

**Bird migration at
Puise Sadam, Matsalu, Estonia
autumn 2025**



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In Estonia, three migration sites are regularly occupied in the autumn: Põõsaspea (mainly sea migration at a coastal migration site), Sõrve (mainly land migration at a coastal migration site) and Puise Sadam (ditto). Other posts are staffed either mainly in the spring (e.g. Ristna on Hiiumaa) or also in the autumn, but still too irregularly (e.g. Kabli).

Puise Sadam is located at the end of the Puise Peninsula SSW of Haapsalu in the west of mainland Estonia. After leaving the tip of the peninsula, birds fly either to the other side of Matsalu bay (5.5 km), or to the island of Muhu further away (15 km). The peninsula is oriented NNE-SSW. A description of the site can be found here: <https://www.trektellen.nl/site/info/1653>

Because the focus at Puise Sadam is on land migration, sufficient attention is not always paid to species flying over the water, such as ducks, gulls, terns and waders. If the land migration is strong and the post is staffed with only one person (which happened this autumn on 24 out of 42 days), there is simply less time to look over the sea. As a result, the numbers of these species groups can vary widely each year. The description below of the autumn migration in 2025 is based on counts entered in the Trektellen app. No additional information was sought outside this app. The chance that serious counting will take place that has not been recorded via Trektellen has now become very small. After a brief general overview, most species groups are discussed.

General.

Counts at Puise generally last 5 hours: from half an hour before to 4.5 hours after sunrise. That has not always been successful. Sometimes the weather was bad (fog, rain, too strong wind), sometimes people were lacking time or the observers were at Kabli migration post. Between July 27 and November 15, the post was occupied for almost 160 hours, distributed over the months as follows: July 5:00 hours, August 15:01 hours, September 69:45 hours, October 55:51 hours and November 2:46 hours.

The observers this fall were (in alphabetical order): David Bratt, Allar Broberg, Margus Ellermaa, Tom Jager, Bert Kasius, Tarvo Valkar, Howard Vaughan, Cees Witkamp.

A total of 254,103 birds were recorded in the above-mentioned period. This means an average of 1.593 migrating birds per hour. From these more than 180.000 were seen in September. 153 species were seen migrating. The prevailing picture this autumn is of a quite low migration intensity for the most common species, with the exception of tits and the lesser spotted woodpecker.

Discussion of the most important species groups and species.

Few Greater White-fronted and bean geese were seen. The number of Greylag Geese, 743, was the highest number on migration counts for this post since 2016. The more than 120 birds that passed by on October 15 and 18 are late for this post. The Barnacle Goose did reasonably well with more than 5,000 ex. Mute Swan and Whooper Swan also did reasonably well, the Bewicks Swan was virtually absent. The migration of ducks was not very noticeable this autumn. A few exceptions were Eurasian Wigeon, Eurasian Teal, Common Pochard, Common Merganser (aka Goosander) and Red-breasted Merganser, which were more often recorded than in other years. This also applied to the Velvet Scoter, of which 160 were seen coming high from inland on October 29.

With somewhat more than 22,000 the number of Common Wood Pigeons was not exceptional. There have been single days in the past with a similar number in previous years. This year the Common Crane migration mainly took place between September 21th and 27th. During that period 12,748 birds were counted.

15 species of waders were identified as migrants, of most species less than 10 individuals were seen. The most common species were Northern Lapwing (240), Common Snipe (38) and Wood Sandpiper (35).

Terns were seen very rarely, only the 16 Caspian Terns are worth mentioning, making it the most counted tern. Among the gulls, European Herring Gull, Common Gull and Great Black-backed Gulls were recorded in rather high numbers compared with other years.

Divers mainly occur in spring, this autumn there were 40 Black-throated and 3 Red-throated Divers. The number of Great Cormorants was slightly higher than in recent years, with just over 2,800 individuals. Significantly more (242) Great Egrets were recorded than in previous years. Of these, 18 flew north. Strong migration like on October 27, 2023 (92 birds including a group of 62) was not seen this year. The number of Grey Herons was fairly normal with 111 individuals. Of these, 12 flew north. Just like with the Great Egret, it is sometimes difficult to determine to what extent herons really move away or settle behind us or fly back later in the day.

Puise is not the place to go to see raptor migration, that has been clear for years. Despite this, 180 were seen, divided into 8 species. Overall, it wasn't a bad year for most birds of prey, with almost all species showing similar or higher numbers than in previous years. The most common raptor was the Eurasian Sparrowhawk with 99 birds. Hen Harrier did well with 16 compared to a maximum of 9 in previous years.

While the Great Spotted Woodpecker migrated in full force in the two previous years (with 400 and 442 migrants in 2023 and 2024 respectively), the species virtually failed this year with only 32. On the other hand, the migration of the Lesser Spotted Woodpecker was much stronger than in recent years. A total of 140 birds were seen migrating, with a daily maximum of 19. The 5 White-backed Woodpeckers are also worth mentioning. There was a small influx of the latter species into Estonia this year. With only 2 Common Kestrels, 5 Merlins, 7 Eurasian Hobbies and one Peregrine Falcon there was not much to tell about the falcons. The 7 Great Grey Shrikes this season meant the best autumn for this post on Trektellen.

All Estonian corvids are migratory to some extent. The least obvious is the Eurasian Magpie, of which 16 were recorded in 2025, comparable to the 18 from 2024. Most magpies arrived from the north, stayed around the post for a shorter or longer time and disappeared. The question is whether they actually crossed. The same also applies to the Northern Raven. With 148 specimens it was a good season for this species, but with a distribution of 82 to the south and 66 to the north, the migration pattern does not become any clearer. Ravens regularly arrived from the north in groups of more than 20 individuals, passed the counting station, circled above the end of the peninsula for a while and then often flew back north again. The same picture with the Northern Nutcracker: at least 14 of the 23 birds ultimately flew north. The Eurasian Jay had its best year since 2020 with more than 1,500 birds. Of these, almost 900 eventually flew visibly north. During good migration days, birds flying back north sometimes encountered other groups that were still on their way to the tip and then joined them. This made the jay's migratory behavior seem very messy. Due to a lack of

time it was not possible to properly follow all returning groups, but it was noted that some of these groups continued in a more easterly course along the north side of the bay after leaving the peninsula. The migration of Northern Jackdaws, Rooks and Hooded Crows was weak this autumn. Most Hooded Crows were seen in small groups or together with Rooks and/or Northern Jackdaws. 97 Bohemian Waxwings were recorded. Not much compared to, for example, 2023 (when 440 were seen) but still much better than the 2 from last autumn.

The introduction already states that it was a very good tit year. Numbers of almost all tit species passing were higher than we are used to on Puise. This included the Eurasian Blue Tit, Great Tit, Willow Tit, White-headed Long-tailed Tit and Bearded Reedling. More than 111,000 birds of the Blue Tit were counted, with a new national daily record of 32,648 birds. The first wave of migrating birds showed up around the 8th of September with circa 11.000 birds and a high share of birds flying in an opposite direction. The second wave was on the 13th with around 13.000 birds and on the 18th the already mentioned 32.000+ passed the tip. The amount of returning birds that day was nearly none. From the beginning of October on the numbers decreased from more than 1.000 on some days to hundreds or even tens beginning November. For Great Tit on a good day more than 1.500 birds pass the station. In autumn 2025 five of these days were noted, resulting in a total of 17.617 migrating birds. Unfortunately the daily maximum from 2019 (18.446 birds) remained. The Willow-Tit was seen with a daily maximum of 52 birds (seasonal total 232), the White-headed Long-tailed Tit with more than 2,100 on one day (and a season total of 7,672) and the Bearded Reedling with a total of 310 and a daily record of 147. The latter is a national record on Trektellen.

Woodlark and Eurasian Skylark showed lower numbers than usual, as did Sand Martins and Western House Martins. The Barn Swallow did better, with almost 4,100 recorded, comparable to 2024. The last barn swallows were seen on October 21. What was striking about the last migrants was that solitary barn swallows joined groups of fieldfares. This was seen four times on October 19 and 21, although it cannot be completely ruled out that these were not all different birds.

Warblers are generally seen in small numbers, often moving from bush to bush around the migration site. A total of 8 species were seen, of which the Common Firecrest was new as a migrant for this location. The Goldcrest had a very good season with almost 1,000 birds. For this species, the numbers only approach reality when there are several counters, otherwise they will simply slip through the stream of tits.

8 Eurasian Nuthatches and 19 Eurasian Treecreepers were recorded. The latter flew along with the enormous numbers of tits, the former seemed to be less connected to them.

The number of almost 600 Common Starlings was low, years with 10,000 or more are normal. Thrushes generally did well this fall. The number of Song Thrushes (111), Mistle Thrushes (359), Redwings (1013) and Common Blackbirds (740) was significantly higher than normal, especially in the last three. On the other hand, the numbers of Fieldfares were somewhat disappointing at less than 6,000. We had no really good days for this species this fall.

Flycatchers, redstarts and wheatears were mainly seen flying from bush to bush or on the wires. A total of 7 species were seen, of which the European Robin was the most common with 6 birds.

Some House Sparrows were occasionally seen migrating. House Sparrows breed around the migration site, which sometimes makes it difficult to distinguish them from migrants. More than

350 Eurasian Tree Sparrows were recorded as migrants, a slightly higher number than normal. Dunnocks were spotted more often than average, with a seasonal total above 100 for the first time.

Relatively few Western Yellow Wagtails were seen this fall. With fewer than 200 birds, the species did much worse than, for example, 2024 with almost 900 birds. A single Citrine Wagtail was recorded as a migrant. The number of White Wagtails was also disappointing at 140. The same applies to Tree Pipits, of which 50 have just been seen or heard. The Meadow Pipit, on the other hand, was noticed more often.

The number of Eurasian Chaffinches (including chaffinch/brambling and finch spec) is between 15,000 and 25,000 in most years. Also this year with c. 19,500. About 4,000 Bramblings were counted, almost half of them on one day. Hawfinch migration was low with 99 birds this autumn, especially compared to the almost 400 last autumn with a comparable number of counting hours. The 425 Northern Bullfinches are a normal number for this site. Slightly more Common Rosefinches were seen than in previous years, comparable numbers of European Greenfinch, more Common Linnets, European Goldfinches and Eurasian Siskins and also some Redpolls after the 0 year of 2024. Red Crossbill migration was virtually absent this autumn. With 7 records it was a good year for the European Serin, but here it could be that one specimen was present around the site on several days. Yellowhammer and Common Reed Bunting were the most frequently observed buntings. The numbers (254 and 345) correspond well with the numbers from 2023. Only 4 Snow Buntings is a low number.

The icing on the cake.

Rare species or species irregularly passing by that can be seen as the icing on the cake, either actively migrating or on site around the migration post:

a Little Egret (12th sighting for Estonia), a Caspian Gull, the first Eurasian Hoopoe for the migration site, a late (October 15) Common Rosefinch, a Humes Leaf Warbler, a juvenile Rosy Starling (the second after a specimen in 2022), first migrating Common Firecrest, several Citrine Wagtails around the harbour, Parrot Crossbills, a Western Bullfinch and the first migrating European Rock Pipit.