

Finland's Mammals

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1 Fly Helsinki

Day 2/7 Activities and hide sessions with key mammals as the main targets.

Day 8 Fly Helsinki to London

Departs

July

Focus

Wolverine, Wolf, Brown Bear and other mammals.

Grading

Grade A. Easy walks only.

Prices

Visit www.naturetrek.co.uk (tour code FIN04).

Highlights:

- Watch for Wolverines from a log-cabin hide deep in the Finnish forests.
- Enjoy fantastic Brown Bear views and a superb chance of Wolf from specialist hides.
- Specific excursions for the rare Forest Reindeer and Siberian Flying Squirrel.
- Excellent photographic opportunities.
- Look for Black-throated Diver, Osprey and White-tailed Eagle among other birds.
- Search for the endemic Saimaa Ringed Seal.
- Explore Finland's vast Taiga Forests.
- Expertly led by Naturetrek naturalist.



Wolverine, Brown Bear and Wolf



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Introduction

If you dream about seeing or photographing wild Brown Bears, Wolverines and even Grey Wolves then this is the tour for you; Finland is without doubt the place to be! Home to an estimated population of around 1500 bears, 130-200 wolverines and around 150 wolves, Finland offers exceptional opportunities to view these three large carnivores at close range. We will guide you to places where you can watch or photograph these predators from hides located near carefully positioned carrion. Regardless of whether you are a photographer or just happy watching the animals, the hides give you some fabulous views of what are usually, particularly difficult mammals to see in the wild. This tour also offers added value as we search for rare species whose occurrence in Finland is hardly known by many. The endemic Saima-ringed seal, the nocturnal Siberian Flying Squirrel and the shy Forest Reindeer. Given the increasing reliability of sightings, we are confident that an unforgettable experience awaits for those taking part in this exciting tour!

Itinerary

Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Day 1

Fly UK to Helsinki

Today we will arrive in Helsinki and meet our leader before transferring to a lovely nearby hotel just a short drive from the airport. We will enjoy dinner as a group together here before a late evening excursion targeting several species of ungulates that are more common in this area of south Finland. We have an excellent chance to find Elk and Roe Deer and we may also find such introduced species such as Fallow Deer and White-tailed Deer. Due to midsummer and the late twilight period, the return to the hotel will not commence until around midnight. After all, the twilight period is the best time to observe ungulates! There will be a slower start the following morning to catch up on some sleep but we wish to take our opportunity to try to find Elk in particular this evening.

Day 2

Lapua

After a longer night's sleep and an extensive breakfast, we transfer to the small village of Lapua near the west coast. During this scenic 4-hour drive, we will stop regularly for birding and any wildlife we may come across. There are many lakes and forests on the journey, home to various Scandinavian species we will only know from winter months or on migration here in the UK. Common Crane, Common Goldeneye, Osprey, Black-throated Diver,



Siberian Flying Squirrel

Red-necked Grebe, Redwing and Brambling are just some of the species we will hope to encounter.

After dinner, an evening excursion is planned for one of the most difficult to find mammals in Europe. The Siberian Flying Squirrel. Their nocturnal existence, but also the often dense primeval forests where they occur, are the main reasons why their existence remains so unnoticed. Assistance from a local guide with squirrel knowledge is essential for the success of the evening. His knowledge of a hosting tree or a specially designed nest box occupied by the squirrels, will determine the success of the evening.

With the fact we are staying up late again, the program offers the opportunity to sleep longer the following morning before continuing the journey!

Day 3

Transfer to Kuhmo (first night in hide)

After a relaxed start and breakfast we will transfer to Kuhmo. Just like yesterday, a second long drive, this time of around 5 hours is necessary to arrive at the destination where our next target species are to be found. This drive east to the Finnish "no man's land", will be interrupted three times to stretch our legs, enjoy some roadside birding and use the facilities. July is the month that species of grouse are seen regularly with their young. A Hazel Hen, Black Grouse or Capercaillie suddenly crossing the road is certainly possible. If we are lucky, some Forest Reindeer will do the same!

Once in Kuhmo, we will check into our hotel and then continue towards the first carnivore base camp where we shall make a picnic before continuing towards both the observation hides for our first of three exciting nights of mammal watching from a hide. Besides good number of bears, this site is especially famous for being a core area of a local Wolf pack. A very exciting night awaits!

More about Kuhmo and the first hide session:

On the border with Russia, we will overnight in a hide being situated in the middle of Brown Bear, Wolf and Wolverine territories. This "no man's land" is a region where nature really is impressive. When watching from the hide and observing resident White-tailed Eagles, Black Kites and Ravens near the baiting sites, a carnivore will show up seemingly out of nowhere!

Both hides we shall use on this first night, are located next to each other. They offer a wide view over an extensive swampy area. Animals can come from all directions and at any time. No night is the same here in terms of what shows up and the time they show up during the session. Even though feeding takes place, it is the animals themselves



Brown Bear

who determine when and how often they come. With luck on our side, we might see both Bear and Wolf together here. It is also not unusual for Wolverine to also turn up! A sleeping bag is not included at this site so everyone must ask for one if they wish on arrival and if the weather is chilly. They are not free of charge here. It is 20 EUR at this location. The next two hide sessions they are included.

Day 4

Explore Kuhmo and the surrounding areas

After our night in the hide, we will return to the hotel near Kuhmo and begin the standard recovery morning procedure. Following breakfast there will be the chance to rest into the afternoon or for those who want to explore from the hotel you can do of course! After lunch, there will be the opportunity for an excursion to explore the surrounding wilderness with a special focus on locating the rare and shy Forest Reindeer. The key to success is locating females with calves in the vast area. The guide's knowledge of the area is essential for locating them and we have had high success rate in recent years during this tour. Fingers crossed!



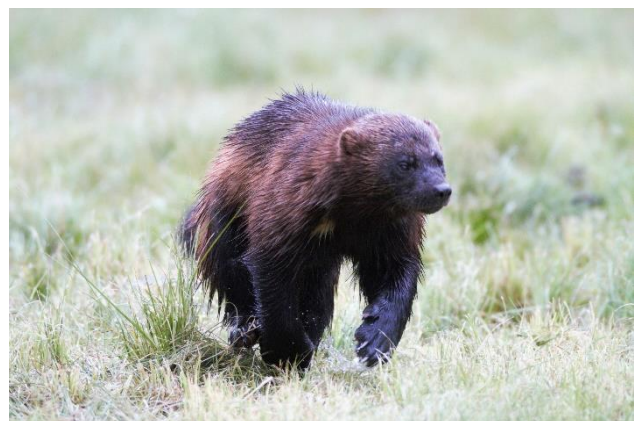
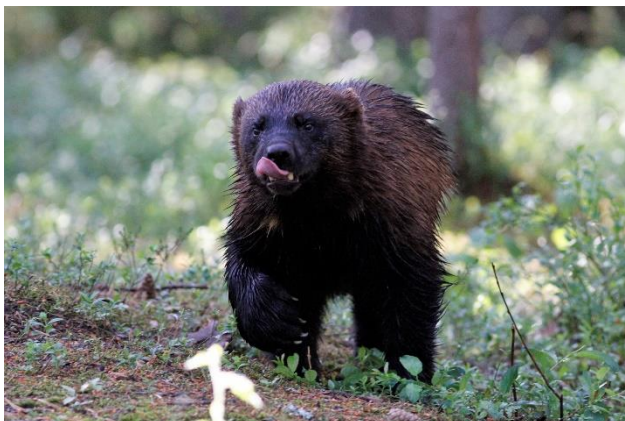
Forest Reindeer

Day 5

Transfer to Lieska (second night in hide)

After breakfast we will begin our journey south, moving to Karelia taking lunch in the rural town of Vuonislathi. We then continue towards the vicinity of Lieksa where our second large carnivore base camp is situated. This stake out is undoubtedly one of the best places to observe and photograph the Wolverine! The largest terrestrial member of the mustelid family. It is also possible for Wolf and Bear to be seen here but the key focus is on Wolverine.

After a short briefing in the base camp we will head towards the hides and our second exciting night time vigil! After what we hope will be a productive night and our large carnivore targets achieved, we will be collected from the hide at around 7.30am.



Wolverine

Further information:

Wolverines are forever on the move and cover great distances each day. They are elusive and secretive animals that need to be 'persuaded' to stop for a while. With that in mind, our host baits the immediate surroundings of the hide with carefully concealed pieces of meat. The local Wolverines are now aware of this regular food supply and so although they do not visit the hide every night, they are seen on a regular basis throughout the summer months with a peak in sightings from late-June through to mid-July. During both sessions, we are all present near a location that offers a view of a lake with an adjacent hill with primeval forest on the other side. The location offers photographers the opportunity to use hides at the bottom of the hill. Those not so dedicated to photography will be spoiled by the panoramic views that the windows of the log cabin offer. This is undoubtedly the most luxurious and exclusive hide in all of Scandinavia when it comes to observing large carnivores.

Day 6**Lieska (third night in hide)**

On leaving the hide after the previous night's vigil, we will transfer to a nearby hotel where after breakfast, en-suite rooms can be used to shower, refresh and rest before gathering again in the dining room. Again, during the rest time you can explore from the hotel if you wish for some birding. After lunch we shall return to the same lake site where we use the same photography hides and log cabin for another night of exciting mammal watching.

Day 7**Lieksa & Saimaa Lake**

After our final night hide session and following breakfast, will make the 3-hour journey to Rantasalmi where we will break for lunch. Looking for wildlife as we travel. This afternoon can be spent using the spa facilities of this luxury resort or by exploring the surroundings here to get familiar with some common Scandinavian bird species such as Fieldfare, Pied Flycatcher, Whooper Swan and Goldeneye to name a few.



Lake Saimaa

In the evening we shall board a vessel from the jetty just opposite the hotel to head out for a boat ride through the spectacular Linnansaari National Park. From our vessel we have fantastic views as we appreciate this strikingly scenic country. Lake Saimaa, the largest lake in Finland, is regarded in the top 5 most beautiful lakes in the world and with the captain's unrivalled knowledge we aim to find the endemic Saimaa Ringed Seal. As we travel, Osprey, Red-necked Grebe and Black-throated Diver are likely to be seen with Beaver also possible here.

Day 8

Transfer Helsinki and fly to the UK

Following breakfast and after packing, we will head to Vantaa airport in Helsinki. We will then take a late afternoon flight from Helsinki, landing back in the UK.

Tour Grading and Focus

Grade A (easy). This is a straightforward wildlife tour that makes no great physical demands and should be within the capabilities of anyone who is of a reasonable/average level of fitness. Walks will be along undulating forest trails and well beaten tracks. This is a dedicated mammals finding tour. The focus will be on doing all we can to achieve sightings of the key target mammals and the other rare and unusual mammals we explain in this itinerary. At all times, due attention will be made to birds too and we will always be alert to find everything we can.

Weather

Although this tour take place during Finland's summer, the weather can be vary variable. Temperatures are similar to those you might expect in Scotland and rain is possible. Daytime temperatures are likely to be between 15°C and 25°C, dropping to 5 -10°C at night.

Food & Accommodation included in the price

All food and accommodation is included in the price apart from dinner on the day of arrival and lunch on day 8. A rental sleeping bag is also a personal cost during the first of the three hide sessions. For both other sessions, sleeping bags are included.

Comfortable hotels with each room having private facilities are used throughout. To compensate for the nights in the hides, good rural hotels will be used. Here, after breakfast, all tour participants can recover and rest should they wish.

Three nights will be spent in specially designed hides. We generally arrive at these hides at around 4pm and remain there until around 7-7.30am the following morning. There are a number of different hides based in different areas (near Lieksa and Kuhmo) which overlook regular feeding areas for the resident predators. Although slow movement and whispering is standard hide behaviour, these hides offer enough space to move without too much limitation. Moreover, they are specially designed for photographers complete with ballhead mount screws and cloth sleeves to push your camera lens through. *For any photographers joining the tour, it is important that you take your own personal ballhead if you wish to attach your camera to the ballhead mount screws in the hide.* Regardless of whether you interested in photography or not, the hides are also superb for viewing with very close views possible of the wildlife. The hides cater for small groups and all

have long-drop, eco toilets, and bunk beds should anyone want to lie down. Sleeping bags will be provided (twice free of charge) along with a snack meal and hot drinks to get through the night.

During Finland's mid-summer, there is a degree of light present nearly 24 hours a day. Especially in the Lieksa area, the darkest hours of the night between 11pm and 3am is the prime time for mammal watching, though of course you are welcome to rest when you wish during your time in the hides. In the "no man's land" of the Kuhmo area, field experience shows that Bears and sometimes Wolves from the local pack, can appear early in the evening.

We use hotels in combination with the hide sessions so after leaving the hides in the morning you will be taken to the hotel to have breakfast and use a room to freshen up.

How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website.

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Wolf (all photos in the itinerary taken on the tour)