

Finland - On the Trail of the Wolverine

Naturetrek Tour Report

10 - 13 July 2014



Wolverine by Andrew Fellows



Wolverine by Andrew Fellows



Red Squirrel by Tom Mabbett



View from the hide by Tom Mabbett

Report compiled by Tom Mabbett
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Summary

Our first tour dedicated to seeing the once almost mythical Wolverine was a great success as we travelled to the depths of the Finnish wilderness and had simply stunning views of 4 possibly 5 individuals during the two nights we spent in the hide.

Day 1

Thursday 10th July

I met up with the group at the departure gate at Heathrow and we had a smooth flight with no hold ups, first to Helsinki and then onward to Kuopio. In Kuopio we met with our local guide Jari and after a journey of around 2 hours we arrived at our hotel in Lieksa and headed straight down to dinner. Sat around table we enjoyed a well-earned drink and watched a Pied Flycatcher just outside the window and a Common Tern flying up the river. Following a nice meal we turned in to get some sleep before the two nights ahead in the hide!

Day 2

Friday 11th July

After an excellent buffet breakfast we realised that Cliff had already been out for a wander and he reported a very showy Blyth's Reed Warbler not too far away. We decided to go for a quick walk down there before Jari arrived, and we all enjoyed excellent views of the bird with Wood Warbler singing nearby and Siskins overhead. Cliff also stumbled across a Mountain Hare on its morning walk.

After this we were soon on our way and after around 20 minutes arrived at the lodge and dropped our bags. A feeding station just outside the lodge had Red Squirrel tucking into the sunflower seeds with Siskin, Greenfinch and Chaffinch coming down and some had brief views of Crested Tit. After a cup of tea and some cakes we headed out and travelled to the nearby national park for a walk. The woodland walk was quiet and although glorious summer weather, it was perhaps too glorious for birds to be active. Crossbills were heard and there were some interesting plants and butterflies and it was nice to explore this taiga forest habitat in the sunshine. Butterflies included Moorland Clouded Yellow and Niobe Fritillary.

Moving on we took a board walk out across some vast open boggy grasslands and soon were watching a nice Hobby with Whimbrel also seen and distant Whooper Swans flying up. Continuing on a family of Redstarts was noted along with Spotted Flycatcher and Yellow Wagtails of the grey-headed subspecies were calling loudly overhead and giving good views. A few of us continued to a huge watch tower and we scanned across this vast habitat noting Goldeneye on a distant pool. As time was pushing on we headed back to the van and on to the lodge.

After a delicious early dinner and a briefing (if somewhat lost in translation) it was time to head for the hide and we were in the hide by 5pm. Strategically placed pieces of meat and fish were put out around the lake below and on some tree stumps just in front of us. We all settled down full of anticipation for the nights vigil ahead looking out over a glorious view on a beautiful evening. For the next three hours or so we sat and scanned the area and watched the Teal and Goldeneye on the water and watched a Poplar Admiral in the scope below us. At first a little concerned that the gulls were stealing some of the meat, as the clock reached half eight there was movement within the trees on the far side of the lake...

It was indeed our first Wolverine and it was heading towards us! In the glorious sunshine it came across the river on a fallen tree and headed in to where the meat was hidden. We all watched in awe as the Wolverine, which was identified as a male due to its size, ambled around perfectly happily in front of us finding and eating the meat and fish and clambering up a tree trunk very close to us. Superb!

After this early excitement we had various visits throughout the night with the last appearance at around 2am. Two Wolverines were seen together at one point interacting together and evidently related and we watched through the scope as one laid and relaxed on the rocky bank across the lake. It was really great to see so much different behaviour and prolonged views. The highlight of the night was how one individual, another male we think with different facial markings, spent so much time so close in front of the hide! At one point it sat down just 2 feet from the window, extremely relaxed and only alerting and momentarily standing on its hind legs as a second Wolverine was coming in! They really are fantastic mammals and you could see their strength as they climbed the tree trunks for meat and showed their impressive teeth at times.

In the periods where Wolverines weren't on show we were of course keeping alert for any other wildlife and a real bonus was a Hawk Owl which flew in and perched on top of a dead spruce in the valley below. We all had excellent scoped views of this fantastic bird and were amazed when it flew in and landed in the tree directly in front of the hide!

With spirits high we drank tea and coffee and all at some point took at least a couple of hours sleep while others kept an eye on proceedings. At this time of year there is no darkness and the light gets to the sort of level it does here in the UK in the early evening. After a fantastic and action packed night our host arrived and transported us back to the lodge.

Day 3

Saturday 12th July

We got back to the lodge after our night in the hide and enjoyed a hot drink and porridge, with toast, boiled eggs and other options. We were all surprisingly awake and after a few showered and freshened up we went through the checklist and again watched the Red Squirrels juts outside the lodge.

After a short stroll through the woodland around the lodge we were informed that Flying Squirrels could be seen during the day at a site not too far away. We decided to go for it and after a nice lunch back in Lieksa tried for the squirrels. It was an unusually hot day and maybe this contributed to the fact that the squirrels did not want to show themselves and after a couple of hours we had to move on and get back to the lodge.

Back at the lodge we were soon on our way to the hide and after some tea and cakes we settled in for another night. We enjoyed the sounds from outside through the super sensitive microphones that are set up outside here and waited. After many visits throughout the previous night we all expected some early action. It wasn't until 11pm though that our first Wolverine arrived, but unlike the night before it was a rather brief visit as it came in and took some meat. It was superb to once again watch this fantastic animal at close quarters.

We sat up through the night and again we were treated to great views of the Hawk Owl hunting not too far in front of the hide and at one point we could see it feeding on a vole or mouse on a tree stump through the scope. With a few of us struggling to keep our eyes open, sleep breaks were taken and just when we thought we had seen our last Wolverine a smaller animal, a female, appeared at 6am and again came in quite quickly and took away a piece of fish and tucked into it across the lake as we watched on. It was a really fitting end to our time in the hide and shortly after this Wolverine departed into the wilderness we were picked up and taken back to the main lodge.

Day 4

Sunday 13th July

We said our farewells shortly after breakfast today and travelled back to Heathrow via Helsinki and everything we went smoothly with a quick impromptu visit to a Finnish meadow en route to the airport!

To summarise, it was a superb few days with better views than any of us could have hoped for of the Wolverines. It really is true wilderness here and to see this amazing animal a level of dedication is required. We all got on really well, laughed a lot and it was a pleasure to be a part of!

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Species List

Birds (✓ = recorded but not counted; H = heard only)

	Common name	Scientific name	July			
			10	11	12	13
1	Red Squirrel	<i>Sciurus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
2	Wolverine	<i>Gulo gulo</i>		✓	✓	✓
3	Mountain Hare	<i>Lepus timidus</i>	✓	✓		
4	Vole Sp			✓	✓	✓

Birds

1	Whooper Swan	<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>		✓		
2	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>		✓	✓	✓
3	Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Anas penelope</i>				✓
4	Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>		✓	✓	
5	Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>		✓	✓	
6	Buzzard (Steppe)	<i>Buteo buteo vulpinus</i>				✓
7	Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>		✓		
8	Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>		✓	✓	
9	Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>		✓		
10	Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa achropus</i>				✓
11	Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>		H		
12	Black-headed Gull	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>	✓	✓		
13	Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
14	Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	✓	✓	✓	
15	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>		✓	✓	
16	Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	✓	✓		
17	Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓		
18	Rock Dove / Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓	✓	
19	Northern Hawk Owl	<i>Surnia ulula</i>			✓	✓
20	Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>		✓		
21	Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	✓			
22	Great-spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>		✓	✓	✓
23	Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓		
24	House Martin	<i>Delichon urbica</i>	✓	✓		
25	Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>		✓		
26	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba alba</i>		✓		
27	Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>		✓		
28	Waxwing	<i>Bombycilla garrulus</i>		✓		
29	Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>		H		
30	Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>		✓		
31	Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>		✓		
32	Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>		✓		
33	Fieldfare	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>		✓	✓	
34	Redwing	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>		✓	□	
35	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>		✓	✓	
36	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>				✓
37	Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenbaenus</i>				H
38	Blyth's Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus dumetorum</i>		✓		
39	Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	✓	✓		
40	Wood Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus sibilatrix</i>		H		
41	Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>			H	

	Common name	Scientific name	July			
			10	11	12	13
42	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>			H	H
43	Pied Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>	✓			
44	Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>		✓		
45	Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>		✓		
46	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		✓		
47	Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		✓		
48	Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>		☐	✓	
49	Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>				✓
50	Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
51	Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		✓	✓	✓
52	Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus corone cornix</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
53	Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		✓	✓	
54	Siskin	<i>Carduelis spinus</i>		✓	✓	✓
55	Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>		✓	✓	
56	Common Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>		H	H	
57	Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>				✓
58	Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>	✓			

Butterflies

Moorland Clouded Yellow, *Colias palaeno*

Niobe Fritillary, *Argynnis niobe*

Poplar Admiral, *Limenitis populi*