



# Honeyguide

## WILDLIFE HOLIDAYS

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**Latvia**  
**20 – 27 May 2015**

### **Participants**

David and Stephanie Bennett  
Peter and Sue Burge  
Desmond and Deborah Cassidi  
Malcolm and Helen Crowder  
Ken Leggett  
Colin Taylor  
Susie Turner

### **Leaders/guides**

From Honeyguide: Rob Macklin, who also wrote the report.  
From Baltic Wildlife: Karlis Millers. In Riga: Laura Žukovska.  
<http://www.balticwildlife.eu/>

In Smārde we stayed at the hotel Valguma Pasaule <http://valgumapasaule.lv>  
and in Kolka we stayed at the Hotel Zitari.

All the images in this report are from the holiday week, authors identified by initials.

Cover photo montage, clockwise: crested tit at nest (DB), globe flower (HC),  
map butterfly (MC), common cranes (RM), wild pansies (HC), Kolka Cape (ST).

Below: the group in Kolka (RM).



As with all Honeyguide holidays, part of the price was put towards a local conservation project, in this case for the Latvian Owl Research Society. Gaidis Grandāns from the Society gave the group a presentation about owls in Latvia and what is being done to protect them. The conservation contribution of £40 per person was supplemented by gift aid through the Honeyguide Wildlife Charitable Trust and rounded up, resulting in a donation of €817 (£600).

This, and other recent donations, has brought the total for all conservation contributions through Honeyguide since 1991 to £100,974 as at the end of May.

## INTRODUCTION



The second Honeyguide trip to Latvia enjoyed somewhat changeable weather with temperatures in the mid-teens for the most part. The first part of the trip was based at the superb Valguma Pasaule hotel on the edge of Kemerī National Park, west of Riga, with the hotel gardens hosting such delights as pied and red-breasted flycatchers, wood warblers, redstarts and breeding grey-headed woodpeckers outside the hotel restaurant. Site visits were based on the Kemerī National Park and at Dundurī Meadows we had a great afternoon seeing cranes, three red-footed falcons, red-backed shrikes and a wild boar. At Lake Kanieris there were 200 migrating black terns, three white-winged black terns and a sighting of a bittern in flight.

The second part of the week was based at the hotel Zitari in Kolka, making an ideal base for migration watches at Kolka Cape and for exploring the Slītere National Park. On the way we stopped off at Mersrags where we were able to get great views of three citrine wagtails. Migration was slow at Kolka although the ringing nets turned up a pair of superb hawfinches and a scarlet rosefinch. A couple of the group were lucky enough to have good views of a pair of bluethroats. Hoopoes were nesting in a ruined building and there were four bee-eaters over a few days. Offshore there were good numbers of black-throated divers, common and velvet scoters, eider ducks and just three long-tailed ducks. Slītere National Park turned up excellent views of a pair of lesser spotted eagles, a singing greenish warbler and excellent plants including globeflowers, bogbean and round-leaved sundew. The week ended with a tour of old Riga and included a tour of the Art Nouveau quarter – a great week.

## DAILY DIARY

### Wednesday May 20 – To Latvia

A short delay of 30 minutes at Luton before our Airbus 320 took off for Riga where we arrived in the early evening. We were greeted at the airport by Laura and Karlis from Baltic Wildlife before boarding the two minibuses and were soon speeding off on our forty minute drive to our hotel at Valguma Pasaule. On the way we saw a great white egret, mute swan, hooded crow and several swallows. A splendid three course meal was followed by an introduction to the tour by Laura and Karlis. The weather was forecast to be unsettled until the weekend but nevertheless we looked forward to our explorations in the coming days!

### Thursday May 21 – Hotel Valguma Pasaule and Dundurī Meadows at Kemerī National Park

The day dawned overcast, windy and distinctly cool but a few hardy souls took the opportunity to explore the hotel grounds before breakfast. Six goosanders, including five stunning males, were sheltering on the far side of the lake, two spotted flycatchers were hunting for insects and a garden warbler sang from the cover of thick scrub. Many plants were in flower including masses of oxlips, the striking herb paris, bright yellow archangel, water avens and wood cranesbill. Colin and Ken reported a brood of goosanders on the lake, a female hawfinch right by the hotel and a calling wryneck across the river.

After a hearty breakfast we headed off into the woods hoping the weather would improve, which thankfully it did by late morning. As we departed, goldcrests and a great tit were singing and a male pied flycatcher perched up in full view on the hotel windowsill. We walked alongside the lake, the Valguma Ezero, where many wood warblers were in song along with willow warblers, chiffchaffs and blackcaps, and Colin pointed out a nuthatch gathering food for its ever-hungry brood.

A female crossbill perched right out in the open atop a pine tree and then, unexpectedly, five black-throated divers flew high over the woods. Many more plants were added to our growing tally, the most impressive being fly honeysuckle, Suffolk lungwort, wood sorrel plus both white and yellow anemones.

Two red-breasted flycatchers were in full song on the woodland edge but proved very difficult to track down in the canopy. Coming out of the wood into an open meadow we were delighted to encounter sheets of flowering oxlips. A common buzzard was hovering over the grassland and we watched it swoop to catch a small mammal and make off with it, probably to feed hungry chicks. Another raptor hovered into view, this one a dark honey buzzard, a wryneck called from the woodland edge and seven more black-throated divers flew over – presumably migrants taking a short cut across the land. Swifts and swallows were hawking insects in the skies above, another majestic great white egret flew over, our first cuckoo called and a woodlark sang alongside a skylark above the meadow. By this time the rain had abated and it was quickly brightening up – time for our first butterfly, a wood white resting and well camouflaged on flowering meadow saxifrage.



Wood warbler (DB)

We decided to walk back to the hotel alongside the river where we encountered our first singing thrush nightingale, a calling grey-headed woodpecker, another cuckoo and great views of two white-headed long-tailed tits of the northern race *Aegithalos caudatus caudatus*. A female pied flycatcher and a tree creeper were located in the riverside trees and as we approached the hotel a sparrowhawk was soaring overhead plus we had great views of a pair of wood warblers nest building on the woodland floor and yet another singing pied flycatcher. Time for lunch after a splendid introduction to the wildlife of western Latvia.

In the early afternoon we boarded the buses for the short drive to the Dunduri Meadows in Kemer National Park. On the way we saw our first red-backed shrike, a stunning male, several white wagtails, a whimbrel, a wood sandpiper and three very confident little ringed plovers. As we entered the meadows both thrush nightingale and grasshopper warbler were singing from deep cover and we were astonished to see an adult wild boar foraging on the woodland edge – and this in the early afternoon!

Our first major stop was overlooking a large reedbed and we were delighted when 19 cranes flew over calling loudly, an amazingly evocative call. A male marsh harrier quartered the reeds while many hundreds of hirundines, mainly house martins, hawked for insects in the skies above. The hirundines were joined by three red-footed falcons, including a stunning adult male, showing full details of their plumage as they too harvested the insects and dragonflies. Two great white egrets flew over the meadows where a pair of whooper swans had set up their territory but our attention was soon turned to the bird song emanating from the reedbed. Two great reed warblers were chuntering away from deep cover and we had good views of a Savi's warbler singing from reed stems. More singing birds included reed warbler, thrush nightingale, cuckoo and reed bunting plus a male red-backed shrike perched up in full view.



Red-backed shrike (DB)

After all this excitement we drove on towards the observation tower, passing an open meadow where a hunting marsh harrier startled four goldeneye and a male teal. At the tower itself four more great white egrets were feeding in with the Heck cattle and Konik ponies, a pair of buzzards displayed over the forest and a golden oriole sang from the woodland edge. At least seven red-backed shrikes were perched up in full view on a nearby fence but our attention was quickly taken by a black woodpecker in flight across the open fields before disappearing into the forest.

Time to head for home as 18 lapwings flew up from the surrounding fields and our first raven flew past with two hooded crows. Colin then spotted a large raptor which was quickly identified as a lesser spotted eagle soaring right over our heads – a great way to end the day's explorations. An enjoyable evening meal at the hotel was enlivened by a grey-headed woodpecker going into its nest hole right outside the restaurant window and our first redstart of the trip, a splendid male in full view in his resplendent summer plumage.

## Friday May 22 – Kemeru National Park Administration Centre and Lake Kanieris

Several of the group explored the hotel grounds before breakfast, turning up five goosanders and four goldeneye on the lake, 15 whooper swans flying over, three common sandpipers on the river, several singing siskins and a very obliging singing male redstart right outside the hotel entrance.

Our first destination of the day was to a wet woodland site within Kemeru National Park, a favourite haunt for a variety of woodpeckers. We were to be disappointed on the latter but were well compensated by other birds on view. A scarlet (or common) rosefinch was in full song as we arrived and a smart lesser whitethroat flew right over us. Laura had arranged for the group to be filmed, in connection with Baltic Wildlife's start-up funding, and Ivans duly obliged as the group began to look for more wildlife. Several wood warblers were singing well along with chiffchaffs and willow warblers and one of the wood warblers was in full view with its whole body quivering as it sang! Temperatures had now climbed to the dizzy heights of 17C and this had tempted out singing blackcap, spotted flycatcher and cuckoo. Butterflies began to appear, first several lemon-yellow male brimstones followed by our first green-veined white, several green hairstreaks and a single map butterfly. While we were having coffee Colin watched a crested tit diving into its nest hole in a rotting silver birch tree and we all took great delight in watching the bird go back and forth with food. Before we left this area a treecreeper was spotted right at the top of a roadside tree, a song thrush broke into song and a garden warbler put in an unexpected appearance.

We decided to have lunch at one of the observation towers overlooking Lake Kanieris and Rob drove the bus to the tower to unload the lunch and chairs. On the walk in from the road and through the shelterbelt there were yet more wood warblers, chiffchaffs and willow warblers in song while a bittern boomed loudly from the reedbed. The track was lined with flowering oxlips, Solomon's seal, white and yellow anemones plus ramsons or wild garlic, while attending butterflies included wood white and green hairstreak. On the edge of the reedbed an area of drier grassland was being invaded by juniper scrub (rare in the UK) and growing under the scrub were delightful stands of birdseye primrose and common milkwort. A large number of dragonflies were on the wing, mostly brilliant emeralds, but also four-spotted chasers and a single ruby whiteface.



Green hairstreak (HC)



The viewing tower at Lake Kanieris (RM)



Adder's-tongue fern (SB)

We had lunch below the tower to the sounds of chuntering great reed warblers and a booming bittern. Nearby in the shallows a pair of mute swans were closely guarding seven cygnets while out on the vast open lake were over 200 migrating black terns with three spectacular white-winged black terns. At least seven marsh harriers were quartering the reeds but not particularly alarming the many nesting black-headed gulls and common terns. A score of great-crested grebes were also on show and we were lucky enough to find a red-necked grebe with them. On the way back to the buses parked on the road Sue really came into her own finding adder's-tongue fern, leaves of early purple orchid and especially pleasing flowering coralroot bittercress. A real bonus as we were about to leave was sighting a hunting hobby taking advantage of the many dragonflies.

Our final stop of the day was to another observation tower on the north side of Lake Kanieris. As we walked along the boardwalk we had good views of four whinchats and found toothwort growing out of the base of a tree. Out on the lake were a score each of pochards and tufted ducks then a booming bittern was followed by another bird taking flight and flying low over the reeds with most of the group getting good views. Deep within the reeds both great reed warbler and Savi's warbler were in full song and another hobby delighted us by hunting dragonflies in front of the tower. We walked back on the boardwalk through wet forest and Karlis managed to tempt out a firecrest which showed briefly before bursting into song. Finally an adult white-tailed eagle sailed high over the forest providing a tantalising view for just two of our group – a great end to an amazing day in Latvia!

### Saturday May 23 – Mersrags and Kolka Cape

An overcast and chilly start to the day as we left Valguma Pasaule and drove north. Our first stop was an area of marsh and reedbeds on the coast at Mersrags where citrine wagtails had recently been reported.



Blue-headed yellow wagtail (DB)

Most of the group managed to pick a way through the reeds disturbing many bright dark-headed yellow wagtails (race *thunbergi*) and we did get a very good view of a blue-headed yellow wagtail (race: *flava*). Two whinchats were feeding on the open marsh and several great white egrets and grey herons took to the air while sedge warblers and reed buntings sang from dense cover. It was not long, however, before we located our quarry with two male citrine wagtails engaged in a territorial dispute before the adult male perched up in full view. A female bird then appeared and also perched up in the reeds in full view – brilliant! We then came across two wood sandpipers feeding together on an open pool before getting brief views of two red-throated pipits as they flew over our heads. Offshore three little terns and two common terns were fishing along the shoreline and many shelducks were on the sea. A superb morning and time for coffee as light rain began to fall.

We were hopeful of an improvement in the weather as we continued north to Kolka Cape and so it proved with no rain at all in this area. As we approached Kolka six common buzzards and a honey buzzard were flying low over the forest. At the Cape we had our picnic lunch by the information centre before walking down to the shore. Most of the activity was happening offshore and after a summer-plumaged dunlin had flown past we quickly picked up many sea ducks. The first group turned out to be a party of 15 eiders including several brightly coloured males then we began to find large numbers of common scoters, both on the sea and flying north out of the Gulf of Riga and into the Baltic Sea. Closer inspection revealed the presence of 20+ velvet scoters, displaying their white wing-bars in flight, at least six black-throated divers and a flypast Sandwich tern. A large bird of prey then drifted in across the gulf being continually harassed by the local gulls and which turned out to be a very dark honey buzzard!

Time to check-in at the Hotel Zitari before returning to the Cape in mid-afternoon. We quickly spotted over 60 yellow wagtails feeding at various spots in the area as three linnets flew over and a scarlet rosefinch was in full song. Both marsh warblers and whitethroats were singing from the scrubby areas as Karlis erected his mist nets ready for ringing the following day. We then walked back down to the shore, passing a sluggish but very much alive slowworm on the path, to be treated by close-up views of a full summer plumaged black-throated diver and a male common scoter. Scoter numbers then increased to over 100 common and 60 velvet and we were fortunate enough to find three long-tailed ducks on the sea and also relatively close-in. Plants were few and far between in this sandy area but we did find round-leaved wintergreen on the dune slacks. Several of the group decided to walk the one kilometre back to the hotel and Colin and Ken found a single turnstone and two wheatears along the shoreline bringing to an end another very good day.

### Sunday May 24 – Kolka Cape and Sītere National Park

Well before breakfast Karlis and Colin went up to the Cape to open the mist nets and see what migrants were passing through. A golden oriole was singing from the trees around the Lutheran Church and a hoopoe was seen disappearing into a ruined building. Back at the hotel Susie found two tree sparrows on a neighbouring roof, ably captured on camera by David.



The Lutheran church in Kolka (ST) and tree sparrows (DB)

After breakfast we all arrived at the USI campsite at the Cape just in time to see a white-tailed eagle, a honey buzzard and four common buzzards fade away into the distance. The expected fall of migrants had not happened but the nets still managed to catch a range of species which allowed the group to see them close up in the hand; species included marsh and icterine warbler, sedge and willow warbler, red-backed shrike and the undoubted star of the show an adult male bright red scarlet rosefinch.

A wet scrub-lined ditch runs through this area of meadow and provides a magnet for migrants but we were still very surprised to hear that Helen had seen a superb adult male bluethroat showing his red throat patch set in brilliant blue. Unfortunately the bird quickly disappeared back into the scrub defying all our attempts to relocate it. Helen and Malcolm later saw both male and a female fly over the meadow and briefly display but that was the last sighting.



Scarlet rosefinch (HC)

Time for coffee and biscuits at the campsite where we were treated to good views of wheatear and whinchat plus a great view of a crested lark on the roof of one of the outbuildings. A few more migrants were beginning to move through with two hawfinches flying over, a Blyth's reed warbler in song, a woodlark flushed from the meadow and a hobby overhead. To cap a fine morning a male black redstart was singing in full view from the top of a huge chimney and a very unexpected bee-eater flew over the campsite.

Instead of a picnic lunch we were treated to an excellent repast at USI of traditional sorrel soup, sweet pie and a rhubarb and strawberry pudding with cream. We were joined at lunchtime by Gaidis from the Latvian Owl Research Society. After lunch Colin and Ken opted to stay with Karlis and Gaidis at Kolka while Rob and Laura took the buses with the bulk of the group into Slītere National Park and to the inland Slītere lighthouse (no longer in commission) where we climbed to the top for an unrivalled view across the forest. Before the lighthouse was built some of the local 'wreckers' would build fires along the shoreline to lure unwary ships onto the rocks and their demise – much the same as in Devon and Cornwall in times past.

Most of the group decided to take the circular boardwalk route through the forest where we found a wide variety of plants, typical of old undisturbed forest. Male ferns and common marsh ferns were growing in great profusion but there were also scores of magnificent ostrich ferns with their open demeanour resembling huge buckets. Wood and yellow anemones, ramsons, yellow archangel and woodruff were all in flower and we were delighted to find the pink-flowered perennial honesty, coralroot bittercress, common toothwort, bogbean and yet more delicate birdseye primroses. Wood warblers and blackcaps were in song throughout the walk but the undoubted bird highlight was a splendid male red-breasted flycatcher which David spotted low down in the forest. We didn't actually see any mammals here but did find fresh pine-marten casts on the boardwalk then a much larger pile of wolf dung complete with thick hair, probably from wild boar.



The boardwalk fringed by ostrich ferns (DB)



Early purple orchids among the cowslips (HC)

After we climbed the 165 steps back up to the lighthouse we all agreed it had been a fascinating walk through old-growth forest. We were still not quite done as we spotted hundreds of early purple type orchids, with unspotted leaves, in the nearby meadows instigating much debate about their identity! Time for one last stop at a roadside observation tower where a pair of common buzzards and a sparrowhawk were soaring overhead but the stars here were two new butterflies, small blue and the very bright eastern short-tailed blue bringing our total up to 16 species.

**Monday May 25 – Kolka Cape, Milzgravis Meadows and Slitere National Park**

Warm and sunny all day with temperatures climbing to a very pleasant 18C and light southerly winds. The advance crew of Karlis, Gaidis and Colin went up to the Cape before breakfast and where they found ring ouzel, tree pipit and crossbill. The main body of the group arrived after breakfast and immediately spotted 20 yellow wagtails on the road and on the campsite. Scarlet rosefinches appeared to be singing everywhere and a hoopoe flew out of the usual ruined building giving us all reasonable views. A steady stream of 17 hawfinches were moving through the area and we were delighted when a pair of these magnificent finches were caught in the ringing nets for everyone to see at very close quarters. Gaidis grimaced in pain as the male continually pecked away at his hand – a hawfinch bill can crack a cherry stone!



Left:  
female hawfinch

Right:  
male hawfinch

(DB)



Unfortunately raptor migration was almost non-existent with just three sparrowhawks and a single common buzzard although compensation was to be had in our first cuckoo sighting, a circling hobby and brief views of red-breasted flycatcher and barred warbler, while Helen found a viviparous lizard near the wet ditch.

Before lunch we decided to visit meadows south of the National Park at Milzgravis, and as we walked along the track towards them we encountered several map butterflies plus two male brimstones. The meadows themselves covered a vast area supporting many breeding skylarks and whinchats plus a minimum of six calling corncrakes hidden in deep vegetation. A female roe deer moved into the nearby forest at our approach, a pair of red-backed shrikes were along a wide reedy ditch but best of all was a willow tit feeding young in a hole in a tree. Time to head back for lunch before more explorations in the National Park.



Bogbean (DB)



Round-leaved sundew (HC)



Bog rosemary (HC)

Our afternoon visit was to the west of the Park, near Mazirbe, at the Peterezers nature trail, a 3.4km trail through pine forest and open bog. On the way Steph spotted an elk on the forest edge but it soon melted away into the depths. The pine forest was growing on a dune system known as 'Kangari' supporting a whole range of plants such as more ostrich ferns, perennial honesty, spring vetchling, marsh violet and toothwort. Woodland birds included at least three singing wood warblers with one in full view, spotted flycatcher and a singing pied flycatcher. A boardwalk had been built through the open bog and by the lakes and we were able to get good views of tree pipit. Bogbean was growing in great profusion with many striking flower spikes accompanied by the delicate flowering bog rosemary. The shallows on the lake edge were full of black leeches prompting a discussion on the medicinal properties of these creatures while a large water beetle dived for cover. A common buzzard soared overhead and careful searching by Sue turned up the delicate round-leaved sundew and chalk milkwort.

After dinner at Hotel Zitari we were treated to a presentation by Gaidis from the Latvian Owl Research Society with many fascinating facts about several owl species including the potentially dangerous ural owl which will protect its nest with great courage, often striking intruders hard! The Honeyguide donation of €817 went towards the work of the society and was very warmly welcomed by Gaidis.

**Tuesday May 26 – Milzgravis Meadows, Slitere National Park and Dundaga**



Barred warbler (MC)

A sunny yet cool start to the day, turning overcast with occasional spots of rain but remaining bright with temperatures up to 17C. The pre-breakfast patrol turned up a real goodie in the shape of three bee-eaters over the USI campsite plus ten hawfinches and a female golden oriole, while Susie and Ken spotted eight goldeneye offshore by the hotel. News reached us that a barred warbler had been caught in the mist nets so our first unscheduled stop was back at the Cape to see this bird, a stunning male in the hand showing slate-grey plumage and a striking yellow eye – this a 'lifer' for most of the group. While we were there we also saw another wryneck perched up and in flight, three more hawfinches and 40 yellow wagtails on the short turf.

After this we drove south and back to Milzgravis meadows, seeing a crane and hearing a corncrake on the way, where unbelievably, Karlis found his two-way radio he had lost the previous day! We all had excellent views of the willow tit taking food into its nest while out in the meadow we found two more cranes, two hunting male marsh harriers, a fast flying hobby and a singing grasshopper warbler.

Our next stop was close by at a known greenish warbler site on the edge of the National Park. As we parked the buses we spotted in the trees a woodpecker which turned out to be male great spotted, soon to be joined by a female, presumably gathering food for their young. A black woodpecker flew across the road giving us all a tantalising view, with both wood warblers and a cuckoo singing in the forest. Ken then spotted a red squirrel halfway up a conifer with another nearby allowing us all to get really good views. The roadsides were covered in a glorious array of flowers, particularly greater celandine, ramsons, wood cranesbill, fly honeysuckle and wood avens. We were having trouble pinning down any greenish warblers but after finding a crested tit in the canopy we finally tracked down a singing male right out in the open by the roadside in full view. While we were congratulating ourselves we spotted yet another male red-breasted flycatcher in full song and showing well.



Red squirrel (HC)

We decided to have our picnic where we thought there was a good chance of seeing raptors. Almost on cue a female lesser spotted eagle flew out of the trees, over our heads and, amazingly, was joined by the much paler male as they soared together before drifting out of view. A white stork was joined by its mate on a huge nest by a local farmhouse, at least two cuckoos were calling over the meadows and two yellowhammers perched obligingly on nearby telephone wires. The fields here were well known to the leaders and supported many flowering clumps of globeflowers (now really rare in UK) plus a few early purple orchids.



Middle-spotted woodpecker (DB)

After lunch we decided to visit a new site, the town of Dundaga which boasts a medieval castle surrounded by parkland and lakes. This proved to an inspired choice as the area was alive with birdlife. A guided tour of the castle was on offer but the group decided wildlife should come first just as an icterine warbler burst into song right outside the castle. A fieldfare was chattering noisily and it soon became apparent why – we were standing below her nest at the edge of the lake. As we moved a short distance away she immediately went back to the nest. Another new species soon turned up in the shape of a pair of moorhens on the lake with five young. Fieldfare numbers quickly climbed into double figures, both spotted flycatcher and nuthatch were active in the lakeside trees and several pairs of house martins were nesting on the castle. A middle spotted woodpecker flew over the lake and at least two wrynecks were calling – we managed to track one of them down and had good views before it flew off. Golden orioles seemed to be calling

everywhere and we estimated at least six birds, mostly males, and we all managed to see them well, no easy task. As we returned to the buses, reed and sedge warblers were singing from the reed-fringed lake, icterine warbler numbers crept up to six, we had another great view of a male pied flycatcher but to cap a superb day the middle spotted woodpecker perched up in full view before flying back to its nest with a beakful of insects.

### Wednesday May 27 – Mersrags and Riga

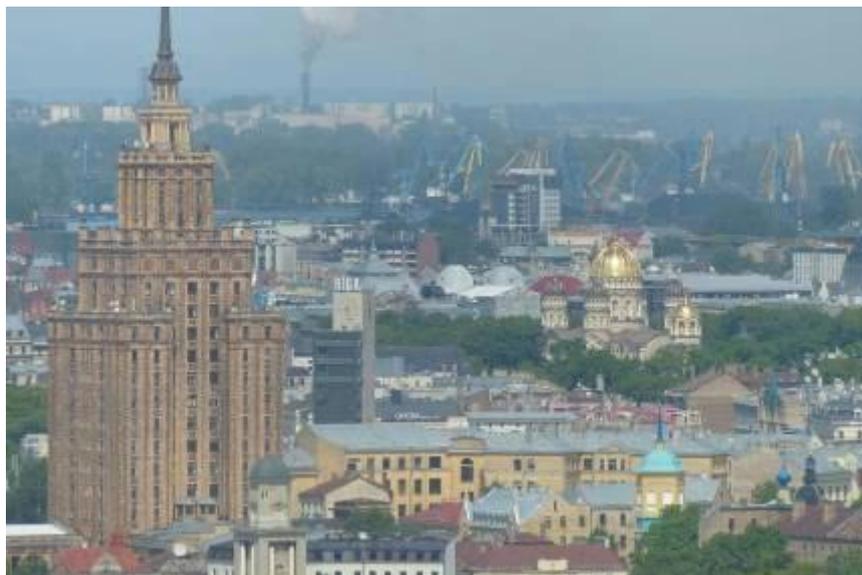
We bade farewell to Hotel Zitari in Kolka and headed south in bright sunshine for Riga. On the way we stopped briefly at the shore near Mersrags to stretch our legs but still managed to find three new species, a pair of red-breasted mergansers, an oystercatcher and nine turnstones plus a few specimens of flowering eastern pasque flower.

Arriving in Riga, home to more than one-third of Latvia's two-million inhabitants, we met up with Laura at the TV and Radio Tower, some 368 metres high, the tallest building in the EU. We all went up (diagonally) in the lift to the viewing platform which gave wonderful views across the whole of the city, which lies at the mouth of the river Daugava. Ever watchful, some of the group spotted a female hen harrier flying past, yet another new species.

Parking the minibuses in the cobbled streets of old Riga, we visited the fascinating Art Nouveau Museum, housed in an ornate building designed by architect Konstantīns Pēkšēns in 1903, where every feature from staircase to crockery epitomises the romantic style. We then walked through streets of richly decorated art nouveau facades for a welcome bowl of hot soup in a local restaurant, after which most of the group continued with the very informative walking tour led by Laura of Riga's historical centre (a UNESCO World Heritage Site), every building deserving attention.

Our watches synchronised, we met up at 4.30 as planned and arrived at the airport in good time for our early evening flight back to Luton.

Many thanks are due to Laura for organising the trip and helping out the group, to Gaidis for his talk on Latvian owls, and especially to Karlis for his local knowledge and tremendous birding skills.



The radio and TV tower in Riga and a view across the city from the observation deck (DB)

### HIGHLIGHTS

(two each)

Helen	Bluethroat; birdseye primrose.
Sue	Sundew; rosefinch.
Malcolm	Lesser spotted eagle in display; fields of dandelions.
Peter	Hawfinch in the hand; bogbean.
Steph	Elk; the orchid field.
David	"Birding from bed" (at Valguma Pasaule); dandelion fields.
Susie	Cranes; the orchid field.
Debs	Lesser spotted eagle; round-leaved wintergreen.
Colin	Citrine wagtail; globeflower.
Ken	Crested tit; globe-flowers.
Desmond	Crested tit; bogbean.
Rob	Globeflower; barred warbler in summer plumage.

## SYSTEMATIC LISTS

### BIRDS

<b>Black-throated Diver</b>	Peaks of 12 overhead at Valguma Pasaule and 10 offshore at Kolka Cape.
<b>Great crested Grebe</b>	Peak of 20 on Lake Kanieris.
<b>Red-necked Grebe</b>	One at Lake Kanieris.
<b>Cormorant</b>	Recorded throughout with c.1500 pairs at Lake Kanieris.
<b>Bittern</b>	Three at Lake Kanieris.
<b>Great White Egret</b>	Peak of ten at Lake Kanieris.
<b>Grey Heron</b>	In small numbers at major wetlands, max.4 at Lake Kanieris and Mersrags.
<b>White Stork</b>	Widespread and common.
<b>Mute Swan</b>	Widespread and common and two broods on Lake Kanieris.
<b>Whooper Swan</b>	Two in Dunduri meadows and 15 overhead at Valguma Pasaule.
<b>Shelduck</b>	Noted at Lake Kanieris, Mersrags and Kola Cape.
<b>Gadwall</b>	Two at Lake Kanieris.
<b>Teal</b>	One female at Dunduri meadows.
<b>Mallard</b>	Widespread and common at major wetlands.
<b>Pochard</b>	20+ at Lake Kanieris.
<b>Tufted Duck</b>	20+ at Lake Kanieris.
<b>Eider Duck</b>	15 offshore at Kolka Cape.
<b>Common Scoter</b>	110 offshore at Kolka Cape.
<b>Velvet Scoter</b>	60 offshore at Kolka Cape.
<b>Long-tailed Duck</b>	Three offshore at Kolka Cape.
<b>Goldeneye</b>	Peak of 30 offshore at Kolka Cape.
<b>Goosander</b>	Breeding at Valguma Pasaule.
<b>Red-breasted Merganser</b>	Pair offshore at Mersrags.
<b>Pheasant</b>	Noted on first day on route from Riga.
<b>Honey Buzzard</b>	Five birds at Valguma Pasaule and Kolka.
<b>White-tailed Eagle</b>	One at Lake Kanieris and one at Kolka Cape.
<b>Marsh Harrier</b>	Peak of six at Lake Kanieris.
<b>Hen Harrier</b>	A female from the TV Tower in Riga..
<b>Goshawk</b>	One at Dunduri meadows and one at Slītere.
<b>Sparrowhawk</b>	Peak of four at Kolka Cape.
<b>Buzzard</b>	Widespread and common.
<b>Lesser Spotted Eagle</b>	One at Dunduri Meadows and two at Slītere National Park.
<b>Kestrel</b>	Singles at three sites, mainly from buses..
<b>Red-footed Falcon</b>	Three at Dunduri Mreadows.
<b>Hobby</b>	Noted at Lake Kanieris, Kolka and Milzgravis.
<b>Corncrake</b>	Widespread in meadows.
<b>Coot</b>	Only at Lake Kanieris.
<b>Moorhen</b>	Pair with young at Dundaga.
<b>Crane</b>	Peak of 25 at Dunduri Meadows.
<b>Oystercatcher</b>	One at Mersrags.
<b>Little Ringed Plover</b>	Three in Kemerī National Park.
<b>Ringed Plover</b>	Peak of seven at Kolka Cape.
<b>Lapwing</b>	Peak of 30 at Dunduri Meadows.
<b>Dunlin</b>	One at Kolka Cape.
<b>Whimbrel</b>	One at Dunduri Meadows.
<b>Bar-tailed Godwit</b>	One at Mersrags.
<b>Redshank</b>	One at Kolka Cape.
<b>Wood Sandpiper</b>	One at Dunduri Meadows and two at Mersrags.
<b>Common Sandpiper</b>	Peak of three at Valguma Pasaule.
<b>Turnstone</b>	Nine at Mersrags.
<b>Black-headed Gull</b>	Widespread and common.
<b>Herring Gull</b>	Widespread and common.
<b>Great Black-backed Gull</b>	Two at Mersrags.
<b>Little Tern</b>	Three at Mersrags.
<b>Sandwich Tern</b>	Five at Kolka Cape..
<b>Common Tern</b>	Minimum of 50 at Lake Kanieris and breeding there.
<b>White-winged Black Tern</b>	Three at Lake Kanieris.
<b>Black Tern</b>	200 at Lake Kanieris.
<b>Stock Dove</b>	Two at Dunduri Meadows and Kolka Village.
<b>Feral Pigeon</b>	Common in Riga.
<b>Woodpigeon</b>	Occasional at most sites.
<b>Turtle Dove</b>	One at Dunduri Meadows.

<b>Collared Dove</b>	Peak of three at Kolka Cape.
<b>Cuckoo</b>	Recorded daily, mostly heard but also seen on a few occasions.
<b>Tawny Owl</b>	Heard at Valguma Pasaule.
<b>Swift</b>	Widespread and common.
<b>Kingfisher</b>	One at Valguma Pasaule.
<b>Bee-eater</b>	Four at Kolka Cape.
<b>Hoopoe</b>	Peak of three at Kolka.
<b>Wryneck</b>	Peaks of three at Valguma Pasaule and Dundaga.
<b>Lesser Spotted Woodpecker</b>	One at Valguma Pasaule.
<b>Middle Spotted Woodpecker</b>	One at Dundaga.
<b>Black Woodpecker</b>	One at Dunduri meadows and Slitere National Park.
<b>Grey-headed Woodpecker</b>	Breeding at Valguma Pasaule.
<b>Great Spotted Woodpecker</b>	Noted at Valguma Pasaule, Slitere National Park and Dundaga.
<b>Crested Lark</b>	One at Kolka Cape.
<b>Woodlark</b>	Noted at Valguma Pasaule and Kolka Cape.
<b>Skylark</b>	Widespread and common in meadows..
<b>Barn Swallow</b>	Widespread and common.
<b>House Martin</b>	Widespread and common.
<b>Tree Pipit</b>	Peak of three at Slitere National Park.
<b>Meadow Pipit</b>	Peak of three at Valguma Pasaule.
<b>Red-throated Pipit</b>	Pair at Mersrags.
<b>Yellow Wagtail (thunbergi)</b>	Peak of 90 at Mersrags and Kolka Cape.
<b>Blue-headed Wagtail</b>	Male at Mersrags.
<b>Citrine Wagtail</b>	Three at Mersrags..
<b>White Wagtail</b>	Widespread and common.
<b>Wren</b>	Occasional in woodlands.
<b>Duncock</b>	One in nets at Kolka Cape.
<b>Robin</b>	Occasional at all sites..
<b>Thrush Nightingale</b>	Heard at Valguma Pasaule and Dunduri Meadows.
<b>Bluethroat</b>	Pair at Kolka Cape.
<b>Black Redstart</b>	Only at Kolka Cape.
<b>Redstart</b>	Noted at Valguma Pasaule and Kolka Cape.
<b>Whinchat</b>	Peak of 15 at Milzgravis.
<b>Wheatear</b>	Peak of six at Kolka Cape.
<b>Ring Ouzel</b>	One at Kolka Cape.
<b>Blackbird</b>	Widespread and common.
<b>Fieldfare</b>	Peak of six and nesting at Dundaga.
<b>Song Thrush</b>	Only at Valguma Pasaule.
<b>Mistle Thrush</b>	Peak of eight in Slitere National Park..
<b>Savi's Warbler</b>	Singing males at Dunduri Meadows and Lake Kanieris.
<b>Sedge Warbler</b>	Noted at all wetland sites.
<b>Blyth's Reed Warbler</b>	One heard at Kolka Cape.
<b>Marsh Warbler</b>	Only at Kolka Cape.
<b>Reed Warbler</b>	Noted at Kemer National Park, Mersrags and Dundaga.
<b>Great Reed Warbler</b>	Three at Dunduri Meadows and Lake Kanieris.
<b>Grasshopper Warbler</b>	One singing in Dunduri Meadows.
<b>Barred Warbler</b>	Three at Kolka Cape inc.male in the hand.
<b>Icterine Warbler</b>	Peak of four at Dundaga.
<b>Lesser Whitethroat</b>	Noted at Kemer National Park and Kolka Cape.
<b>Whitethroat</b>	Reasonably widespread and common.
<b>Garden Warbler</b>	Noted at Valguma Pasaule and Milzgravis.
<b>Blackcap</b>	Widespread and common.
<b>Greenish Warbler</b>	Singing male at Slitere National Park.
<b>Wood Warbler</b>	Widespread and relatively common in forest areas.
<b>Chiffchaff</b>	Relatively common on forest edges.
<b>Willow Warbler</b>	Relatively common on forest edges.
<b>Goldcrest</b>	Relatively common in forest areas.
<b>Firecrest</b>	Singing male at Lake Kanieris.
<b>Spotted Flycatcher</b>	Peak of four at Valguma Pasaule.
<b>Red-breasted Flycatcher</b>	Uncommon at Valguma Pasaule, Kolka Cape and Slitere National Park.
<b>Pied Flycatcher</b>	Widespread and relatively common in forest areas.
<b>Long-tailed Tit</b>	Two of the northern race at Valguma Pasaule.
<b>Willow Tit</b>	Noted at Valguma Pasaule and nesting at Milzgravis.
<b>Crested Tit</b>	Nesting in Kemer National Park and noted at Slitere National Park.
<b>Coal Tit</b>	Only at Valguma Pasaule.

<b>Blue Tit</b>	Widespread and common.
<b>Great Tit</b>	Widespread and common.
<b>Bearded Tit</b>	Heard at Lake Kanieris.
<b>Nuthatch</b>	Widespread in forest areas.
<b>Treecreeper</b>	Only at Valguma Pasaule and Kemer National Park.
<b>Golden Oriole</b>	Peak of six at Dundaga.
<b>Red-backed Shrike</b>	Peak of ten in Kemer National Park.
<b>Jay</b>	Noted in all forest areas.
<b>Magpie</b>	Widespread and common in certain areas.
<b>Jackdaw</b>	Peak of 50 at Kolka Cape.
<b>Rook</b>	Two at Kolka Cape.
<b>Hooded Crow</b>	Widespread and common.
<b>Raven</b>	Peak of three at Slitere National Park..
<b>Starling</b>	Widespread and common.
<b>House Sparrow</b>	Widespread and relatively common.
<b>Tree Sparrow</b>	Two at Kolka Village.
<b>Chaffinch</b>	Widespread and common.
<b>Greenfinch</b>	Relatively common in villages.
<b>Goldfinch</b>	Noted at Valguma Pasaule, Slitere National Park and Dundaga.
<b>Siskin</b>	Peak of six at Kolka Cape.
<b>Linnet</b>	Small numbers at Kolka Cape.
<b>Serin</b>	Singing male at Kolka Village.
<b>Crossbill</b>	Noted at Valguma Pasaule and Kolka Cape.
<b>Scarlet Rosefinch</b>	Singing birds (both male and female) at all major sites.
<b>Bullfinch</b>	Noted at Valguma Pasaule and Kolka Cape.
<b>Hawfinch</b>	Peak of 17 at Kolka Cape.
<b>Yellowhammer</b>	Peak of six at Slitere National Park..
<b>Reed Bunting</b>	Recorded at all wetland sites.

**Total = 155**

#### MAMMALS

Hedgehog – dead on roadside	Mole – hills only.	Rabbit	Red squirrel
Wild boar	Wolf – castings	Red fox	Pine marten – castings
Raccoon dog	Elk	Red deer	Roe deer

#### BUTTERFLIES AND MOTHS

Large White	Small White	Green-veined White	Orange Tip
Brimstone	Wood White	Green Hairstreak	Small Copper
Eastern Short-tailed Blue	Small Blue	Holly Blue	Peacock
Camberwell Beauty	Red Admiral	Painted Lady	Map Butterfly
Small Heath	Riband Wave moth	Latticed Heath moth	

#### DRAGONFLIES AND DAMSELFLIES

Brilliant Emerald <i>Somatochlora metallica</i>	Four-spotted Chaser <i>Libellula quadrimaculata</i>	Ruby Whiteface <i>Leucorrhinia rubicunda</i>	Common Blue Damselfly <i>Enallagma cyathigerum</i>
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#### REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS

Marsh Frog	Newt sp.	Slowworm	Viviparous lizard <i>Zootoca vipara</i>
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#### OTHER INVERTEBRATES

Scorpion Fly	Red Wood Ant	Hornet	Violet Carpenter Bee
Crab Spider	Firebug	Dung Beetle	Leech

## PLANTS

### TREES AND SHRUBS

Norway spruce	<i>Picea abies</i>	Norway maple	<i>Acer platanoides</i>
Scots pine	<i>Pinus sylvestris</i>	Small-leaved lime	<i>Tilia cordata</i>
Juniper	<i>Juniperus communis</i>	Bird cherry	<i>Prunus padus</i>
Sallow	<i>Salix</i> sp	Aspen	<i>Populus tremula</i>
Wych elm	<i>Ulmus glabra</i>	Horse chestnut	<i>Aesculus hippocastanum</i>
Alder	<i>Alnus glutinosus</i>	Ash	<i>Fraxinus excelsior</i>
Silver birch	<i>Betula pendula</i>	Rowan	<i>Sorbus aucuparia</i>
Hazel	<i>Corylus avellana</i>	Spindle	<i>Euonymus europaeus</i>
Bog myrtle	<i>Myrica gale</i>	Gooseberry	<i>Ribes uva-crispa</i>
Pedunculate oak	<i>Quercus robur</i>		

### FERNS, GRASSES AND SEDGES

Adderstongue fern	<i>Ophioglossum vulgatum</i>	Common reed	<i>Phragmites australis</i>
Male fern	<i>Dryopteris filix-mas</i>	Cocksfoot	<i>Dactylis glomerata</i>
Ostrich fern	<i>Matteuccia struthiopteris</i>	Bog cotton grass	<i>Eriophorum angustifolium</i>
Common marsh fern	<i>Thelypteris palustris</i>	Lesser pond sedge	<i>Carex acutiformis</i>
Bracken	<i>Pteridium aquilinum</i>		

### HORSETAILS – Equisetaceae

Water horsetail	<i>Equisetum fluviatile</i>	Field horsetail	<i>Equisetum arvense</i>
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### WILD FLOWERS

#### Pink family – Caryophyllaceae

Greater stitchwort	<i>Stellaria holostea</i>	Wood stitchwort	<i>Stellaria nemorum</i>
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#### Buttercup family – Ranunculaceae

Meadow buttercup	<i>Ranunculus acris</i>	Eastern pasque flower	<i>Pulsatilla patens</i>
Goldilocks buttercup	<i>Ranunculus auricomus</i>	Baneberry	<i>Actaea spicata</i>
Marsh marigold	<i>Caltha palustris</i>	Hepatica	<i>Hepatica nobilis</i>
Globeflower	<i>Trollius europaeus</i>	Greater celandine	<i>Chelidonium majus</i>
Wood anemone	<i>Anemone nemorosa</i>		

#### Nettle family – Urticaceae

Common nettle *Urtica dioica*

#### Cabbage family – Cruciferae

Lady's smock (cuckoo flower)	<i>Cardamine pratensis</i>
Swedish cress (Swedish thale-cress)	<i>Arabidopsis suecica</i>
Garlic mustard	<i>Alliaria petiolata</i>
Large bittercress	<i>Cardamine amara</i>
Coralroot bittercress	<i>Cardamina bulbifera</i>
Tall rockcress	<i>Cardaminopsis arenosa</i>
Shepherd's purse	<i>Capsella bursa-pastoris</i>
Perennial honesty	<i>Lunaria rediviva</i>

#### Heath family – Ericaceae

Ling	<i>Calluna vulgaris</i>	Bog rosemary	<i>Andromeda polifolia</i>
Cowberry	<i>Vaccinium vitis-idaea</i>	Bilberry	<i>Vaccinium myrtillus</i>

#### Saxifrages – Saxifragaceae

Meadow saxifrage *Saxifraga granulata*

#### Rose family – Rosaceae

Bramble	<i>Rubus fruticosus</i>	Water avens	<i>Geum rivale</i>
Raspberry	<i>Rubus idaeus</i>	Wood avens	<i>Geum urbanum</i>
Meadowsweet	<i>Filipendula ulmaria</i>	Bird cherry	<i>Prunus padus</i> (also in tree list)
Silverweed	<i>Potentilla anserina</i>	Dwarf serviceberry	<i>Amelanchier spicata</i>
Wild strawberry	<i>Fragaria vesca</i>		

#### Pea family – Leguminosae/Fabaceae

Spring vetch	<i>Vicia lathyroides</i>	Spring vetchling	<i>Lathyrus vernus</i>
Bush vetch	<i>Vicia sepium</i>	Black medick	<i>Medicago lupulina</i>
Hairy tare	<i>Vicia hirsuta</i>		

#### Wood-sorrel family – Oxalidaceae

Wood-sorrel *Oxalis acetosella*

#### Spurge family – Euphorbiaceae

Dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis*

#### Milkwort family – Polygalaceae

Common milkwort	<i>Polygala vulgaris</i>	Chalk milkwort	<i>Polygala calcarea</i>
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	<b>Geranium family – Geraniaceae</b>		
Common storksbill	<i>Erodium cicutarium</i>	Wood cranesbill	<i>Geranium sylvaticum</i>
Dove's-foot cranesbill	<i>Geranium molle</i>		
	<b>Dock family – Polygonaceae</b>		
	Common sorrel	<i>Rumex acetosa</i>	
	<b>St. John's Wort family – Clusiaceae</b>		
	Perforate St. John's wort	<i>Hypericum perforatum</i>	
	<b>Violet family – Violaceae</b>		
Common dog violet	<i>Viola riviniana</i>	Field pansy	<i>Viola arvensis</i>
Wood dog violet	<i>Viola reichenbachiana</i>	Wild pansy	<i>Viola tricolor</i>
Marsh violet	<i>Viola palustris</i>		
	<b>Sundew family – Droseraceae</b>		
	Round-leaved sundew	<i>Drosera rotundifolia</i>	
	<b>Carrot family – Apiaceae / Umbelliferae</b>		
Cow parsley	<i>Anthriscus sylvestris</i>	Ground elder	<i>Aegopodium podagraria</i>
	<b>Wintergreen family – Pyrolaceae</b>		
	Round-leaved wintergreen	<i>Pyrola rotundifolia</i>	
	<b>Primrose family – Primulaceae</b>		
Cowslip	<i>Primula veris</i>	Oxlip x Cowslip hybrid	<i>Primula elatior x veris</i>
Oxlip	<i>Primula elatior</i>	Birdseye primrose	<i>Primula farinosa</i>
Chickweed wintergreen	<i>Trientalis europaea</i>		
	<b>Bogbean family – Menyanthaceae</b>		
	Bogbean	<i>Menyanthes trifoliata</i>	
	<b>Borage family – Boraginaceae</b>		
Common forget-me-not	<i>Myosotis arvensis</i>	Suffolk lungwort	<i>Pulmonaria obscura</i>
Early forget-me-not	<i>Myosotis ramosissima</i>		
	<b>Labiata family – Lamiaceae/Labiatae</b>		
White dead-nettle	<i>Lamium alba</i>	Yellow archangel	<i>Lamiastrum galeobdolon</i>
Red dead-nettle	<i>Lamium purpureum</i>	Ground ivy	<i>Glechoma hederacea</i>
	<b>Figwort family – Scrophulariaceae</b>		
Germander speedwell	<i>Veronica chamaedrys</i>	Field speedwell	<i>Veronica persica</i>
Wood speedwell	<i>Veronica montana</i>	Brooklime	<i>Veronica beccabunga</i>
	<b>Broomrape family – Orobanchaceae</b>		
	Toothwort	<i>Lathraea squamaria</i>	
	<b>Plantain family - Plantaginaceae</b>		
	Greater plantain	<i>Plantago major</i>	
	<b>Bedstraw family – Rubiaceae</b>		
Cleavers	<i>Galium aparine</i>	Woodruff	<i>Galium odoratum</i>
Hedge bedstraw	<i>Galium mollugo</i>		
	<b>Honeysuckle family – Caprifoliaceae</b>		
	Fly honeysuckle	<i>Lonicera xylosteum</i>	
	<b>Daisy family – Compositae</b>		
Daisy	<i>Bellis perennis</i>	Sea wormwood	<i>Artemisia maritima</i>
Yarrow	<i>Achillea millefolium</i>	Hemp agrimony	<i>Eupatorium cannabinum</i>
Coltsfoot	<i>Tussilago farfara</i>	Dandelion	<i>Taraxacum sect. vulgare</i>
	<b>Lily family – Liliaceae</b>		
Grape hyacinth	<i>Muscari neglectum</i>	Solomon's seal	<i>Polygonatum multiflorum</i>
Lily of the valley	<i>Convallaria majalis</i>	Herb paris	<i>Paris quadrifolia</i>
May lily	<i>Maianthemum bifolium</i>	Ramsons	<i>Allium ursinum</i>
Star of Bethlehem	<i>Ornithogalum angustifolium</i>		
	<b>Iris family – Iridaceae</b>		
	Yellow flag	<i>Iris pseudacorus</i>	
	<b>Orchid family – Orchidaceae</b>		
	Early purple orchid	<i>Orchis mascula</i>	
	<b>Bulrush family – Typhaceae</b>		
	Common reedmace	<i>Typha latifolia</i>	