

# Snapshot



## SNPS International Conference Study Tour to Latvia





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## Why did we go to Latvia?

The Society of National Park Staff wanted to mark the 40 year Anniversary founding of SNPS as well as the 70 years Anniversary of National Parks with an international conference tour. It is SNPS's purpose to promote understanding and enjoyment of national parks amongst national park staff.



**Alexei's bus**

The aim of the trip was to provide a unique opportunity for members to experience, learn and understand more about protected areas from a new and alternative perspective; from a different country and its hosting organisations as well as from each other on the tour. Knowing staff from the Nature Conservation Agency of Latvia, helped facilitate the tour. Tour Leader Tim Duckmanton, had some prior knowledge of language, locations and Latvian culture, making the organisation of the trip easier to achieve. In particular, the support given by Agnese Baladina, Head of Meza maja Nature Education Centre, Kemeru National Park, was hugely appreciated.

## What did we do?

The conference tour started on 17 September and finished on 26 September. We visited two national parks and Latvia's largest area of protected wetland, before attending the Europarc Conference on the last day.

We met in Riga at the Folkklub ala pagrabas, an excellent folk club that serves great beer and superb food. We travelled around the country in a bus, driven by Alexei who kept us safe on the roads and joined us for the tour. It was an unexpected highlight getting to know him.

Our first visit was to Slitere National Park, on the north west coast. We walked over and around wooded sand dunes with raised bogs in the slacks between them. They are named after the Livonian words kangari (dune) and vigas (wet slack). The unique dune system (over 80 dune lines) was formed from the sandy sediment deposited by the last glaciation. We only managed to walk through a very small proportion of the 90,000 ha of



**Cape Kolka**

woodland. The visitor centre was located in a disused lighthouse and had great potential for a range of interpretation. The national park typically welcomes 50,000 people a year. At Cape Kolka we watched migrating birds, heading south and spotted White Tailed Eagles. Our visit included an opportunity to meet one the last ten fluent Livonian speakers in the world. Marite explained her Livonian heritage and culture. The Soviet occupation helped conserve her culture, as much as it has

prevented development and human activities impacting upon the wildlife within the 5 km wide controlled border that extended from Cape Kolka, south. We know this as the Iron Curtain – it is now being recognised for its value in nature recovery as connecting wildlife corridor through Europe. We also looked out for wolves and beavers. We only spotted wolf scat and had an opportunity to drink beaver tincture, which most of us sampled. Beavers were re-introduced to Latvia, from Norway, in the 1920's and again from Russia in the 1950's. They are now common. Although protected from hunting in protected landscapes, they can be lethally controlled outside of those areas. We experienced beaver management by removing dams where their homebuilding was flooding and making wet meadows unsuitable for the rare saxifrage flower.

Our second study location was Lubans Wetland. One of the most important migration stop over points for water birds and nesting areas for rare species such as Lesser Spotted Eagle, Corncrake and Great Snipe. It is also archaeologically significant as it contains the first recorded history of human occupation in Latvia, from the Late Paleolithic (10,500 years ago). Most years the visitor centre typically meets 3,000 people and in 2018, only 235 overseas visitors. Ilze, our host, estimated that our group constituted 7% of non-Latvian visitors for 2019. We also experienced a very long walk through Krustkalni nature reserve, a wet woodland like no other that any of us had ever experienced before. Part of this included getting stuck in to more beaver management, removing a series of dams. Teiči nature reserve blew our minds when we climbed to the top of the reserve's observation tower. The woodland in the distance, as we looked over the lowland raised bog was 15 km away.



**Kemeri Great Bog Walk**

Our third venue was Kemeri National Park, located near Jurmala and Riga (the most populous places in Latvia). This visit was largely self-led. The higher visitor pressure was evident, from the larger car park at Great Kemeri Bog to the vandalism on the interpretation board. The boardwalk through Great Kemeri Bog took us to another observation tower (front cover image) where we learned about of the importance of the functioning bog for providing

sulphur laden water and mud to the health spas in Kemeri village. Our cultural stop over was the local fishing museum with artefacts, stories and images from the Lapmežciems Kolkas (Soviet fishing fleet collective). Despite the Soviet occupation, a traditional fishing culture has persisted and is maintained by the local community.

The last day of the conference tour concluded with an inspirational and very motivating experience at the Europarc Conference 2019, Nature on Your Mind. We listened to a range of related topics from key note speakers, including health and wellbeing, culture and recreation.



## From a Certain Point of View...

Here, delegates share their different experiences, what it meant to them and how they'll use their new knowledge for the benefit of their National Park.

### Aynsley Clinton, Sustainable Visitor Experience Officer, New Forest

As someone who embraces opportunities afforded through SNPS, I was hooked from the moment Tim delivered his presentation at the SNPS May conference, in the Yorkshire Dales. The prospect of discovering internationally designated landscapes alongside colleagues carried huge appeal.

The Baltic region was unknown territory for me. I wanted to understand how the country transitioned from Russian rule to its creation of National Parks. I was intrigued to learn that Latvian is one of the oldest languages in Europe and the closest to our prehistoric ancestors. Equally, it was disconcerting to learn that Livonian, the language of the fishing community, is endangered.

My role focuses on sustainable visitor experiences, so I was particularly keen to find out about recreation management in Latvia. It soon became apparent that the people are very entwined with the land. Being 50% less densely populated than the UK, and half the land forested and publicly accessible, it was commonplace to see locals picking berries and mushrooms from the natural environment. We experienced fantastic local food first-hand thanks to our welcoming hosts. Although Latvia ranks low economically in Europe, it is rich in wildlife and scores highly in terms of its population's connection to nature.

As we progress work on the England Coastal Path, it was encouraging to learn at the EUROPARC Conference of the 745-mile trail along Estonia and Latvia, discussing shared obstacles and opportunities in this positive project.

I relished the chance to share this wonderful and enlightening experience with colleagues from a range of specialisms.

### Catrin Glyn, Snowdon Partnership Officer, Snowdonia

Meeting Marite in the Livonian Centre in Kolka was an experience I'll never forget. Not only because the hiraeth (see below) in her voice as she spoke Livonian struck a chord with me, but mostly because of the mixture of troublesome emotions I experienced afterwards. I've thought long and hard about it after returning home and have been dumbfounded by the magnitude of the experience. Although the language is only spoken fluently by ten people these days and is considered to be dying, it was very much alive on Marite's lips. Even so, I couldn't but feel a staggering sense of grief after meeting her, a sense of



Livonian Cultural Centre

empathy for those who have lost their mother tongue. Being Welsh, I couldn't imagine losing an integral part of my identity and witnessing the death of my language, I couldn't comprehend such anguish. I felt so grateful but yet overwhelmingly saddened at the same time. It was one of the biggest honours of my life and the complexity of the experience will stay with me forever.

I witnessed first-hand how vulnerable our heritage is. For me, the Livonian language was a symbol of all of Eryri's (Snowdonia) special qualities which are so extraordinary yet so fragile. For that reason, this lesson will undoubtedly be forever echoing within my soul and will be a thread through all aspect of my professional and personal life.

Hiraeth is a Welsh word which cannot be completely translated, it means so much more than solely "missing something" or "missing home". It implies the meaning of missing a time, an era, or a person - including homesickness for what may not exist any longer. It is associated with the bittersweet memory of missing something or someone, while being grateful of that/their existence.

*"Hiraeth - the link with the long-forgotten past, the language of the soul, the call from the inner self. Half forgotten - fraction remembered. It speaks from the rocks, from the earth, from the trees and in the waves. It's always there."*

### **Ceri Rapsey, Rights of Way Support Officer, Exmoor**

I applied for the SNPs Latvia trip because I saw this as a great opportunity to discover a new country, with different protected landscapes and diverse wildlife. It was really interesting to share this experience with my colleagues from other UK National Parks; getting to know them on a personal basis and discover what their roles were and see the different challenges being faced within their National Parks.

On our exploration of the Latvia National Parks, the habitats appeared pristine, teeming with wildlife and noticeably very few people around. I would attribute this to the fact that Latvia has a much lower population density than the UK. Therefore, the protected landscapes have a much lower visitor pressure than our own National Parks. However the visitor numbers to Riga are growing and this tourism will surely spread to the protected landscapes within easy reach of Riga before radiating out to the rest of the country, managing this increase in visitor pressure will be a future challenge for Latvia.

This made me think about how we manage our honey pot sites and the extensive rights of way network to get the balance between minimising the detrimental impacts of visitor pressure, without losing the special qualities and character of the place. I did think that several of the Latvian National Parks managed to get this balance right. For example, creating a long boardwalk trail through the sensitive bog habitat, as this ensured the habitat was not getting trampled and maintained the character of the place.

I had so many highlights from the trip from seeing White Tailed Eagles to eating delicious Latvian food to walking in the footprints of wolves!

### **Chris Tomlin, Park Management Leader, Lake District**

Knowing what an amazing time Tim had visiting Latvia, in 2017, I was keen to go. I was very interested in gaining an understanding of their National Parks, legislation, governance structure and management. I love travel and always try to visit other national parks and where possible meet those managing them. Latvia was on my “bucket list” and I wanted to understand how their culture and national parks are conserved and promoted. I wanted to attend the Europarc conference and meet likeminded colleagues from Europe.



**Snack time**

Understanding beaver ecology and direct impacts on their habitat was fascinating, given that there are proposals for a trial release in the Lake District. You can't beat actually standing, looking and discussing impacts with the site managers. The whole trip was very motivating.

The scale and richness of the national parks is mind blowing. Standing at the edge of a bog that stretches for a further 15km is very humbling. As is having a White Tailed Eagle followed by a Golden Eagle flying directly over your head. Seeing wild Beavers and a Raccoon Dog – priceless memories. Slitere National Park and Lubans wetland complex, were highlights. The Europarc conference was brilliant, with lessons to apply in the Lakes.

I loved meeting and spending time with other likeminded SNPS colleagues, what a great group.

### **Dion Roberts, Uwch Gwyrfai Project Officer, Snowdonia**

I decided to apply for the SNPS International Conference trip to Latvia as I saw it as an excellent opportunity to learn current, well-practised methods to conserve protected landscapes and nature reserves.

On arrival to Slitere National park, I quickly noticed the similarity in the woodland species to what mixtures are found in Snowdonia. A self-guided (very slippery) boardwalk took us through the ancient woodland, where I found management practises quite interesting. Dead falling trees are intentionally left in areas to create open areas on the forest



**Kangari boardwalk**



floor. Trees 300-500 years old are left rotting that became a niche habitat for various fungi's, bryophytes and insects. Here it's predicted that 20-25% of all the forest species were found in dead wood.

Visitor numbers relative to the UK were very low. There were visitor centres, but access to them was difficult and things to do after were limited. I reflected, having easy access information centres and good visitor centres are crucial to generate revenue to maintain protected landscapes.

Conifer trees are allowed to grow on the large peat bogs we visited simply because it's a functioning ecosystem and needs as little intervention as possible.

The re-introduction of Beavers is a hot topic in Wales. My first-hand experience seeing benefits such as large-scale flood alleviation, against damages such as local flooding and tree damage will be beneficial to my colleagues.

Lastly, a key learning experience for me, was sharing knowledge and methods with other members of the trip how they manage challenges in their respective national parks.

### **Emma Stockley, Community Heritage Officer, Dartmoor**

For me, visiting Latvia was an opportunity to live adventurously and learn more about how other National Parks are managed.



**Krustkalni Nature Reserve**

There are similarities between Dartmoor and some of the places we visited which provided unique learning opportunities. Kemer National Park, like Dartmoor, underwent a transformation in public perception during the 19th century and having led a project that explored Dartmoor's Victorian renaissance, it was interesting to understand the reasons for this in Latvia. The Baltic region is widely regarded as the source of the amber beads found amongst the grave goods at Whitehorse Hill on Dartmoor, a recently excavated Bronze Age burial. We visited the Lake Lubans area which was a site of amber bead manufacture during the Neolithic – a tantalising link between the Latvian landscape and ours.

The highlight of the trip was experiencing true silence and tranquillity in an unspoilt natural environment – the silence and tranquillity that exists when you are far from overcrowded towns and cities, away from flight paths, military training areas and busy roads. In the

middle of a Latvian forest, if you stop for a moment, the only sounds are the birds, the trickling of water, the wind in the leaves and this was truly energising.



My experiences in Latvia gave me a unique insight into a beautiful country I knew nothing about and I met many interesting, passionate and dedicated people along the way – those I travelled with, and those who carry out some incredible work in Latvia's National Parks and protected landscapes, with smaller budgets and fewer resources than we have back home. The trip has made me realize how much I value working for a National Park, and how being surrounded by others who are passionate about and motivated by protecting natural and cultural heritage is important to me.

### **Heather Palomino, Volunteer Ranger, Cairngorms**

I hoped to (and did) learn about aspects of practical conservation; visitor management issues; culture and community as celebrated within Latvian protected areas; to hear European insights into nature and its health benefits (and what needs to be done to put ideas into practice). What I learnt from the study tour and the Europarc Conference will be helpful in my Volunteer Ranger role:

- Citizen Science is key for addressing the need for gathering credible evidence in order to influence politicians/policymakers and the public at large about nature's health benefits; and, while out gathering, the health benefits will be experienced by the participant. I will be actively advocating this.
- Communication is vital for influencing the public, politicians, and interest groups. A continuous stream of neutral and positive communication is important social capital.
- Following Vilnius' informative talk about Beavers, in Slitere National Park, I am determined to learn more. I was truly impressed by Beavers' engineering skills and privileged to see their dams up close. I have already downloaded Scottish Natural Heritage documentation on Beavers, their protection and management so I can learn more about Beavers in Scotland and their territorial expansion.
- Peat bogs are fascinating and I've gained an appreciation of their importance. I will be following up by reading more about SNH's Peatland Action.
- Latvian identity appears to be intertwined with nature and their culture of song writing/poetry (I can see parallels with our Scottish culture).
- The learning experience was enhanced by staying with locals and eating produce hunted/caught nearby prepared by our hosts.
- I found the signage in the Parks interesting, informative, explaining in some detail the species/habitats (not only in Latvian but also in English). Symbols for do's and don'ts were easily understood, as was advisory notice about ticks being present in the area. I will carefully consider our signage when I am out and about in my own Park.
- Interesting to visit Parks with very restricted access and hear how that is managed. This is a contrast to Scotland's outdoor access freedoms, with sometimes negative impacts on species/habitats.



## Jon Pimm, Area Warden, Brecon Beacons



**Was this Jon's tree?**

Latvia had never been a place I had ever considered visiting. So when the email came around the staff asking for applications to go on a study tour I checked with both my line manager at work and my domestic manager at home and applied to go.

To be perfectly honest I had to look on a map to see where exactly Latvia was when I was told I had been successful in my application to join the study tour. I knew nothing about the country and so did a quick bit of reading up from travel guides.

Being a Warden with Brecon Beacons National Park I was keen to see how work is done on the ground. We had the opportunity to help with a number of practical tasks, dismantling Beaver dams, scrub clearance and path

clearance work and while it was interesting and useful to talk to the staff about the way they do things and share approaches and experiences.

Thinking back now, a month after the trip, the things that are coming back to me, other than the great group we had from most of the UK National Parks, are the friendliness of the Latvian people; the vast size of the bogs we walked around; the amount of forestry (50% forest cover); the close link and respect the population have with the environment through foraging for food; the Golden Eagles soaring overhead; and the tree cut down over night by a beaver near to one of our accommodation huts.

If you ever have the opportunity to visit Latvia I would recommend that you do but that you politely refuse the Beaver tincture if you are offered it.

## Karen Bolton, Planning Enforcement Officer, Pembrokeshire Coast

This trip was life changing for the following reasons. The trip for me pivoted around Dr William Bird's Europarc 2019 conference lecture on the explanation of how a natural healthy life combatting social isolation, stress and poor living/eating conditions could literally save lives. The whole trip, embracing Latvia, its people and relatively undeveloped natural environment as well as the social integration of fellow (previously) unknown SNPS members was the embodiment of William Bird's principle. I became one with Latvia and our group and I loved it. This was transformative. Since I have been back I have explained to people what I have learnt and how and why precisely good diet, moderate exercise and positive social interaction can save other people.

This has been transformative for me personally. I had planned to change jobs but now I see that the new job would not have been supportive of my needs. I am looking at my life as a whole and have made significant changes in diet and exercise



and more importantly am now more supportive towards the emotional needs of people as well as protecting my own mental health and well-being. It has made me question what I am doing and where I am going and how best I can be happy. On top of that I had a wonderful trip, made lifelong friends and have generated loads of new ideas for our National Park. Thank you.



**Nature on your Mind: Understanding our Values**

### **Laura Baird, Information Officer, Loch Lomond and Trossachs**

I represented Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority on the SNPS International Conference 2019 to Latvia.

I was keen to learn more about the Baltic region, this is a relatively undiscovered part of the Europe, before visiting I'd never met anyone who had been there.

We stayed in several locations giving us an insight in to the landscape, culture and heritage of the country, from sandy beaches on the Baltic coast, beside pine forests carpeted in Heather, to peat woodlands threaded with rivers, occupied by Beavers, wild Boar, Wolves and deer populate the landscape. Two of the group were lucky enough to see a wild Elk.

Our experiences ranged from dismantling Beaver dams to clearing paths and burning pine branches to protect rare plant species.

Our food choices ranged from Elk sausage to wild boar soup. Our hosts were generous in their hospitality and our guides were knowledgeable and informative about the landscape, habitat and heritage they are protecting.

A highlight of the trip was the group I travelled with from National Parks across the UK. We quickly found common interests and spending ten days in each other's company which could have been challenging as we had not met before. It was one of the best parts of the whole experience.

We attended the Europarc Conference, listened to speakers and participated in discussion groups. This has been an inspirational and uplifting experience, increasing my knowledge of the Baltic region, and of other UK National Parks.

### **Linda Stafford, Ranger Services Administrator, Yorkshire Dales**

Being new to the National Park family I have been amazed at the wide range of knowledge and expertise of my fellow colleagues. The opportunity of meeting professionals from both UK and European national parks along with a personal interest in how nature can help with mental health, I felt excited at the opportunity to take part in the trip and expand on my understanding.

An on-tap flow of information along with miles of untouched golden beaches, vast areas of natural landscape including woodlands, meadows, wetlands, not to mention the Wolves, Elk, Beavers and White Tailed Eagles, food and history ... my time in Latvia surpassed all of my expectations. Latvia has something for everyone and is a must-go place. I highly recommend a visit to the Slitere National Park – but you should definitely avoid the Beaver tincture!



**Teiči Nature Reserve**

On a recent visit to a peat bog restoration in the Yorkshire Dales I recalled a walk along the boardwalk of the 12,000 year old bog, called Teiči Nature Reserve, with peat around 7 to 9 metres deep. Our guide talked about the importance of the bog and the animal and plant species that play an important role in biodiversity, providing a functioning ecosystem that supplies oxygen, clean air and water.

### **Mark Antcliff, Woodland Officer, North York Moors**

After 12 years working in a National Park and 30 years following a career in UK forestry I was very excited about the prospect of visiting Latvia; a country with a staggering 52% woodland cover.

Although familiar with the management of protected areas in the UK I wanted to see what insights Latvia and those who manage their parks could provide, especially in light of an increasing ambition to re-afforest some of our protected areas for social, economic and environmental benefits.

I was overwhelmed by the quality, extent and diversity of the forests we visited. These were not physically isolated areas, they were predominantly flat, low lying areas surrounded by human occupation, albeit at a relatively low population density.

Habitats have been conserved; partly by design and partly by accident through a range of differing protection policies over several hundred years, including restricting access during Soviet times.

Strict nature reserves can only be visited with permission from, and guided by the Nature Conservation Agency. The result is near pristine habitats the like of which we seldom see in the UK.



Latvia has an abundance of wildlife especially in the upper levels of the food chain with Wolves, Lynx, Pine Martens, Bear and raptors in numbers that perhaps ought to be present in some of our parks. Reasons for this are many but the key aspects include habitat extent, patch size, and connectivity along with a general willingness of people to accept these as “normal” residents of the countryside.

If we are going to re-wild our parks we will need to re-wilden our residents and visitors at the same time and reconnecting them with nature. The theme of the conference at the end of the tour which resonated so strongly after our experiences.

### **Neil Punchard, Broadland Catchment Partnership Officer, Broads**

I found the trip to Latvia incredibly inspiring and it increased my understanding of the benefits of connecting with nature on a personal and professional level. I had the privilege to experience different models for protecting National Parks and use this learning to develop collaborative ideas with the stakeholders in my everyday work.

The acceptance of ‘sacrificial areas’ and provision of designated walkways, facilities and security cameras to ensure this is adhered to was good to see in practice. The use of permits for local foragers, hunters, and naturalists within nature reserves along with guides showed a successful approach to meeting diverse and, at times, conflicting needs.

I was struck by the effectiveness of watchtowers for engagement, monitoring and policing of the parks. I loved the stunning external architecture of the visitor and cultural centres that combined old and new natural materials, such as black wood and rusting metal. The coherent signage used local materials and was simple and effective using symbols rather than words where possible.

The presentations at the Europarc conference were high calibre and gave me some excellent ideas for projects and engagement in the Broadland Catchment Partnership and Broads National Park. The multiple benefits of bunds, and water level management infrastructure, for flood protection, wetland creation, access and recreation was clearly evident and obviously made the cost-benefit analysis viable.



**Cape Kolka observation tower**

I now understand more about all the other UK National Parks from listening to passionate and knowledgeable colleagues that I travelled with who I'm now fortunate to call my friends. I learnt a lot about leadership and the tangible benefits of

developing a high functioning team of people with different backgrounds, beliefs, skills and experiences. The benefits of communally eating, and celebrating, home cooked, local food really rang true. Always finding time at the end of the day for people to have their say (and beer!) and views to be aired and discussed worked incredibly well.

### **Rafael Grosso Macpherson, Senior Development Management Officer, South Downs**

I joined SNPS on the study tour to Latvia as I am relatively new in the National Parks and wanted to be more involved in the movement. Having worked in development management in protected landscapes for several years now, I realise how important is to have a good understanding of how communities live, work and enjoy our National Parks; as well as the value of our natural and cultural capital. Planners can be seen sometimes as working separately from other professionals, and there might be some truth in it. I have an honest interest in the National Park and one of the reasons why I joined was to meet members of staff who would enrich my experience of working in National Parks.



**Kemeris Great Bog Walk**

Visiting Latvia on the study tour was just phenomenal as it made me discover new ecosystems that I wasn't familiar with before, but also to understand how other protected areas are managed.

From this trip, besides of the knowledge gained from the Latvian counterparts and the Europarc conference, I take a new relationship with National Parks in the UK. I have not just learned what makes each place special but also I feel that thanks to this trip we have built good networks that would help us to make our work more productive and enjoyable.

### **Rebecca Thompson, Future Farming Policy Officer, North York Moors**

The opportunity to sign up to the SNPS study tour to Latvia came in the year in which I celebrate 20 years of working for the North York Moors National Park Authority. The timing couldn't have been better for me and I realised it was opportunity not to be missed. Having had six different roles during my time at the Authority, I'm about to embark on a new piece of work; working with Defra as they develop a new Environmental Land Management System that will deliver against the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan. I knew that taking time out from a place where I've lived and worked for 20 years to visit a place that I'd be unlikely to visit otherwise, would allow me to gain an insight into how others seek to protect the natural and cultural heritage of protected landscapes; how they work with farmers



and land managers to achieve this. Lessons learnt from the trip would be valuable to my work in the North York Moors.

I also knew that on a personal level that the trip would do me a power of good. With the passing of time I was feeling that I'd got a bit 'soft' and needed to rediscover my love of travel and adventure. A trip to the beautiful country of Latvia with an amazing group of National Park staff to witness some truly breath-taking scenery was all that I'd hoped for and more and I'm hugely grateful to all those who enabled the trip to happen.

### **Susan Baty-Symes, Information Adviser, Yorkshire Dales**

When I was offered the opportunity to join a trip to Latvia, with colleagues from all over the UK, I jumped at the chance. It was a way to broaden my knowledge of our wider park network and to learn from more experienced colleagues, as well as the opportunity to compare how parks are managed in another country. Whilst there, we were privileged to take part in discussions with attendees from 36 countries at the Europarc conference in Jurmala, addressing European policy and regional issues. I learned so much from the interchange of ideas and information, and have returned with a better insight into the diversity of nature and importance of protecting our natural heritage.

Seventeen of us flew into the country, predominantly strangers, but all with a common love of nature which, I think, bound us together. We worked alongside each other assisting in scrub clearance and Beaver dam management. Not something many of us would have been able to experience in our local area. At times we struggled through challenging terrain, over peat bogs with moss so deep that we sunk down into it. We experienced great teamwork, looking after one another and developing lasting friendships. We walked through deep moss, with the fresh smell of vegetation, cranberries and blueberries freely available to pick along the way, an experience for me never to be forgotten. The vastness of the peat bogs was mind boggling!



**Kolka lunchtime**

Although I had researched beforehand the areas we were to visit in Latvia, nothing could prepare me for the beauty of the country and the welcome we were to be given by our hosts and guides, fond memories that will remain with me for a long time and incentivise me to book a return visit.

## What did we learn?

We learned a lot about the differences managing protected landscapes, between the UK and Latvia. Each of us has taken something unique and very relevant to our own needs and development. Particular highlights, related to our individual reasons for going are:

- A greater appreciation of and improved understanding of UK National Parks, from each other.
- First-hand experience of the power of nature to inspire and motivate change within individuals.
- Improving understanding of intangible cultural heritage, how it is valued and nurtured, managed and people engaged in its protection and enhancement.
- The stark contrast of managing an established Beaver population compared to the re-introduction of Beavers in the UK, giving insight into potential future challenges.
- Endurance and development of conservation and protected landscapes through Soviet times due to the deep connection to nature in the Latvian cultural heritage.
- Nature can provide huge opportunities for eco-tourism and rural development.



## More information

Links to further sources of information and locations we visited:

[Slitere National Park](#)

[Lubans Wetland visitor centre](#)

[Lubāns wetland](#)

[Krustkalni Nature Reserve](#)

[Teiči Nature Reserve](#)

[Kemerī National Park](#)

[Europarc Conference summary](#)

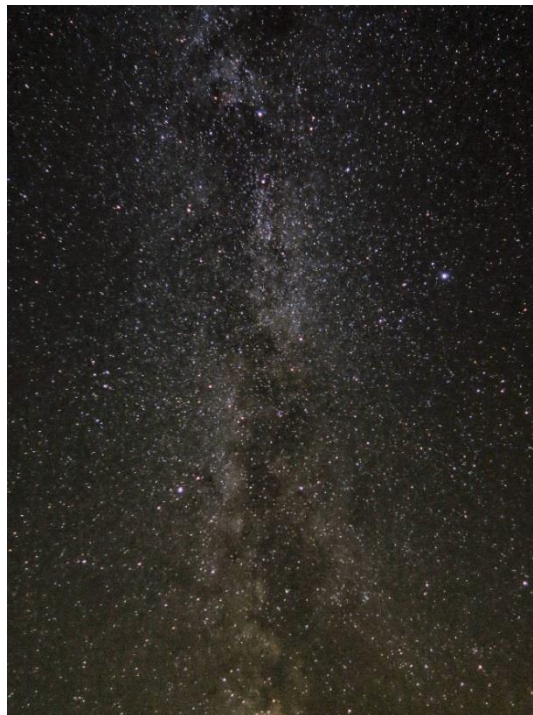
[Nature Conservation Agency of Latvia](#)

[SNPS Twitter for our daily videos @SNPS](#)

[SNPS on Facebook](#) has a collection of albums from the tour (you need to be a group member to view)

Our accommodation (great examples of local fishing families' diversification into eco-tourism):

- [Pitagi Guest House](#), at Slitere National Park
- [Zvejneike Guest House](#), at Lubans Wetland



**Zvejneike September night sky**

### SNPS would like to thank...

Many and grateful thanks goes to these people for supporting our conference tour:

- Agnese Balandina, Head of Meza maja Nature Education Centre, Kemer National Park
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- Erika Klavina, Nature Education Specialist, Slitere National Park
- Vilnis Skuja, Nature Protection Expert, Slitere National Park
- Madars Burnevics, Senior State Environmental Inspector, Slitere National Park
- Ilze Sauša, Centre Manager, Lubans Wetland Information Centre
- Dagnis Vasilevskis. Head of Nature Protection, for Krustkalni Nature Reserve and Teiči Nature Reserve
- Anita Prosser, Director, Europarc Atlantic Isles
- Signe and Janis, Owners at Pitagi Guest House owners, Slitere National Park
- Anna and Janis, Zvejneike Guest House owners, Lubans Wetland
- Alexei the bus driver, from Riga Taxi Tours

### Funded by...

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## Supporting National Park Authorities

