

= Matsalu National Park =

Matsalu National Park (previously Matsalu Nature Reserve , Estonian : Matsalu rahvuspark , often just Matsalu) is a nature reserve and national park situated in Lääne County , Estonia . Matsalu National Park spans an area of 486 @. @ 1 km² (187 @. @ 7 sq mi) , comprising Matsalu Bay , the Kasari River delta , the village of Matsalu and surrounding areas .

Matsalu Bay (Estonian : Matsalu laht) is one of the most important wetland bird areas in Europe , due to its prime position on the East Atlantic Flyway . Large numbers of migratory birds use Matsalu as a staging area . Every spring over two million waterfowl pass Matsalu , of which around 1 @. @ 6 million are long @-@ tailed ducks .

Matsalu National Park is a home for a number of endangered species , many of which are listed in the Estonian IUCN Red List , including the white @-@ tailed eagle of the highest conservation category , a lot of bird species of the second and third protection categories , 22 strongly protected plant species , the natterjack toad , and ten species of mammals of the second conservation category .

= = Description = =

Matsalu National Park covers a total area of 486 @. @ 1 km² (187 @. @ 7 sq mi) , encompassing Matsalu Bay along with the delta of the Kasari River and its surrounding areas ? floodplains , coastal meadows , reedbeds , woodlands , wooded meadows , and the section of Väinameri around the mouth of the bay , which includes more than 50 islands . 224 @. @ 3 km² (86 @. @ 6 sq mi) of the protected area is terrestrial and 261 @. @ 8 km² (101 @. @ 1 sq mi) is aquatic . Matsalu Bay is shallow , brackish and rich in nutrients . The bay is 18 km (11 @. @ 2 mi) long and 6 km (3 @. @ 7 mi) wide , but has an average depth of only 1 @. @ 5 metres (5 ft) and a maximum depth of 3 @. @ 5 m (11 ft) . Water salinity is approximately 0 @. @ 7 per mil . Shoreline length of the bay is about 165 km (102 @. @ 5 mi) . The bay 's shoreline lacks high banks and is populated mostly with shingle shores , with muddy and overgrown reed in the innermost , sheltered part of the bay .

Kasari River is the biggest of several rivers that run into Matsalu Bay . The delta of the Kasari River is not in its natural condition due to dredging between 1930 and 1960 ; the alluvial meadow of the delta (40 km² (15 sq mi)) , most of which is actively managed , is one of the biggest open wet meadows in Europe . Reeds and rushes surrounding the main channel expand westwards up to 100 m (328 ft) every year . Annual inflow into the Matsalu Bay from the Kasari River exceeds the volume of the bay itself approximately eight times ; average seasonal variation of the Kasari River exceeds 1 @. @ 7 metres (6 ft) . The rivers carry large quantities of nutrient @-@ rich sediments into the bay from an over 3 @, @ 500 km² (1 @, @ 350 sq mi) drainage basin . The sediments are deposited in river estuaries , allowing reedbeds to expand .

A total of 282 bird species have been recorded in Matsalu , among which 175 are nesting and 33 are trans migrant waterfowl . 49 species of fish and 47 species of mammals are registered in the area of the nature reserve , along with 772 species of vascular plants .

Every spring over two million waterfowl pass Matsalu , including 10 @, @ 000 ? 20 @, @ 000 Bewick 's swans , 10 @, @ 000 greater scaups , common goldeneyes , tufted ducks , goosanders and many others . A colony of up to 20 @, @ 000 barnacle geese , over 10 @, @ 000 greylag geese and thousands of waders stop on the coastal pastures in spring . The most numerous birds of passage (around 1 @. @ 6 million) are long @-@ tailed ducks . Approximately 35 @, @ 000 ? 40 @, @ 000 ducks feed in the reedbeds in spring . In autumn , about 300 @, @ 000 migratory waterfowl pass Matsalu . The wetland is the biggest autumn stopping ground of common cranes in Europe . The highest recorded number of cranes at the park has been 23 @, @ 000 .

= = History = =

Scientific research in Matsalu started around 1870 , when Valerian Russow , the curator of the Natural History Museum of the University of Tartu , gave a short overview of birds near Matsalu Bay

. Between 1928 and 1936 Eerik Kumari researched birds in Matsalu and suggested a creation of the bird protection area there in 1936 . In 1939 , parts of the bay (Virtsu @-@ Puhtu) were protected for mud used in mud @-@ baths .

Research in Matsalu became regular in 1945 , when the Institute of Botany and Zoology of the Estonian Academy of Sciences established a research base in Penijõe . Matsalu Nature Reserve was founded in 1957 , mainly to protect nesting , moulting and migratory birds . The first permanent workers (administrators and scientists) started in 1958 and the Penijõe research base became the administrative centre of the newly created nature reserve . The Estonian Bird Ringing Centre (Estonian : Rõngastuskeskus) , the coordinator of bird ringing in Estonia , is also located in Penijõe .

In 1976 , Matsalu was included in the list of wetlands of international importance under the International Convention on the Protection of Wetlands (Ramsar Convention) . The European Diploma of Protected Areas was awarded to Matsalu Nature Reserve in 2003 by the Council of Europe , in recognition of the park 's success in preserving the diversity of habitats and the numerous species of birds and other biota groups in the nature reserve . Matsalu is the only nature reserve in Estonia to hold the European Diploma . The diploma was extended for five years in 2008 .

In 2004 , Matsalu Nature Reserve , along with surrounding areas , became Matsalu National Park . Matsalu has seven bird @-@ watching towers (Penijõe , Kloostri , Haeska , Suitsu , Jugasaare , Küdeva and Keemu) and three hiking trails .

= = Matsalu International Nature Film Festival = =

Matsalu International Nature Film Festival (Estonian : Matsalu loodusfilmide festival) is held every autumn in the nearby town of Lihula . The festival is organized by the non @-@ profit organization MTÜ Matsalu Loodusfilmide Festival , which was set up in late 2003 . In February 2010 , MTÜ Matsalu Loodusfilmide Festival partnered with the Estonian State Forest Management Centre (RMK) and will jointly organize the film festivals in the future .

The first Matsalu Nature Film Festival was held between October 3 and October 5 , 2003 , in Lihula with a competitive program of 23 films from 7 countries . More than 2 @, @ 500 people visited the festival that year . The second festival was held between September 23 , and September 25 , 2004 , with participants from 14 countries , a competitive program of 35 films and around 5 @, @ 000 visitors . The third festival took place between September 22 and September 25 , 2005 , with a competitive program of 39 films from 16 countries and over 7 @, @ 000 visitors . The fourth festival , held between September 21 and September 24 in 2006 , had 21 participating countries and 41 competing films . The fifth Matsalu Nature Film Festival was held between September 19 and September 23 , 2007 , and had more than 7 @, @ 000 visitors . Organizers admit that as the festival is held on a nature reserve , it cannot grow much larger in a little town and therefore plan to bring mostly European nature documentaries to the festival , at the same time not forgetting the human @-@ related topics .

In 2007 , organizers of the Matsalu International Nature Film Festival received the Environmental Award of the Year from the Estonian Ministry of Environment . The ministry pointed out persistent and successful organization of the film festival over the years , which has popularized nature protection and contributed significantly to environmental awareness .

= = Images = =