

First Saimaa ringed seals successfully translocated within Lake Saimaa in Finland

June 8 2023



Photo of Tuukka, one of the translocated Saimaa ringed seals. Credit: UEF Saimaa Ringed Seal Research / Vincent Sorjonen-Biard

In Finland, two adult Saimaa ringed seals were successfully translocated from Pihlajavesi basin to Kolovesi basin and to the southern part of

Lake Saimaa in late May. The seals, known as Amalia and Tuukka, have stayed in their new habitats. Landlocked in Lake Saimaa, the Saimaa ringed seal is one of the world's rarest and most endangered seals.

The Saimaa ringed seal translocations on Lake Saimaa have been successfully completed for this spring. The [seals](#) were translocated during the molting season in late May, when Saimaa ringed seals can be spotted resting on rocks. Amalia, an adult female, was translocated from Pihlajavesi basin to Kolovesi basin, and Tuukka, a young adult male, from Pihlajavesi to the southern part of Lake Saimaa.

"The entire translocation process, including capture, transport and handling, took only a few hours. Everything went smoothly, and a veterinarian was there to look after the seals' well-being at all times. Both Amalia and Tuukka were very calm about getting translocated," says WWF Regional Manager Ismo Marttinen, who works as Fieldwork Manager for the seal translocations.

After their translocations, the seals moved in an area covering about ten kilometers from their release points, but during these couple of weeks, they both seem to have settled in a smaller area.

"Amalia has taken a liking to a sheltered bay on Kolovesi, where she's been resting, and Tuukka is catching fish on the southern part of Lake Saimaa. Both seals have already dived to depths of over 30 meters, indicating that they're foraging in new waters," says Researcher Marja Niemi of the University of Eastern Finland.

The individuals to be translocated were identified by their unique fur patterns, and game camera footage provided information on their sex and age group, as well as some information on their background. Amalia (Phs 221) is an adult, slightly older female previously known to researchers, and Tuukka (Phs 499) is a young adult male.

The aim of the translocations is to maintain the remaining genetic diversity of the Saimaa ringed seal population and to prevent segregation into sub-populations. Studies show that the genetic diversity of the Saimaa ringed seal population of some 440 individuals is very low and, alarmingly, the population is becoming segregated into sub-populations especially on the southern part of Lake Saimaa and on Kolovesi, where a significant reduction in the number of female seals giving birth is also a cause of concern.

"Amalia will hopefully add to the number of seals giving birth on Kolovesi, and Tuukka will introduce new genes to the southern part of Lake Saimaa. If the translocated seals remain in their new habitats and find partners to mate with there, the positive impact of these translocations will, above all, hopefully be seen in future seal generations," says Miina Auttila Senior Specialist in Nature Conservation at Metsähallitus, Parks & Wildlife Finland.

The translocated seals' settlement in their new habitat and life will be studied in many ways in the future. Initially, the seals will be monitored with small satellite tracking devices, which have been attached to their fur and are expected to fall off by next spring's molting season at the latest. Thanks to their individual fur patterns, seals can be monitored throughout their [life cycle](#), and DNA samples enable monitoring to continue to future generations, too.

Provided by University of Eastern Finland

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