

# NATURE SUPERSTARS OF ESTONIA 2021

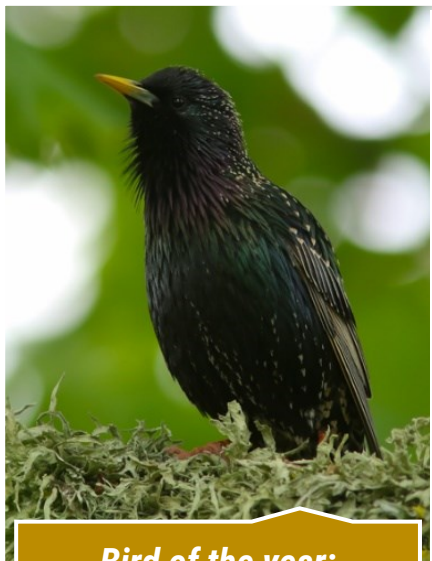


Foto: Uku Paal

**Bird of the year:  
the common starling**

The **common starling** (*Sturnus vulgaris*) is a regular bird in Estonian cultural landscapes. It has a spotted black plumage and a yellow bill. They arrive in March and leave in November. The common starling prefers to nest in cavities, including man-made nest boxes. During late April or May the female lays 4-7 pale blue eggs and both parents participate in brooding. The offspring hatch on the 11th or 12th day and leave the nest on their third week. Starlings are mainly insectivorous but can also feed on buds and berries. Common starlings can mimic sounds and birdsongs. They walk on ground instead of hopping.



Foto: Piret Valge

**Tree of the year:  
the common juniper**

The **common juniper** (*Juniperus communis*) usually grows as a small tree or shrub in Estonia. It is more common in Western Estonia and the islands. It is dioecious – male and female cones form on separate plants. The berry-like cones ripen on the 2nd year. Thus, the female juniper can have both unripe green and ripe blue cones from two different years. These juniper berries are used both in medicine and culinary practices. Its wood has

also been used in craftsmanship. The common juniper chosen as the first Estonian tree of the year in 1996 when this tradition first started.



Rattus rattus ja Rattus norvegicus Foto: Andrei Miljutin

**Animal of the year: the black rat and the brown rat**

The **black rat** (*Rattus rattus*) and the more aggressive **brown rat** (*Rattus norvegicus*) are similar in appearance. The black rat arrived to Estonia in the 13th century and the brown rat in the 18th. Nowadays the black rat can be found in Southeastern Estonia. A skilled climber, it hides commonly in our granaries and attics. With bigger eyes and ears it looks less threatening of the two rats. The brown rat commonly dwells in our cellars and pipes. The widely used laboratory rat has been bred from brown rats. As both rats are omnivores they can spread pathogens and spoil food in households.

The **lesser twayblade** (*Neottia cordata syn. Listera cordata*) grows sparsely all over Estonia in humid forest environments. Its cordate leaves are about the size of a fingertip and set in pairs. No more than 20 cm tall, these small orchids bloom from May to July. There are about 5 – 20 yellowish, green or even reddish flowers in a thin cluster. They are commonly pollinated by mosquitoes and smaller flies. The lesser twayblade is a protected species of the 2nd category in Estonia. Its primary threat is deforestation.



Foto: Toomas Hirse

**Orchid of the year:  
the lesser twayblade**

The **garden tiger moth** (*Arctia caja*) has a wingspan of 52-70 mm. It has brown front wings with a white pattern and orange back wings with brown spots. It can be seen in July and August and prefers many types of habitats including grasslands and forests. The finger-sized caterpillars are brown and covered in fur. They will start feeding in autumn, survive the winter and moult five times before pupating in spring. The caterpillars feed on the leaves of trees and plants.



Foto: Ain Piir

**Butterfly of the year:  
the garden tiger moth**

Having a similar shape to a fern or a bird feather, the **knights plume moss** (*Ptilium crista-castrensis*) is one of the most decorative mosses in Estonia. It is about 10 cm tall with curved stems and branches. Though it may seem soft it feels rigid to the touch. Having a bright colour it can be easily distinguished among other moss species. The knights plume moss prefers humid and semi-shady coniferous forests and is common all over Estonia.



Foto: Silvia Pihu

**Moss of the year:  
the knights plume moss**

The **burnt spiny cap** (*Hydnellum fuligineoviolaceum*) has a brownish cap with a dark blue hue. There are



Foto: Vello Liiv

**Fungus of the year:  
the burnt spiny cap**

brownish or blueish teeth under the cap which produce spores. This fungus has only been found on the islands of Hiiumaa, Saaremaa and Vormsi with only 10 confirmed locations. It prefers to grow near conifers in pine and alvar forests. The burnt spiny cap is a protected species of the 1st category in Estonia. Its fruit bodies can be seen in September and October and should not be picked.

The **cambisol** is a stony yet fertile soil. It has formed on parent material rich in limestone which can also occur in the lower horizons of the soil. It is common in Northern and Southwestern Estonia and on our islands as well. It is rich in nutrients and can sustain forests, grasslands as well as agricultural

land. Its fertility may vary as it depends on the thickness of the organic horizon, as well as the content of rocks. Cambisols form 6,3% soils and 11,1% of agricultural land in Estonia.



Foto: Almar Rokko

**Fish of the year:  
the northern pike**

The **northern pike** (*Esox lucius*) is a common fish in our lakes, rivers and coastal sea. It is a solitary predator and can spend long periods between plants ambushing prey. It catches other fish with a lightning fast strike but can also feed on waterbirds, frogs and small mammals. It is prohibited to go pike fishing in spring – they spawn after ice has melted and typically choose flooded areas. The northern pike is a respected fish in both Estonian folklore and cuisine. The legal minimum size of a caught pike is 45 cm. A hobby fisher is allowed to catch no more than 5 pikes a day.



Foto: Eesti Mulliteaduse Selts

**Soil of the year:  
the cambisol**