



Photo: Madars Mileiko

Cape Kolka in autumn

In autumn, the migration of birds at Cape Kolka is full of surprises. In autumn, the migration of birds is a large-scale event. The bottle-neck effect, which caused high concentration of birds at Cape Kolka during their migration in spring, is no longer at play. In autumn, the travelling birds move slower, they tend to stay in the suitable feeding grounds for a longer time. There are many new specimens among them, which come from the territories, which are not densely populated. Therefore, they are bold and are not afraid of humans. It allows us to observe these birds from a very short distance. For instance, there are brent geese (*Branta bernicla*) which pluck algae from the sea right next to the shore line or Calidris (*Calidris*), which search for the food in the algae brought to the shore just a few metres from their observers.

The number of visitors at Cape Kolka decreases dramatically once the autumn arrives enabling birds to rest and to feed undisturbed, and at the same time allowing observers to watch the birds without hindrance. For the same reason, it is recommended to visit Cape Kolka on the workday. In autumn, different species of geese and ducks migrate intensively over the cape. When migrating, dark and black ducks throw a circle around Cape Kolka and can be often seen from the distance of only hundred metres. This season, even the king eider (*Somateria spectabilis*), has been observed. Loons (*Gavia sp.*), grebes (*Podiceps sp.*) and great cormorants (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) are also migrating over the cape. The

most common are the red-throated loons (*Gavia stellate*) and black-throated loons (*Gavia arctica*), while in October 2004 a rare yellow-billed loon (*Gavia adamsii*) was observed here. Near the cape, you can often encounter great crested grebes (*Podiceps cristatus*). By the end of September to the beginning of October, exotic long-tailed ducks (*Clangula hyemalis*) appear which often feed approximately ten metres from the shore.

In autumn, different birds of prey migrate over the sea and are extremely tired upon arrival to the shore, and therefore they often settle in the nearest tree, where you can observe them and take photos. Eurasian sparrowhawks (*Accipiter nisus*) are often present here, but with some luck, you might even come across a peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus*). The invasions of red-footed

Bird count at Cape Kolka, an activity in the Baltic Wings project.
Photo: Ruslans Matrozis



falcons (*Falco vespertinus*) caused significant interest. It was particularly pronounced in autumn 2019, when within one day several hundreds of these rare birds moved across Cape Kolka. In the second part of September, the migration of common cranes (*Grus grus*) was observed, when hundreds of cranes crossed the cape.

The number of wading birds depends on the silts of rotting algae on the beach. They attract several species of birds: dunlins (*Calidris alpina*), curlew sandpipers (*Calidris ferruginea*), broad-billed sandpipers (*Calidris falcinellus*) etc. In the beach sand, next to the water line, common ringed plovers (*Charadrius hiaticula*) and little ringed plovers (*Charadrius dubius*), ruddy turnstones (*Arenaria interpres*), European golden plovers (*Pluvialis apricaria*) and grey plovers (*Pluvialis squatarola*) search for food. At the beginning of autumn, you can observe red-necked phalaropes (*Phalaropus lobatus*), and in the late autumn – even rare red phalaropes (*Phalaropus fulicarius*).

In autumn, usually you can come across parasitic skua (*Stercorarius parasiticus*), however, you could also encounter other species of skua.

Gulls use the cape as both a resting and feeding ground. Here, you can encounter all gull species *Laridae* that are typical for Latvia. It is interesting to observe how in autumn large flocks of little gulls (*Hydrocoloeus minutus*) fly across Cape Kolka. Large number of terns (*Sternidae*) migrate at the beginning of autumn.

In autumn, you can observe such species as common murre (*Uria aalge*), razorbills (*Alca torda*) and black guillemots (*Cepphus grille*). Powerful optics are required to observe these birds, since they do not come close to the shore.

Pigeons (*Columbus sp.*), long-eared owls (*Asio otus*) and peckers (*Picidae*), common kingfishers (*Alcedo atthis*) and passerine birds (*Passeriformes*), e.g. pipits (*Anthus sp.*), finches (*Fringillidae*),

crossbills (*Loxia sp.*), various titmice (*Paridae*), long-tailed tits (*Aegithalos caudatus*) and buntings (*Emberiza sp.*) also migrate over Cape Kolka.

In winter, the number of encountered species decreases significantly. During harsh winters, the sea freezes, but until then it is possible to observe mute swans (*Cygnus olor*), common eiders (*Somateria mollissima*), long-tailed ducks (*Clangula hyemalis*), black and dark scoters (*Melanitta sp.*), common goldeneyes (*Bucephala clangula*), merguses (*Mergus sp.*). Further away from the shore, red-throated loons (*Gavia stellate*) and great crested grebes (*Podiceps cristatus*) catch fish. European herring gulls (*Larus argentatus*) always keep close to them. Here, you might often come across great black-backed gulls (*Larus marinus*). A big rarity is glaucous gull (*Larus hyperboreus*), which was last encountered in 2000. Moreover, even when the sea is frozen, there are birds to observe at Cape Kolka, because here you will have a chance to encounter golden eagles (*Aquila chrysaetos*) and white-tailed eagles (*Haliaeetus albicilla*). Various species of titmice (*Paridae*) search for food in the pines of the cape. The birds of crow family (*Corvidae*) can be seen here the entire year. By the end of winter, in February, you can hear the first migrating Eurasian skylarks (*Alauda arvensis*), rarer, during warm winters, you might have a chance to encounter a woodlark (*Lullula arborea*).

The record keeping of migratory birds at Cape Kolka is conducted within the framework of the project “Baltic Wings – Nature tourism for sustainable rural economic development” of the Central Baltic Sea region program. The aim of the project is to establish high-quality places for observing nature objects and birds in Sweden, Åland Islands, Finland and Latvia (Kurzeme seashore), and to encourage cooperation for the development of sustainable nature tourism in the Central Baltic region.

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Snow buntings on the beach. Photo: Ruslans Matrozis



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