

# HEROES IN THE NATURE 2024



Foto: Raul Viik

**Bird of the year:  
the common cuckoo  
kägu**

**The common cuckoo** (*Cuculus canorus*) is about the size of a pigeon. Its appearance is similar to the sparrowhawk's or merlin's. The common cuckoo is a brood parasite. It lays small eggs (~3 g) into nests of other species (white wagtail, spotted flycatcher, whinchat etc). Cuckoos usually prefer nests of the species they were born in themselves. The cuckoo chick hatches before the host chicks and evicts the host chicks from the nest. It leaves the nest on its 20th day, and is being fed by its foster parents for another couple of weeks. The common cuckoo feeds on invertebrates, including furry caterpillars usually passed by other birds. Read more: [Eesti Ornitoloogiaühing](#)



Foto: Piret Eensoo

**Tree of the year:  
the pedunculate oak  
tamm**

**The pedunculate oak** (*Quercus robur*) was tree of the year first in 1998. The oak flowers during leafing. It is wind-pollinated and its flowers, both male and female, are inconspicuous. The acorns, however, are known by everyone. Acorns are eaten by mammals, birds and even people during difficult times. The Tamme-Lauri oak is our oldest and thickest known tree. We don't really have a national tree but in the hearts of many Estonians, the oak has a special place as a symbol of strength and long lifespan. Oak branches are shown on our national coat of arms, while the oak leaf is a symbol of nature conservation. Read more: [loodusajakiri.ee](#)



Foto: Piret Eensoo

**Orchid of the year:  
the common spotted  
orchid  
vööthuul-sõrmkäpp**

**The Eurasian otter** (*Lutra lutra*) is a semiaquatic mustelid. It has a long streamlined body and short limbs with webbed feet. While swimming calmly, the head and upper back are out of the water. The otter's waterproof fur is one of the more durable ones. It feeds on amphibians, fish, small mammals and aquatic insects. It leaves its strong-smelling droppings in a visible location. Otters are playful, curious but also cautious. Their dens are usually located in the shores of waterbodies. They can have 1–3 pups. A protected species (category III) threatened by changes in water level, destruction of habitats and pollution. Read more: [Looduskalender](#)

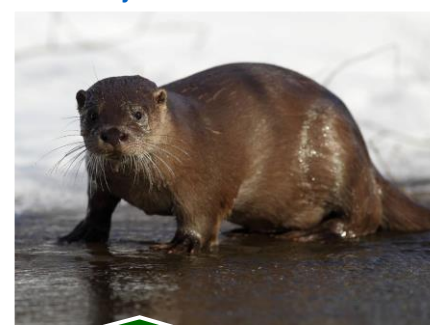


Foto: Remek Meel

**Animal of the year:  
Eurasian otter  
saarmas**

**The common spotted orchid** (*Dactylorhiza fuchsii*) is common all over Estonia. It grows in sparsely mixed forests, roadsides, damp meadows and drainage ditches. The flowers are purplish-pink with dark dots and dashes. The lips have three lobes with the middle lobe shaped like a saw tooth. It flowers in June-July and is pollinated by beetles, bees and bumblebees. The flowers have a weak aroma and do not contain nectar. The leaves are spotted on top and silvery underneath. The lower leaf is obovate. A protected species (category III) threatened by shrubification of its habitat. Read more: [Eesti Orhideekaitse Klubi](#)

**The wall brown** (*Lasiommata megera*) was first discovered in Estonia in 2018. It is a southern species whose coming into Estonia is connected to climate change. The wingspan is about 5 cm. It prefers open landscapes like pastures, roadsides and forest edges with grasses their larvae can feed on. Grown wall browns can be seen in May-June and August-September. Read more: [Looduskalender](#)



Foto: Ain Piir

**Butterfly of the year:  
the wall brown  
kirju-tumesilmik**

**Mollic gleysol** (Go) is a nutrient-rich soil formed in damp conditions. Mixed forests of both conifers and broad-leaved trees grow on these soils with a rich groundcover. These make up nearly half of all known gleysols and are most common in Pärnumaa, Läänemaa, Hiiumaa and Raplamaa. Read more: [Eesti Maaülikool](#)

**The common liverwort** (*Marchantia polymorpha*) grows in damp habitats like forests, drainage ditches, but also on fireplaces. They can be a troublesome „weed“ for gardeners. The body of liverwort is called a thallus. The thallus branches dichotomously. They produce umbrella-like gametophores which contain male and female gametes on male and female liverworts respectively. Additionally, gemma cups can be observed on the thallus which contain gemmae to reproduce asexually. Using both ways the liverwort ensures successful reproduction. Read more: [Eesti Samblasõbrad](#)



Foto: Piret Eensoo

**The moss of the year:  
the common liverwort  
helvik**



Foto: Priit Penu

**Soil if the year:  
Mollic Gleysol  
leostunud gleimuld**

**The candy cap** (*Lactarius camphoratus*) is a common milk-cap mushroom in spruce and mixed spruce forests. Its cap is thin, about 5 cm wide, dark red-brown and even blackish-brown with a white latex. The body tastes mild but spicy and smells like curry. Suitable for drying and seasoning a variety of foods. Fruiting bodies appear from June till October. Read more: [Eesti Mükoloogiaühing](#)

**The pike perch** (*Sander lucioperca*) is a fish with a narrow head, a sharp nose and fusiform body. Its first dorsal fin has spines. Lives in lakes Peipus and Võrtsjärv, as well as in the lakes of Southern Estonia as well as the river Emajõgi. Also in coastal sea, especially Pärnu bay. A good pike perch lake is rich with nutrients and oxygen and first to warm up in spring. The pike perch is a carnivore. It is an esteemed food fish. To ensure proper reproduction, the minimum size of pike perches is 51 cm in lake Võrtsjärv and 46 cm in other waterbodies. The limit for recreational fishers is 5 pike perches a day. Fishing for pike perch is prohibited during spawning period. Read more: [Kalastaja](#)



Foto: Arvo Tuukene

**Fish of the year:  
the pike perch  
koha**

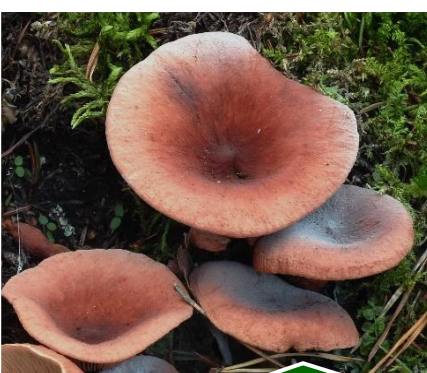


Foto: Vello Liiv

**Fungus of the year:  
the candy cap  
kamperrisikas**