



*Little ringed plover*



*Little ringed plover nest*

## Watch your step at the seaside!

The busiest time of the year at the beaches is about to begin. The expert Vilnis Skuja from the Slitere National Park (Latvia) shall tell you about the life on the sea side, and what rules must be observed if you want to have nature-friendly holidays near the sea.

The sea has always drawn people to its shores. This attraction is the most evident, when you look at the beaches in big cities, where people stroll calmly, jog, collect ambers, surf and go kiteboarding. Only in rare cases, when it is not summer, we say that the beach is empty. That means – there are not many people at the beach. Just people. And that's when our ego comes out, because the beach is never empty.

The life at the beach goes on, even when there are no people around. Besides some specific microorganisms, the beach harbors its own flora. Here, you can see plants that have managed to adapt to the salty environment and that can resist constant gusts of wind-blown sand. The fauna of the beach is represented by several spider and insect species that dwell in the sand, and you can even come across tiny crayfish in the wet sand of seashore. All these are tiny organisms and there is a multitude of them, thus it is hard to tread them down to the point of extinction. Nevertheless, it is a different story when it comes to larger animals the number of which varies between tens and hundreds. For example, specially protected natterjack toads tend to propagate on specific sea side areas. Natterjack toads lay strings of eggs in the sea side pools, where the tadpoles spend approximately a month before turning into tiny toads. Afterwards, they spend some more time on the shore before finally moving on. While taking a walk along such beach which is covered with tiny natterjack toads, we can hardly imagine that our every third step is likely to kill a small, only half a centimeter-long toad. Some birds like plovers (*Charadrius*) and terns (*Sternidae*)

try to nest near estuaries where the sea side area is wider. Constant flow of people often forces them to abandon their nests which usually look like just holes in the sand. An open nest can be destroyed by a crow, the eggs might overheat in the sun or grow cold. Thus, in the last twenty years the entire tern colony has abandoned Irbe river estuary due to human activity, the sea side birds no longer try to nest at the Cape Kolka. The number of nesting plovers at the sea side of the Gulf of Riga has also decreased.

Thus, the question arises – what can we do to get along with the nature and to ensure that our walks do not diminish versatility of nature on the sea side? What can we do to avoid becoming the killers of toads and destroyers of bird nests?

- 1) observe the directions on the informative signs placed at the sea side territory;
- 2) be careful when choosing the spot for spreading the beach towel. If you notice that some bird becomes too agitated in the area where you intend to set in, it is worth to walk a bit further away from this area, because it is possible that there is a tern nest nearby;
- 3) in the summertime, while walking along the sea side, keep your dog on the leash;
- 4) do not drive your car into the sea side;
- 5) in the first weeks of summer, when walking along the sea side, keep closer to the water line;
- 6) do not ride a horse in the specially protected sea side territories.

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#Slitere\_national\_park #Latvia

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*Natterjack toad*