

Baltic Birding Hotspots

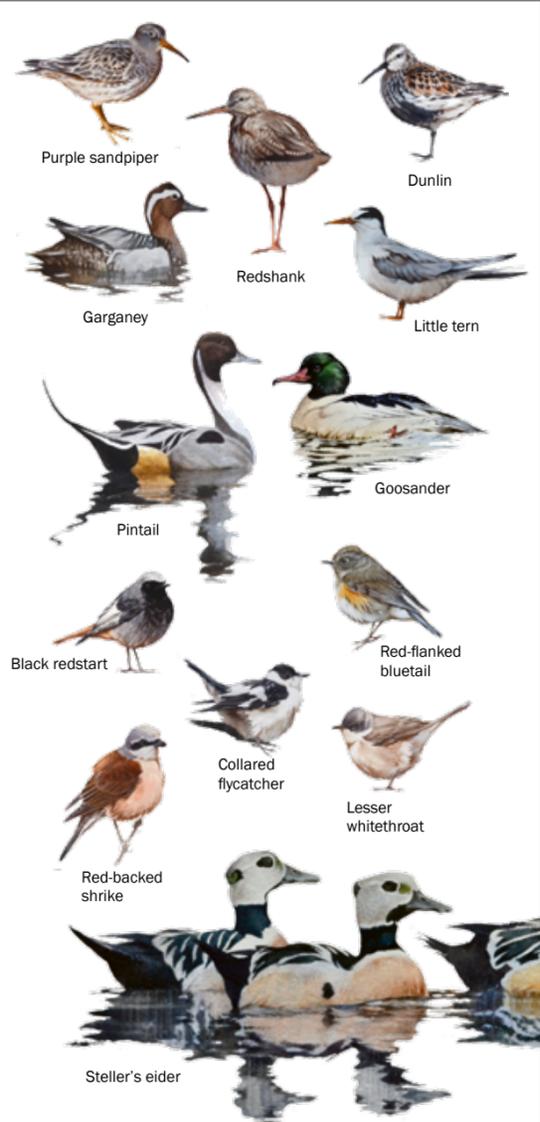


The birding in the Baltic Sea area is good in all seasons with an impressive migration in spring and autumn. In April to late June geese, waders and passerines migrate through the area. In autumn the southbound migration follows mostly the same routes, with many birds resting and feeding along the coasts.

In this map you will find the birding hotspots of the central Baltic area. Welcome to the peace and quiet, with excellent birding away from the crowds.

The Baltic Wings project aims at developing the central Baltic area as a nature and birdwatching destination through infrastructure investments, capacity building in co-operation with local entrepreneurs as well as other stakeholders, marketing and information. Read more at www.balticwings.org.

www.stof.nu www.kokar.ax
www.narsholmen.nu www.daba.gov.lv



Migration

Migration in the central Baltic area is intense and especially impressive during spring when millions of birds rush to the nesting grounds in the north. Spring migration starts in February–March and in April

the migration gets intense with common eiders, scooters, long-tailed ducks, loons and other seabirds passing in thousands every day. Migrating ducks with up to 50,000 individuals of long-tailed duck and surf scoter can be observed in a single morning.

In April–May the raptors arrive with good observation opportunities at Cape Kolka. Lesser and greater spotted eagles, buzzards, falcons, hawks, kites and harriers can be frequently spotted. Kolka is also an excellent site for woodland species such as black storks, woodpeckers as well as capercaillie.

In late May and the beginning of June the spectacular migration of waders heading for the Siberian coastline can be observed in the area, but already in June–July some of the waders migrate south again and forage along the coasts.

In October the migration of barnacle geese – with tens of thousands arriving in huge flocks to the seaside meadows and fields in Estonia and on Gotland – is a magnificent sight. Also in late autumn, rare eastern migrants from Russia stray into the Baltic area. Small songbirds of the Phylloscopus genus can be found in groves and on the beaches, especially after strong winds from the east.

During winter the northern ducks and eagles highlight the birdwatching. Golden eagles have a very strong population in Gotland and long-tailed ducks, scaups, smew and Steller's eiders winter in the central Baltic Sea.

Woodpeckers and owls are most easily found in early spring when they are hooting and drumming. Ural owl can be found in Estonia, Latvia and northern parts of the Stockholm area. Tengmalm's owl at Gotland, Estonia and Latvia. Pygmy owl can be found in the whole Central Baltic area as well as black woodpecker. White-backed woodpecker is found in Estonia, Latvia and southern Finland and the three-toed woodpecker in Eastern Baltic areas while scarce in Sweden.



Illustrations: Peter Nilsson (birds), Helena Duveborg (map). Cover: Sheiducks.



Birding in the central Baltic area

The central Baltic area has many different biotopes, suitable for a rich and interesting fauna with many species that are rare in the rest of Europe. During migration the Arctic species pass, rest and feed along extensive undeveloped coastal areas – grasslands or bare, small islands in the archipelago.

During winter, Arctic waterfowl including large numbers of long-tailed ducks and rare ducks such as the Stellers eider spend their time feeding in the central Baltic. Owls, woodpeckers and eagles can be seen all seasons and brighten birding during winter and early spring.

In summertime, the grazed meadows along our coasts, the rugged islands of the archipelago and boreal forests offer peaceful wildlife experiences, away from the crowds.

FINLAND, ÅLAND



1. Kökar, Åland

Kökar is a group of islands in the archipelago between Finland and Sweden – way out in the open Baltic Sea. Kökar has a long tradition of bird watching. In springtime, over 250 different bird species can be seen – sometimes up to 140 on one trip. The highlights are the early migrators like eiders in early spring and loons in the second half of May. In summer breeding birds like barred warblers attract birders. In autumn, from late August to October, the autumn migration of passerines, birds of prey and seafoam takes place. In winter, seafoam and local birds overwinter around Kökar. In Kökar you can find six shelters and platforms specially built for bird-watching within an area of a few kilometers.



ESTONIA

2. Hiiumaa

Hiiumaa island has excellent spots for studying the migrating birds passing close by the shore at Ristna peninsula. Thousands of waterfowls can be spotted during April–May and in autumn. In the first week of May, the sky can be filled with migrating waterfowl and 50,000 common scoters is not an unusual sight in early mornings. The autumn migration can be even more intense with tens of thousands of waterfowl and geese, cranes and many easterly vagrants entertaining eager birdwatchers standing along the coastline. The inland lake Käina in the southeast part of the island is a favoured place to roost for geese and ducks. Smew and other waterfowl can be numerous in spring and in autumn.



3. Vilsandi National Park, Saaremaa

The western coastline of the island Saaremaa has excellent sites for watching the large number of sea ducks and geese passing over

the sea during spring migration. Vilsandi national park is breeding grounds for avocets and tawny pipit. Passerines rest in coastal forests during migration and in winter about 2,000 Steller's eiders can be seen in the area. In early spring they come closer to shore and are easier to see. In late winter and early spring the woodpeckers – white-backed, three-toed, grey-headed and black – and owls are active and call in the forest and capercaillie, black grouse and hazel grouse are lekking. The autumn migration in September and October to Latvia from the southern peninsula at Sörve can be spectacular with tens of thousands of birds in the sky.

4. Matsalu National Park

The park includes the Matsalu Bay and its coastline, the Kasari River delta, and nearly 50 islands. This is one of Europe's most important waterfowl resting areas between the Arctic and Western Europe. In Matsalu you will find the 4,000 hectares of Kasari meadow, Europe's largest preserved flat meadow, which is an important nesting site for corn crane, spotted crane and great snipe. More than 2 million waterfowl fly through the national park each year, of which more than 230,000 remain for shorter or longer stays.



LATVIA

5. Cape Kolka, Slitere National Park

The location of Cape Kolka creates good conditions for watching the migratory birds during the spring migration season, when the cape creates a «bottleneck» effect where the birds flying above land gather before setting off across the Gulf of Riga towards Estonia. Not all birds dare to cross the sea at once, and such hesitation before the long journey increases the concentration

of the birds in the area around the cape. Cape Kolka is the best place in Latvia to watch the sea birds, especially in autumn, when the flow of terrestrial birds across the cape is not as intense as in spring. Here, you can come across the waders in the middle of summer as well as capercille, many species of woodpeckers and owls in the Slitere National Park, where Cape Kolka is situated.

SWEDEN

6. Lausvik, Gotland

Lausvik bay is especially good for waders, ducks and geese during migration, with tens of thousands of barnacle geese feeding in the fields nearby or resting in the bay. In early spring bar-tailed godwits rest in big numbers and the area is excellent for white-tailed and golden eagles all seasons. The bay can be a very good spot for waders, especially the smaller Calidris species during July and August. There are two birding towers with good views of the area.



7. Närsholmen, Gotland

Närsholmen is called the Swedish savannah because of the open, grazed landscape with the typical under-grazed junipers resembling acacias. Närsholmen is good for birding in all seasons. In spring migrating loons, ducks and waders will pass, in the summer avocets, curlews and terns may be found along the shores. The autumn migration of tens of thousand of barnacle geese is almost overwhelming during peak days.



8. Karlsöarna, Gotland

Lilla Karlsö and Stora Karlsö are the only islands in the Baltic Sea with colonies of breeding guillemots and razorbills during spring and summer. The steep cliffs along the islands' shorelines are a spectacular sight and the open grassland in the center of Stora Karlsö has a beautiful flora with many different orchids.

9. Faludden, Gotland

A cape where the migrating birds can pass very close with ducks, loons and geese migrating north or south. The large grazed meadows are excellent for migrating geese in spring and autumn, the dominating species being the barnacle goose with the occasional red-breasted goose in the flocks of thousands of geese. In bushes and small groves migrating passerines rest and forage, in the autumn there are often very



interesting species found here, especially after strong winds from the east that will push eastern warblers to Gotland.



10. Stockviken, Gotland

Nature reserve Stockviken has two parts: Inre Stockviken which is a lake with excellent views of ducks in the spring, and Yttre Stockviken, the coastline, with its waders, terns and ducks. Eagles and other raptors are often seen in the area. Many rare species have been seen here over the years.



11. Hoburgen, Gotland

Hoburgen in the south-west is the best birding spot on Gotland where many migrating birds arrive or leave the island. The landscape is spectacular with the limestone cliffs and open landscape with views over the sea. The migration is magnificent with geese, ducks and auks passing on route north or south at a good spotting distance. The small ringing station during migration is well worth a visit.



12. Landsort, Öja

This rugged island in the southern part of the Stockholm archipelago is known as a top bird migrating place that also has its own ringing station. It is the first land that the birds see when coming from the south over the Baltic sea, and the lighthouse helps to guide birds to the island at night. Because of Landsort's strategic location, sometimes thousands of passerines can be seen foraging on the island.



13. Utö

The strategic location makes the island Utö one of the best spots in the Stockholm area for studies of migrants that are using the African-Siberian fly-way. The shallow beaches are perfect for roosting and are also used as breeding grounds for several coastal birds like showeler, eider, scoters, ringed plovers, arctic skuas and arctic tern. The newly built bird tower located at Södra fladen, partly financed by EU-funds, gives a good overview of the birds in the shallow areas. There are other areas along the southern coastline where you can observe nearly all coastal birds in the Stockholm area. However, most of it belongs to a military training facility so there are restrictions for civilians to enter the area. This area is also a real hotspot for resting and migrating raptors like hen harrier and

rough-legged buzzard. In September there is a good chance to find red-throated pipit, bluethroat, yellow wag-tail and occasionally rustic bunting.

14. Vårbergstoppen

This artificial hill is located in the suburbs of Stockholm. The top rises 90 m high above the sea level and is used by many migrating birds as a beacon on their way north or south. The waterways nearby the lake Mälaren also attract migrating waterfowl, so birdwatching at this spot can be rewarding nearly year around. The site offers a 360-degree visibility for at least 20 km in fair weather conditions.



15. Fysingen

This lake is situated just south of Arlanda international airport, and it is favoured by many waterfowl. There are also cattle-grazed wetlands along the north shore of the lake. This combination attracts a lot of migrants both in spring and autumn. There is a birdwatching tower in the NW shore and a trail adopted for wheel chairs along the reed beds on the west side. The diversity of birds also attracts raptors, for example white-tailed eagle nesting in the nearby woods. Rare birds are often found during migration.



16. Skatudden, Vaddö

Skatudden together with the nearby Rönnskärsudde on the island Vaddö are excellent places for studying migrating birds. In springtime thousands of different geese, ducks, passerines and raptors can be spotted at close distances. The most spectacular event is the autumn migration when in September and October birds travel from the east passing over Åland to the Swedish coast. Since the birds from Siberia, Russia and Finland also choose this pathway, a lot of different species in thousands and thousands can be observed swooping over the Baltic sea.

