

Poland's Mammals: In Search of the Eurasian Lynx!

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	Fly Krakow and drive Bieszczady NP
Day 2/3	Exploration with Bieszczady NP
Day 4	Transfer to second base
Day 5/7	Exploration just outside Bieszczady NP
Day 8	Transfer Krakow fly London.

Departs

March/April

Focus

Mammals and birds

Grading

Grade B (see grading text below)

Dates and Prices

Visit www.naturetrek.co.uk (tour code POL05) or see the current Naturetrek Newsletter

Highlights:

- Exciting opportunity to try to see some of Europe's most enigmatic mammals.
- Spotlighting in search of Eurasian Lynx.
- Scan for Wolf, Bison and Bear in superb habitat.
- Excellent population of European Bison.
- Red Deer, Roe Deer & Wild Boar all possible.
- Visit a Beaver lodge at dusk to view them.
- Star birds may include Tengmalm's, Ural and Pygmy Owl, White-backed and Grey-headed Woodpecker.
- Expert guidance by a Naturetrek naturalist & local guide.



Eurasian Lynx, European Bison, Wolf (all taken on the tour)

NB. 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

Krakow- Bieszczady

Following our arrival into Krakow and meeting our guide we will have around a 3 hour journey to Bieszczady NP, making stops where needed for comfort and wildlife along the way. After settling in to our hotel and enjoying dinner we will head out for our first spotlighting session in the surrounding areas with Lynx, Wolf and Bear as targets here among others.



A view over Bieszczady National Park

Day 2/3 - Exploring the National Park with morning drives, walks, scanning sessions and spotlighting.

This morning we will have an early start and be out for a dawn drive around the surrounding area which is superb Lynx and Wolf habitat in particular. The quiet roads will be slowly covered and we will also stop to scan from vantage points for wildlife at this important time of day for mammal activity. We will be aiming to be out from around 5.30-7.30 for these drives. A whole host of species are possible with Red and Roe Deer often seen out grazing while Wolf and Lynx will still be active. We will return for breakfast and of course should you ever wish to skip an early session throughout the week then you can of course do so.

Following a relaxed breakfast we will head out for a walk in search of some of the superb birds of the area and to get a feel for the geography of our surroundings while of course keeping sharp eyed for mammals. Fieldfares should be evident as they start to think about breeding while Crossbill, Brambling and Hawfinch may be encountered. Lesser Spotted Eagles may have returned to the area and will be another bird we hope to see and in this wild area there are many possibilities.

Following lunch there will be time to relax and have some free time after an early start and with spotlighting to come. In the late afternoon we shall head out again for a further walk or drive in the area. Birds will be migrating at this time and we may be lucky to encounter a Black Stork or returning Hoopoe while Red Squirrels are present throughout the area and should be found. In the early evening we shall position ourselves with a view over the surrounding habitat and scan the area for mammals emerging from



White-backed Woodpecker

cover as the light fades or we may continue to drive around the area making stops and scanning from various points. This exciting form of wildlife watching can reveal almost anything in this most wild, remote area from a Red Deer emerging to graze to a Wolf trotting across an open glade we will be alert to everything. It will be a case of scanning with binoculars and telescopes and being patient as we wait in the hope that something will show itself. Please note that both leaders will have telescopes and if you own one, we highly recommend bringing it along.

After this scanning session we shall return to the hotel for dinner and following our meal venture out again with the spotlight as our key targets emerge and are most active after dark. We will aim to be out with the spotlight from around 9pm – 10.30pm and again if on any evening you wish to opt out then that is an option.

Day 4 - Travel to our second base.

Today there will again be an option to head out for a pre-breakfast drive in search of our target mammals and following breakfast we will check out of the hotel and travel to our second base. Here we will go for a walk to explore the area before lunch and birds may include White-tailed Eagle, Sparrowhawk, Goshawk, Hazelhen, Grey-headed Woodpeckers, Marsh and Willow Tits, Nuthatch, Crossbill, and Nutcracker. We will look for signs of mammals as we walk and Wolf often pass very close the hotel here and scat and prints can often be found. After rain it is possible to find Fire Salamanders and any walks in the area are always a treat.

Again following lunch here there will be some down time followed by another walk in the area and a scanning session as the evening draws in. Spotlighting will again be on offer as we keep up our quest to see the enigmatic mammals of the area with Lynx and Wolf two of our main targets once more. With so much to try and find and so few visitors and other people in the area this really is a special part of Europe.

Day 5/7 - Exploring the area with morning drives, walks, scanning sessions and spotlighting.

Over the next two full days we will explore this fabulous area, again with early morning drives before breakfast, walks at various different sites and of course scanning at dusk and spotlighting at night. We are just outside the National Park boundary here but the area is still superb for wildlife and holds excellent mammal viewing opportunities.

Our base here is more of a lodge style set up and just stepping out of our rooms can yield some superb wildlife. Bison can often be seen grazing just outside our rooms and being the start of the spring season the first fresh grass



often tempts them out and we shall make a real effort to get close up to these magnificent beasts. Another walk in the area runs alongside the nearby San River which can offer an excellent chance of Bison viewing and White-backed Woodpecker can often be encountered here. One evening during our time here we shall visit an active Beaver Lodge at dusk in the hope of seeing these amazing creatures. There are many signs of Beaver in the area and we shall see their impressive lodges and with luck the creatures themselves as they emerge at dusk to go about their business.

Another area we shall visit looks over a secluded lake and here there is the possibility to watch Otters while on the forest glades there is always a chance of Bear and Wolf breaking cover. On our forest walks we shall keep alert for Hazelhen as this often difficult to see species has an excellent population here and noisy Nutcrackers are often present. Raptors we may encounter can include Golden and White-tailed Eagle and Goshawk. While the focus is to find and watch mammals of course other wildlife will be appreciated and there is an awful lot to enjoy in this area.

During the week we shall also make an effort to see the special owls that call this area their home. Tengmalm's Owl is present and a known hotspot will be visited to try and see this species while Ural Owl can be seen quite frequently as we cover the area by night. Pygmy Owl is also possible here.

We have some wonderful habitat on our doorstep throughout and Red Deer herds can often be seen grazing during the early morning and almost anything can show appear from just around our base. It must be remembered that although each day offers a full and action packed itinerary these activities are optional. Down time will be factored in after lunch each day and the daytime activities

will be kept relaxed. The importance of the early mornings, evenings and spotlighting sessions cannot be underestimated in our quest to find our target mammals and we will be making every effort to succeed with our quest.

Day 8 – Travel to London

Following breakfast we will drive back to Krakow (a journey of around 4 hours), in time for our flight to London.



Tengmalm's Owl

Grading

Capability to walk along forest trails which may be wet and slippery is required for this tour and some of the walks may be steep in sections. All walks though will be at a slow and steady pace as we are intending to find and watch wildlife. With two guides throughout there can be the option to dip out of a particular walk if it seems too difficult and there is flexibility here. Our greatest opportunity for mammal viewing will be from standing at strategic viewpoints and from the vehicle itself. There will also be long hours on this tour with late nights and early mornings and then rest times in the day.

A few notes on the mammal watching

Every effort on this tour will be made to actually see the star mammals of this area but of course nothing can be guaranteed. We have chosen the very best time of year to visit. Trees will still be largely leafless which will help and after the winter months the first signs of Spring should be showing which will encourage activity while even if there is still a lot of snow around, this has proved a successful time too. We will need to put in lots of effort, have patience and of course need some luck so succeed. We will not be using hides or a baited area during the tour and any mammal seen will be going about its business as it naturally would do. We know this area to hold a superb population and indeed complete assemblage of Europe's native carnivores and through many hours spent in the field the best areas to focus on have been identified. We have permits to allow access to otherwise restricted areas and everything has been done to maximize chances. In the hours when mammal activity is less likely, time will be spent watching birds and other wildlife of the area.

A few notes on the use of the spotlight and thermal scope

During this tour a significant amount of time will be spent in the vehicle to try to achieve our goal of finding and seeing these most sought after and elusive mammals. Starting in 2023, we brought in the use of a handheld, thermal imaging scope to increase our chances. This is used alongside the spotlight

at night. It is clear, after many years of working in this area, that covering ground in the vehicle using the thermal scope linked with the spotlight gives us the very best chance of success. The thermal scope will be used initially for the majority of the time and when the creature is found in the thermal, the van will aim to get in a position where all members can see the animal and it may also be the case, depending on range/animal movement, that people get out of the vehicle. Then when the time is right, the spotlight will be used to allow everyone to try to see the creature which by this point will hopefully have been identified using thermal. We limit the number of group members on this tour to just 5 and you have two leaders. One group member will be up front, then two in the middle and two in the back and you will rotate. It must be remembered that despite our very best efforts to allow everyone a clear view of every sighting, this is often very difficult to achieve with a moving animal and inevitably a slightly different view for each person in the van. We hope of course that each group member has had a good view of the key targets by the end of the week. With this tactic, all groups in 2023 achieved sightings of Lynx, Wolf, Bear, Bison and Beaver among many other highlights. It requires great effort, perseverance and long hours and sightings of course can be brief and fleeting at times, while other times more prolonged as the photos below show from the tour. If you have any questions as to your suitability for the tour please contact tom@naturetrek.co.uk



Eurasian Lynx, Wolf, Brown Bear and cub. (all taken by Mark Kaptein on 2023 tours)

Weather

At this time of year we can expect cold starts to the day and hopefully bright Spring like conditions. Snow may still be around in places depending on how severe the Winter has been but seasons are

hard to predict of course. Rain is always possible so light waterproofs and layers are recommended. As we may be stood still for some time scanning so a hat and gloves are well worth packing.

Food, accommodation and Wifi

All meals are included in our price. Accommodation is in a clean comfortable hotel for the first three nights within the National Park and a more lodge style guesthouse for the latter four nights around 1hr away outside the official park boundary. The hotels are chosen because of the excellent location and wildlife possibilities on the doorstep. They are both very comfortable, warm and all rooms are en-suite. Any alcoholic drinks and other personal items will be at your own expense. At the first hotel there is Wifi but in at our second base there is no Wifi at all and even phone signal can be poor here. When we take dinner in a nearby town there is Wifi. On two evenings, as our ultimate goal is to watch special mammals, we may have to take a packed dinner out in the field so we are in a good position at the right time of day.

Mammal & bird lists

You will be provided with a checklist of the wildlife that it is possible for us to encounter during the holiday. This will be sent with your final joining instructions no later than two weeks before the holiday but if you wish for an electronic copy earlier than this then please let me know by emailing tom@naturetrek.co.uk

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. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests or connecting/regional flights, at the time of booking.