

Estonian Hand Puppets

Anu Kotli

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Joe Coca

When Carol Rhoades first saw Anu Kotli's knitted Estonian hand puppets, she thought how beautiful they'd be in handspun yarn. The result was this collaboration.

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Estonian Hand Puppets

Knitting for teaching, learning, and sharing

BY ANU KOTLI AND CAROL H. RHOADES

ON MY FIRST SIGHT of Estonian animal puppets at a knitting retreat in Norway, I knew they would be lovely in handspun yarn. The designer, Anu Kotli, very generously gave me copies of some patterns, and I later knitted a rabbit for a friend with angora from her bunny. On all the puppets, the head shaping and the embroidery of the features are essential to the animal's looks. Since Anu doesn't spin but is an expert knitter, we decided that I would spin and she would knit for this project.

The handspun yarn

Although I wanted to spin Estonian wool for these sheep puppets, that wasn't possible. Most Estonian yarn is not necessarily produced with wool from locally raised sheep. The native sheep in Estonia are northern short-tails, many with somewhat coarse outer coats and soft, springy undercoats. There are only a few hundred of these sheep left and a dedicated group is working to preserve them, but the fleece cannot be sold at this time. In their honor, I decided to spin Shetland (also a northern short-tail) wool.

Anu normally knits with a fine two-ply worsted-spun Estonian yarn that measures 16 wraps per inch. Any substitute yarn should be somewhat firm but have a little surface fuzz to give dimension to the puppets. For easy spinning, I chose pin-drafted rovings (a semiworsted preparation) from Julie Guilette at Bramble Wool Farm, and I spun the colors short draw on my Lendrum at 12:1 and plied them at 15:1. The black was shorter and crimpier than the other colors, so I spun and washed it first to use as a standard. I spun it with a short forward draw to increase control over the fiber's natural loft. I spun the other colors semiworsted with a short backward draw. Because the roving contained spinning oil, I washed the skeins in two gallons of hot tap water with a half tablespoon of Louet's Fibermaster woolwash. I rinsed the skeins in hot water twice, then pinned them to dry on the clothesline after squeezing out the water.

Knitting an Estonian hand puppet

Anu's patterns are usually sketches, with specific motifs and their arrangement is left to the knitter. Each puppet typically starts with a one-inch bottom border. The body can be worked in a single allover pattern or a series of small pattern bands. The legs are worked as for mitten thumbs. The head starts with a "flap" for the back, after which stitches are picked up around the sides of the flap and the face is shaped with a series of decreases. Ears are knitted separately and sewn on.

Choose a body pattern and determine the number of stitches to cast on. You may need to adjust the cast-on number for the stitch multiple of the border—just remember to

Project Notes

Finished size: 9½" tall and 10" circumference.

Fiber: Each puppet uses 2¼ ounces Shetland wool pin-drafted roving (obtained from Julie Guilette, Bramble Wool Farm, 265 Truway Rd., Luxemburg, WI 54217; www.sawmat.com). The flock's colors are Shetland black, dark moorit, gray, and white (the white is 11 percent angora).

Yarn: About 1 ounce each of two contrasting colors of 2-ply Shetland, 88 yards per ounce, 15 wraps per inch. Also small amounts of yarn for embroidering features and ½ ounce waste yarn (raveled knitting works well) for stuffing head.

Gauge: 8 sts and 9 rows = 1".

Needles: Set of 5 double-pointed needles, U.S. size 0 or size to obtain gauge; tapestry needle for embroidery.

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increase or decrease as needed before you begin the body motif. The black, white, and brown sheep bodies have 80 sts; the gray one has 72 sts.

Bottom border patterns (choose one)

The cast-on and initial garter-stitch rows are usually worked with the main color (as for sheep's head).

Pattern 1: Cast on an even number of stitches. Purl 1 round; knit 1 round; purl 1 round. Work 6 rounds ribbing: *K1 color A, p1 color B; rep from * around.

Pattern 2: Cast on a multiple of 4 sts. Work 8 rnds ribbing: *K2 color A, p2 color B; rep from * around.

Pattern 3: Cast on a multiple of 4 sts. Purl 2 rounds. Work 8 rounds diagonal ribbing:

Round 1: *K2 color A, p2 color B; rep from * around.

Round 2: *P1 color B, k2 color A, p1 color B; rep from * around.

Round 3: *P2 color B, k2 color A; rep from * around.

Round 4: *K1 color A, p2 color B, k1 color A; rep from * around.

Pattern 4: Loosely cast on a multiple of 10 sts. Work 8 rounds:

* K1, yo, k1, sl1, k2tog, pssso, yo, p1, yo, sl1, k2tog, pssso, k1, yo; rep from * around.

Body

Choose a body pattern and work in it for about 4½ to 5 inches. Make sure the pattern is centered on front and back.

Front legs

The legs are usually worked in a small motif with a repeat of 4 to 6 sts or in a single color

with the last few rows in a contrast color or simple k1 light/k1 dark pattern. Start right leg at beginning of round, knit 9 or 10 sts, CO 4 to 8 sts, place all but last 9 or 10 sts on a holder, and knit sts at end of round. For example, for Kirju and Pilve: K10, CO 8, k10 = 28 sts; Sini: k9, CO 6, k9 = 24 sts; Kriimu: k10, CO 4, k10 = 24 sts. Work in pattern for 2 inches. Shape top in a single color, decreasing 4 sts on each round. For a 28-st leg: (k5, k2tog) 4 times; next round: (k4, k2tog) 4 times; continue as set with 1 less st before decrease on each round. Cut yarn and pull tail through remaining sts; weave in tail neatly on WS.

Work left leg as for right, using the same number of sts at left side; however, if you start at front, the cast-on sts will come after all the sts knitted from the body.



Anu and Carol named the sheep: 1) Kirju, 2) Kriimu, 3) Pilve, and 4) Sini.



Anu's sheep puppet couldn't resist being one of the flock.

Neck

The neck is worked with the remaining sts from the body plus sts picked up and knitted from the cast-on sts at each leg. For example, Kirju has 40 body sts remaining—20 at front and 20 at back. Eight sts were cast on at the leg, so pick

up and knit 8 sts at each leg = 56 sts. The neck can be worked as a continuation of the body pattern, in one color, or in a simple motif. Work 10 rounds for the neck, decreasing to 52 sts on fourth round and to 48 sts on eighth round.

Head

Work across the first 24 sts (front neck) and place the sts on a holder. Work across remaining 24 sts of round for back of head. Work back and forth for 13 rows, slipping first st of each row purlwise. Work 8 short rows, starting on RS: Knit to last st, yarn to front, slip st purlwise; turn, slip wrapped st and purl to last st; yarn to back; slip last st purlwise; turn and slip wrapped st. Work one less st each row. When there are 4 wrapped sts at each side, use needle 1 to knit across to last 4 sts (wrapped); knit each with its wrap (on the next round, you will knit the 4 wrapped sts on right side of flap). Pick up and knit 7 sts along left side of flap (needle 2); knit across 24 sts on holder

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(needle 3), and pick up and knit 7 sts along right side of flap (needle 4) = 62 sts. Work in the round. On every fourth round, decrease for chin on needle 3 (ssk at beg of needle and k2tog at end). On the eighth round, begin eye sockets: work ssk at beg of needle 1 and k2tog at end of needle 1—repeat this decrease on alternate rounds a total of 5 times = 14 sts on needle 1 and 44 sts total. Now decrease at chin only and knit until ready to work fifth chin decrease row. On same rounds as for chin decreases, decrease on needles 2 (k3, k2tog, k2) and 4 (k2, k2tog, k3). Continue as set, with 3 knit sts between chin and side of face decreases until 32 sts remain. Knit 3 rounds and then decrease only at sides = 30 sts total. Knit 1 round and divide sts evenly onto three needles. Shape

nose by decreasing at beginning and end of each needle until 6 sts remain. Cut yarn and draw tail through remaining sts; weave in tail neatly on WS.

Ears (make 2 alike)

Cast on 24 sts; join, being careful not to twist the cast-on row. Knit 10 rounds.

Shape top

Rnd 1: (K1, ssk, k6, k2tog, k1) twice (20 sts rem).

Rnds 2-3: Knit 2 rnds.

Rnd 4: (K1, ssk, k4, k2tog, k1) twice (16 sts rem).

Rnds 5-6: Knit 2 rnds.

Rnd 7: (K1, ssk, k2, k2tog, k1) twice (12 sts rem).

Rnds 8-9: Knit 2 rnds.

Rnd 10: (K1, ssk, k2tog, k1) twice (8 sts rem).

Rnds 11-12: Knit 2 rnds.

Rnd 13: (K1, k2tog, k1) twice (4 sts rem).

Cut yarn and draw tail through remaining sts; weave in tail neatly on WS. Fold each ear at base and sew to side of head with half of ear along short rows and half parallel to stitch line (see photo on page 5).

Use scraps of yarn to embroider on mouth, nose, and eyes (see photo for placement of features). Block puppet by carefully steam-pressing body under a damp cloth. The head can be steam-blocked over a cloth-covered wooden shape (such as a darning egg). Lightly stuff head with yarn remnants or wad of raveled yarn.



Kriimu.

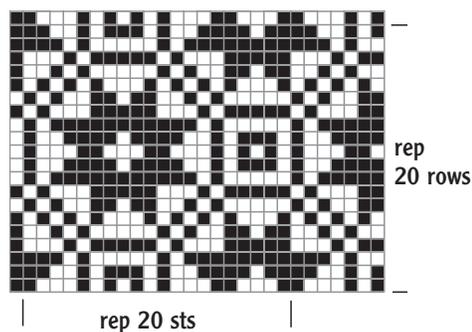


Kirju.

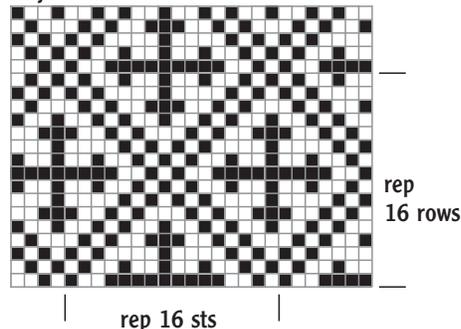


Pilve.

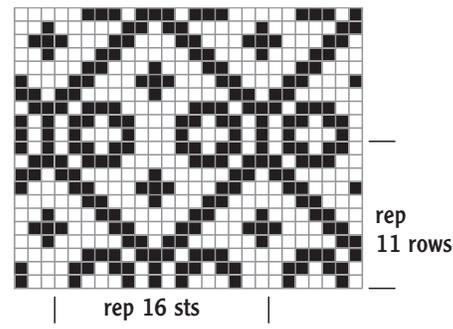
Kriimu's chart.



Kirju's chart.



Pilve's chart.

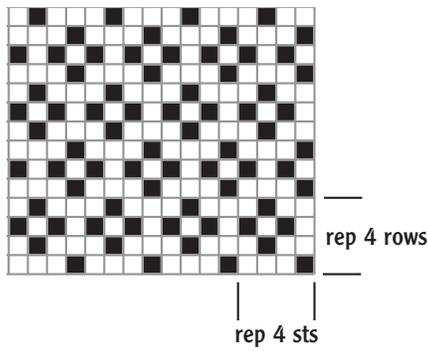


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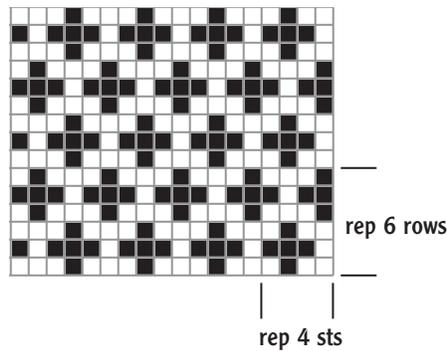


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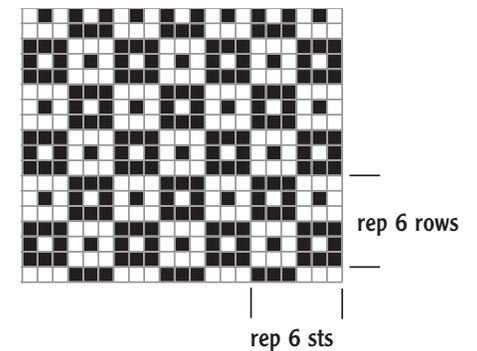
Small motif for legs and neck



Small motif for legs and neck



Small motif for legs and neck



Sini's head.

Anu's animal puppets preserve Estonian culture. Her friend, Anu Raud, originally conceived the idea in 1995, and she considers Anu Kotli one of the best knitters she knows; she also appreciates how Anu Kotli has developed the idea in her own way. Anu Raud uses the animal puppets in her programs at the Heimtali Museum near Viljandi, Estonia. They help children learn and tell stories; teach children about patterning in general and Estonian patterns in particular; and, eventually, entice them to knit. When sold, the animals also provide income for the adult knitters. Each animal is an expression of the knitter's creativity and a heartwarming symbol of Estonia. §

Further Reading

Bush, Nancy. "Anu Raud's Animals," *Piece-Work*, 11, 6 (November/December 2003), 49–50. See Nancy's website, www.woolywest.com, for Estonian books with charted motifs.

———. *Folk Knitting in Estonia: A Garland of Symbolism, Tradition and Technique*. Loveland, Colorado: Interweave Press, 1999.

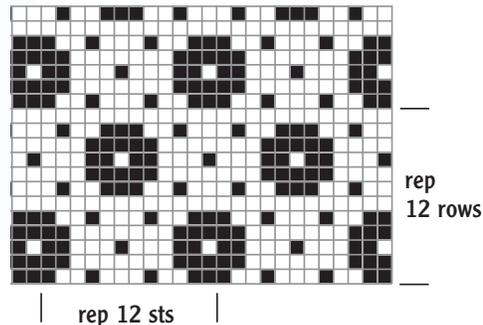
———. "Knit a Flock of Sheep," *Piece-Work*, 11, 6 (November/December 2003), 46–48.

For information on Estonian native sheep, see https://www.virtuaaliamek.fi/opinto_kokonaisuudet/55k5YHhBT/111034994425.html.stx (select "study material" on bar at top of page for basic information on the sheep).



Sini.

Sini's chart.



Anu Kotli of Estonia and her sheep puppets.

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