



Leppemärgid

- | | | | |
|--|------------------------|--|------------------------------|
| | Surfaced road | | Border of SPA |
| | Gravel road | | Rääpina hiking trail (41 km) |
| | Stream, ditches | | View tower |
| | Building | | Beach |
| | Forest | | Harbour |
| | Arable land, grassland | | Information billboard |
| | Lake | | |

0 500 m 1000 m

Visitor's reminder

When visiting special conservation area please keep in mind that:



- you are passing through the home of birds. Therefore, please move only along existing trails; prefer marked hiking trail and observation towers. That way you will not disturb nesting birds. In order to ensure the safety of nestlings and young animals, take your dog along only when leashed.
- camping and making campfire is allowed only in places specially designed for that purpose. When leaving the camping place, please ensure that it is left behind in such a condition that you would like to find upon arrival. Put the trash into trash can or take it with you. Regard the property and structures in the SPA in a prudent manner.
- remember that there are also other persons visiting the area and local residents who may appreciate some peace and quiet.

Should you notice any damage caused to nature or any site of interest, please notify Põlva County Environmental Department thereof (by calling +372 799 8199). Major violations have to be reported to the Police (dial 110) or Environmental Inspectorate (dial 1313).

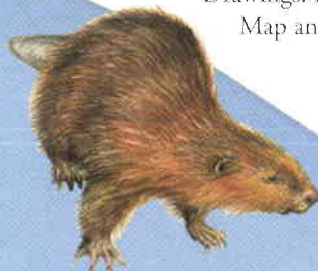
Composing of the booklet is financed by European Commission in frame of LIFE-Nature project "Conservation of Natura 2000 biotopes in Rääpina polder"

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Beaver



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Rääpina Polder Special Protection Area



MINISTRY OF THE ENVIRONMENT

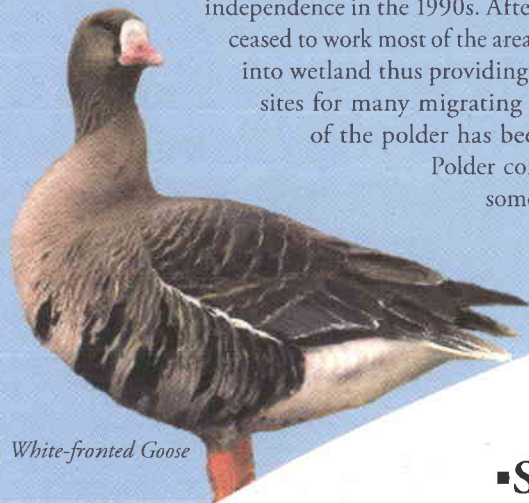
History

In the 1960s-1970s the greatest land improvement object in Estonia – Rāpina polder – was established in grasslands flooded by Lake Lämmijärv and surrounding swamp areas a few kilometres east from Rāpina. Polder consists of a dam at the shore of Lake Lämmijärv, which prevents flooding the fields, and drainage ditches with pumping stations, which are used for discharge of excess water. Due to the polder most of the land was used as grassland during Soviet times, but cereal and vegetables have also been successfully grown here. Active land use of the polder decreased after Estonia re-gained its independence in the 1990s. After the pumping stations ceased to work most of the area became flooded or turned into wetland thus providing suitable habitats and halting sites for many migrating and nesting birds. Today most of the polder has been gradually taken into use again.



□ Lapwing

Polder consists mostly of grasslands, but there is some farmland in western region of the polder as well.



□ White-fronted Goose

Special protection area

Due to its rich avifauna and rare species Rāpina polder belongs to the list of internationally important bird areas and has been included in the list of over European Natura 2000 network areas. In order to protect the values present in the polder area, Rāpina Polder Special Protection Area was established here in 2005. Total area of the SPA is 1498 ha, of which ca 1000 ha constitutes the polder and the rest of it is covered by forest in the west and lakeside reed bed in the east. Polder consists mainly of grasslands with alternating groves, coppices and shrubs. The richest and most valuable bird areas of the polder are found in wet and flooded grasslands in the east.

Rich avifauna

Major value of Rāpina polder SPA is its rich avifauna. 202 bird species from 18 orders have been observed here in the course of time, which is remarkable in view of the small size of the area. The total of 48 bird species of Europe-wide importance (more than 20 of them nesting), i.e. species entered in Annex I of the European Union Bird Directive have been encountered here.

One of the most remarkable species is Corn Crake, whose population is fading in Europe. Although it was considered a typical species of the cultural landscape of the region in the early 20th century, the abundance of Corn Crake has been greatly decreased here also. Rāpina polder is assumedly the best habitat of Corn Crakes in Estonia. Another significant species found in the SPA – black-headed Little Gull – is hardly noticed by most of people,



□ Roedeer

Important migration stop for birds

Due to its favourable location Rāpina polder presents an important migration stop and corridor for migrating birds. In case of an early spring first geese arrive already at the end of March and leave not before mid-May. The most numerous is White-fronted Goose with up to 9000 individuals. Due to wet grasslands many Charadriiformes and Anatidae halt here.

The peak time of autumn migration is at the second half of September. The most numerous birds are small passerines, primarily

Chaffinch and Barn Swallow, but Wood Pigeon, Crane and Lapwing are also very common. During migration

period more than one million birds pass through Rāpina polder.



□ Common Teal

because it is easily confused with common Black-Headed Gull. Polder wetlands are also inhabited by colonies of close relatives of gulls – Black Terns. In Estonia Rāpina polder represents a crucial nesting place for both Black Tern and Little Gull.



□ Little Gull

As for rare birds, Bittern, Ruff, Short-eared Owl and Lesser Spotted Eagle have settled here. Favourable feeding conditions attract several predator species – besides nesting Lesser Spotted Eagle and Common Buzzard one can often see White-tailed Eagle, Osprey and Honey Buzzard here.

Other animals at the polder

The flooded areas of the SPA provide suitable habitat for amphibians which come to spawn here. It has been estimated that more than 300 thousand frogs might be croaking there in spring. Beaver is the most remarkable mammal species of the polder. Their dams and lodges as well as other traces of their activities can be observed at the shores of several ditches. As for other mammals roes, foxes, raccoon dogs, minks and otters are frequently encountered in the polder.

For hikers

Rāpina polder SPA has dense road infrastructure: asphalt road leads to recreation area and beach, field areas are divided by narrow soil tracks. This enables to observe rich avifauna of the SPA on foot, by bicycle, on horseback and by car. Rāpina hiking trail passes through the polder to the extent of 3.5 km. This marked hiking trail with total length of 40 km can be passed on foot and by bicycle and it introduces the most important natural values in the vicinity of Rāpina. In order to provide better overview of the area two bird observation towers have been erected on the polder and informative billboards.

Life in the polder area is the busiest and the noisiest at the end of April and in May, when thousands of migrating birds halt here and nesting birds are arrived. Nights are loaded with non-stop frog concerts. Loud “sawing” by Corn Crake and chirrup grasshoppers are the commonest background sounds in June. The best time to visit the SPA in autumn is in September and early October, during the peak time of autumn migration.