



FOR ANIMAL  
WATCHERS

# ANIMALS IN THE SLĪTERE

Welcome to **Slitere!**

In the Slitere National Park, except for restricted areas, you may walk freely through it to look for plants, animals and landscapes, to pick mushrooms and berries, to go swimming (except at Kolkasrags, where it is dangerous), to get a suntan, to ride a bike or a boat. While doing it, let's respect the nature values!



The Slitere National Park (established in 1999 as a strict nature reserve) is known, with good reason, as an open-air museum which shows the historical development of the Baltic Sea. Nowadays evidence of geological events is seen in the Blue Hills of Slitere, which stand 20 to 30 metres high above what was the shore of the Baltic lake of ice 10,000 years ago. The Stiebris hills were former 8,000 or 9,000 years ago, while the Littorina Sea formed Europe's largest set of dune ramparts and damp hollows between those ramparts. This occurred between 4,000 and 7,000 years ago. The gentle climate of Northern Kurzeme is the reason why so many rare plants are found in the park – some 860 in all including Common Yew (*Taxus baccata*) and Baltic Ivy (*Hedera helix* var. *baltica*). Of certain value in the preservation of these treasures was the Soviet military machine, which has left behind army bases and other military objects in the area. The presence of the military meant that the area of what is now the Slitere National Park remained largely undisturbed for 50 years. The park includes one of the most popular tourist destinations in Latvia – the Cape of Kolka, which is visited by more than 50,000 travellers each year. During the spring migration of birds, tens of thousands of birds fly over the cape within one hour. Along the shore of the Baltic Sea is the so-called Livonian coast, which stretches from Kolka to Sikrags and Oviši. Fishing villages and other cultural objects established by the world's smallest ethnic minority, the Livonians, can be found here. Tourists will enjoy interesting four nature trails, bicycling routes, viewing tower, and the Slitere lighthouse which is open for visitors.



A squirrel, *Sciurus vulgaris*



A common dormouse, *Muscardinus avellanarius*

## Guides

**Vilnis Skuja** (mag. biol.), who has been an ornithologist since 1980. He spent many years studying the raven. Later he focused on mammals, amphibians and reptiles, and he is one of Latvia's most experienced natural researchers. He leads tours through the Slitere National Park. Ring +371 29365230.

**Andris Ratkevičs** is a graduate of the Faculty of Forestry at the Latvian Agricultural University and has worked as a forest ranger in the forests around Ance in the Ventspils District since 1985. He has also served as a guide at the Slitere National Park and offers animal-watching trips into the park for small groups.



Raccoon pups, *Nyctereutes procyonoides*

## ANIMALS IN THE SLĪTERE NATIONAL PARK: A SPECIAL TERRITORY

The geographic location and diversity of biotopes of the Slitere National Park ensure a wealth of mammals. If you learn to be quiet and careful while looking at the lives and habits of forest denizens, you have every opportunity to hear hooting owls, rooting bucks and howling wolves. You may smell a raccoon dog, run into a doe with her fawns, watch a beaver building a home, or spot a group of stags swimming in a lake during the foggy morning. Most of the more than 40 species of mammals in the Slitere National Park are shy and hard to spot. The afforested nature of the territory ensures diversity of fauna, but it also makes it more difficult to spot animals. True opportunities to spy a mammal really relate to open areas.

## ANIMAL-WATCHING

Animal-watching at the Slitere National Park is only possible in the presence of a guide, and only for small groups of one to five people (the park asks that children under the age of 15 not be brought along). The process involves sitting around in special towers for several hours, which is why such tours are offered only when the temperature is above 0°C. You must bring water-resistant and comfortable shoes, warm and "quiet" apparel (it doesn't crinkle or make other noise, and it is not in a noisy colour). You will be walking around 2 km. Bring binoculars, a camera, snacks and non-alcoholic beverages. You must apply for an animal-watching tour at least two weeks in advance. Contact "Lauku Ceļotājs" on +371-6761-7600, or write to lauku@celotajs.lv.

## TOURIST SERVICES

**Accommodations:** Jaunklāvi in Sikrags, 29469614

Jaunlūdimi in Lapmežciems, 29467556

Upeskalni in Mazirbe, 29259510

Mazirbes Kalēji, 28829474, 29213412

Dzintariņi in Mazirbe, 26173009

Jauntilmači in Košrags, 29412974,

Pitagi in Košrags, 29372728, [www.pitagi.lv](http://www.pitagi.lv)

Krūmiņi in Saunags, 29452512

Purvieži in Vaide, 63200179, 29395624

Ūši in Kolka, 63276507, 29475692, [www.kolka.info](http://www.kolka.info)

Tenting grounds in Melsils, 28605606

**Resting place** in Kolkasrags, Melsils

**Shopping** in Dundaga, Mazirbe, Kolka, Melsils, Vidāle

**Dining:** Dundaga, Kolka (only during the season)

**Information:** [www.talsurajons.lv](http://www.talsurajons.lv) 63224165;

[www.kolkasrags.lv](http://www.kolkasrags.lv) 29149105;

[www.ziemeļkurzeme.lv](http://www.ziemeļkurzeme.lv) 63232293, 29444395;

[www.countryholidays.lv](http://www.countryholidays.lv) 67617600;

[www.livones.lv](http://www.livones.lv)

**Emergency assistance: Ring 112**

## ANIMALS IN THE SLĪTERE NATIONAL PARK

Mammals in the Slitere National Park begin with the forest shrew, which weighs only 10 grams and is constantly running around looking for something to eat, and end with the world's largest stag, the Eurasian elk, which weighs in at around 300 kg. The shrew eats insects and uses echo-location of the type that bats use when they go out hunting for butterflies after dark. The most common types of bats in the park are the long-eared bat and the Northern bat. Rodents are the most common type of mammal in the park – field mice, voles and water rats are everywhere. The nests of the yellow-necked mouse have been found to contain as much as half a kilogram of hazelnuts. The Northern birch mouse is uncommon in most of Latvia, but not so in the Slitere National Park, where it's protected. Up in the blue hills of the SNP, one can spot an endangered, fluffy and mouse-sized animal – the fat dormouse, which lives in families, nests in the branches of bushes, and hibernates during the winter. The swamps and forests of the national park are home to large predators, including wolves and lynx. A brown bear was spotted in the park two years ago. There's enough food for smaller predators, too – the European pine marten, the weasel and the polecat. The otter and mink hunt for fish in trout streams. Seals do the same in the sea. Hoofed animals include wild board, deer and bucks. The Eurasian elk feels right at home in swampy forests and areas of burned forest.

## OBSERVABLE SPECIES OVER THE COURSE OF THE YEAR

Here we refer to animals only in terms of the recommended time to look for them (April-September).

A thick dark line means that you are more or less guaranteed a luck at the animal, while a broken line means that you'll have to be lucky to spot one.

Species	Place to spot	Month						
		Apr	Mai	Jūn	Jūl	Aug	Sep	
1 Beaver	Flowing water							
2 Wild board	Fields, meadows							
3 European roe deer	Fields, meadows							
4 Eurasian elk	Open areas in forests							
5 Fox	Fields, meadows							
6 Red deer	Fields, meadows							
7 Wolf	Fields, meadows							
8 Lynx	Edges of forests							
9 Eurasian badger	Fields, meadows							
10 European pine marten	Edges of forests							
11 Otter	Flowing water							



The European roe deer (*Capreolus capreolus*) is the smallest deer in Latvia, and it is hunted by the lynx and the wolf in the Slitere National Park.



The red deer (*Cervus elaphus*) represents the largest population of deer in the SNP. During mating season, you can hear the bulls roaring and battling it out with their horns. That is something which every nature lover will remember for all time.



The Eurasian badger (*Meles meles*) is akin to the stoat and the ermine. Most of the year the badger comes out only at the night, but in early summer, when its young are waiting for their parents in the cave, they sometimes appear during the daytime, too.



The Eurasian elk (*Alces alces*) is the largest stag in the world. The SNP, with its swamps and forests, is tailor-made for this giant. The Eurasian elk can sometimes be seen at roadsides.



The wolf (*Canis lupus*) is very seldom seen, because it is a secretive animal – you'll find wolf excrement far more often in the Slitere National Park than the animal itself. Wolves love to hunt wild board.



The European pine marten (*Martes martes*) mates during the summer and can be seen during the day. Female martens are lighter than males, and they are more likely to be spotted up at the top of trees.



The beaver (*Castor fiber*) lives throughout the Slitere National Park and actively transforms its environment. The animal can be seen and heard from a distance of just a few metres.



The wild board (*Sus scrofa*) is one of the more common large mammals in the park. During the spring it feeds out in the open and can be easily spotted.



The fox (*Vulpes vulpes*) can be seen hunting mice in fields and meadows during the spring. The fox has outstanding smell, hearing and vision.



The lynx (*Lynx lynx*) is a very cautious animal – the only wild feline in Latvia. It is a myth that the lynx jumps on people from tree branches – it hunts on the ground.



The otter (*Lutra lutra*) finds food in trout streams. During the summer it is a 24/7 animal.

The Slitere National Park features several other hikes, as well as bike, water and auto routes. Look for a list of routes on [www.countryholidays.lv](http://www.countryholidays.lv) and for markings out in nature.



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Photo and text: Vilnis Skuja