensive forests. The understory is mainly lichens, Cowberry and Bilberry, and this low ground cover is very helpful when looking for our quarry – no problems with thick bramble and nettle beds here! We'll find the weather perhaps rather cool but the Lynx won't be noticing as spring is definitely in the air for them – it's the mating season and for a week or two at the end of March and at that start of April they are out and about far more than is usual. Excessively secretive for much of the year, they now take to the open, at least more than the rest of the year, in search of a mate. These Lynx are amongst the largest of the breed and so an adult male is quite an impressive beast. We can't guarantee sightings but we'll not want to for trying and we'll hope for more than one sighting too. The researchers and your guides have a network of trap cameras watching the movements of the Lynx as well as helpful technology such as thermal imaging

scopes and LED lamps to aid in our search. We'll concentrate much of searching effort at night but also early morning and evening too.

During our search for Lynx we'll undoubtedly come across some of the commoner mammals that inhabit Estonia's mix of forest and bogs. Roe Deer as mentioned are common nowadays. Pine Martens are very active at this season and Brown Bears will have recently woken and be wandering round forests where they are, like the Lynx, easier to spot at this time of year. Snow Hares are common and we'll also likely see the strange Raccoon Dog. Wild Boar are easy to see and so too Moose, there are 150 of the latter at Lahemaa and they particularly like the bogs and mires that here form extensive complexes. Contorted pines emerging from the sphagnum look like recent invaders but many are in fact two hundred years old!

Though mammals will be very much our aim we'll no doubt have sightings of Black Grouse, Western Capercaillie and Hazelhen as we search the forests, the raucous cries of Nutcrackers around us. Woodpeckers are numerous with seven species - Northern three-toed and Black Woodpeckers are amongst the easier to see, White-backed a little harder. As we use thermal imagers to look for the lynx during the night, we will most likely also meet owls, such as Ural Owl and Pygmy Owl. Coastal waters may produce views of Whooper and Bewick Swans, Velvet Scoters, Smew, and White-tailed Eagles.

Day 6

Return to Tallinn and Departure

Today we can have the last look for whatever is still missing from our wishlist and then return to Tallinn for our flight home.

If you would like to ask about any aspect of this holiday, please call 01298 83563 or email us at enquiries@greentours.co.uk.

To Book a on this Holiday please fill in the booking form which you can download from www.greentours.co.uk (also found in the Greentours brochure) and post to Greentours, 8 Eliot Close, Armitage, Rugeley, WS15 4UP, UK. Tel +44 (0)1298 83563. After booking your place you'll receive a confirmation letter and a detailed information pack will be dispatched twelve weeks prior to departure. Mammal and bird checklists are available.