

# Finland - On the Trail of the Wolverine

Naturetrek Tour Report

9 – 12 July 2015



Wolverine



Brown Bear



Brown Bear



Wolverine

Report & images compiled by Tim Melling



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Tour Participants:	Tim Melling	Naturetrek Leader
	Esa Muikku	Local Guide
	With seven Naturetrek Clients	

## Summary

A fantastic trip which achieved what it intended. We had incredibly close views of three Wolverines and four Bears on the first night. On the second night the Bears arrived early and cleared all the food so Wolverines failed to show, but we all got close photographs of an enormous male Bear at close quarters.

### Day 1

Thursday 9th July

Despite a tube strike in London, everyone managed to arrive at Heathrow airport on time. We flew to Helsinki and then took the short flight north to Kuopio. Here we were met by our local guide Esa who drove us the two and a half hour journey (180 kilometres) to Lieksa. Esa chatted all the way, telling us about the local wildlife and his life as a border guard. We stopped for a meal which was good and reasonably priced, as it would be late by the time we arrive in Lieksa. We saw a few things en route, mainly crows and magpies, but also a few choice things like Whooper Swan and Black-throated Diver. Just outside Lieksa we took a minor detour to view some meadows where we saw a pair of Red-backed Shrikes and a stunningly colourful Scarlet Rosefinch. We also saw a Brown Hare and three distant hares that were probably Mountain Hares. We arrived at the hotel at about 10pm and promptly turned in.

### Day 2

Friday 10th July

After an excellent buffet breakfast we had a wander around the village seeing Fieldfares, Pied Flycatchers and a couple of Mountain Hares. We were collected by Esa who took us to a nearby marshland where we heard Blyth's Reed Warbler and Sedge Warbler, and saw Garden Warbler and Blackcap. Snipes were drumming and chipping and we saw a couple of Teals too.

After this we moved on 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, and was visited by Siskin, Greenfinch and Bullfinch. After a cup of tea we set off on a walk through the forest from the lodge where butterflies seen were Moorland Clouded Yellow, and several Pearl-bordered Fritillaries with confusingly heavy markings compared to British ones. We saw several 'brown' butterflies that we did not recognise but one distant photograph showed them to be the dark boreal subspecies of Large Wall Brown. A number of Crossbills were seen and we visited a lake with two well-grown Red-throated Diver chicks and an adult. There was also Goldeneye with ducklings on the same lake. We saw lots of northern plants including Twin-flower and May Lily, plus Lesser Butterfly and Heath Spotted Orchids. We returned about 3pm and had a salmon stew meal before going to the hide about 4pm.

Our first Wolverine appeared at 6.55pm when it was still light and sunny, and it was at its closest only three or four metres from the hide. It disappeared after a few minutes but another smaller and shorter-tailed individual arrived about ten minutes later and showed equally well, right outside the hide. The first one reappeared about ten minutes later and posed beautifully once again. Eero had hidden pork up trees and under stones which

ensures any Wolverines remain in front of the hide for longer. They turned over the stones and climbed the trees right in front of us. They all arrived from the same direction; behind the hide from the right. Gordon was in the photographic hide down by the lake and one individual climbed on a log right in front of him and scent marked, giving a fantastic photo-opportunity. After that we had three hours of quiet before a large male Wolverine appeared, clambering up a pine tree to access some of the meat bait. He was present for about fifteen minutes but seemed wary and kept standing up to look around. Then he bolted off to the right as a Bear charged at him. This was a beautifully marked young male Brown Bear with symmetrical white triangular epaulettes on each shoulder. He stayed for ages and was joined by another Bear to which he was clearly related as she had the ghost of the epaulette pattern too. They tussled and indulged in play fights but were clearly friendly. Then a third bear appeared; a large female with golden hoar-frosting all over. The Bears were present for about four hours and duly kept any more Wolverines at bay. A few Red Squirrels potted about and there were ever-present Ravens and Common Gulls. A single Baltic Gull (Baltic Lesser Black-backed) was also coming and going, as was a single adult Caspian Gull, which was a rarity in Finland so needed a description submitting. Great Spotted Woodpecker, Jay and Mallard were also around and on the lake. We then slept for a few hours, waking up about 5am. One more single Bear appeared at the edge of the birches just as we were leaving but quickly retreated.

### Day 3

Saturday 11th July

At 7.30am we returned to main base for breakfast before heading out to a peat bog national park about 25 kilometres away. Here we had a three and a half kilometre round walk to an observation tower across boardwalks over the bog. We saw lots of birds: Cuckoo, Sparrowhawk, Hobby, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Redstart, Grey-headed Wagtail, Tree Pipit, Crested Tit, Spotted Flycatcher, Whooper Swan, Little Grebe and Goldeneye. The flowers were also interesting with two species of Sundew, Bog Rosemary, Northern Bilberry and Labrador Tea, plus many interesting sedges. Two Adders and several Common Lizards were seen, plus a number of Cranberry Blue butterflies.

After another mid-afternoon meal of meatball stew, we headed to the hides again. This time we were all in the photographic hide where Gordon had stayed the previous night as it is best for photography. It is lower and closer to the marsh but the views are not as wide, nor the hide as spacious and comfortable. The same birds were present as the previous night plus a single Goosander. There were also a couple of Black-veined White butterflies pottering about. At 8.30pm the epaulette bear appeared and ate most of the Wolverine bait! Wolverines don't like it when bears are around but at least the bear put on a good show, even standing up for us several times and coming really close to our hide. A massive male Bear then appeared at 9.30pm that was the biggest Esa had ever seen and which he estimated to weigh around 200 kilograms. It lumbered about warily but came very close before wandering off again. The huge Bear returned at midnight and spent 45 minutes finishing off the remains of the bait. The presence of the Bears clearly scared off the Wolverines as they failed to appear. Everyone managed great views and photographs of the Bears.

### Day 4

Sunday 12th July

At 7am we returned for breakfast and to pack. The feeding station at base camp had four Red Squirrels and a Brambling, which was new. At 9am we set off to Joensuu airport, 110 kilometres away. On the way we saw Hooded Crow and Magpie, and the occasional Fieldfare and Blackbird. A pair of Whooper Swans with six cygnets were on a roadside lake. We thanked Esa for being such a great and informative guide and bid him

farewell. At the airport a male Red-backed Shrike frequented the rose beds, but the drizzle started to set in so we headed inside and boarded our flight back via Helsinki.

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!

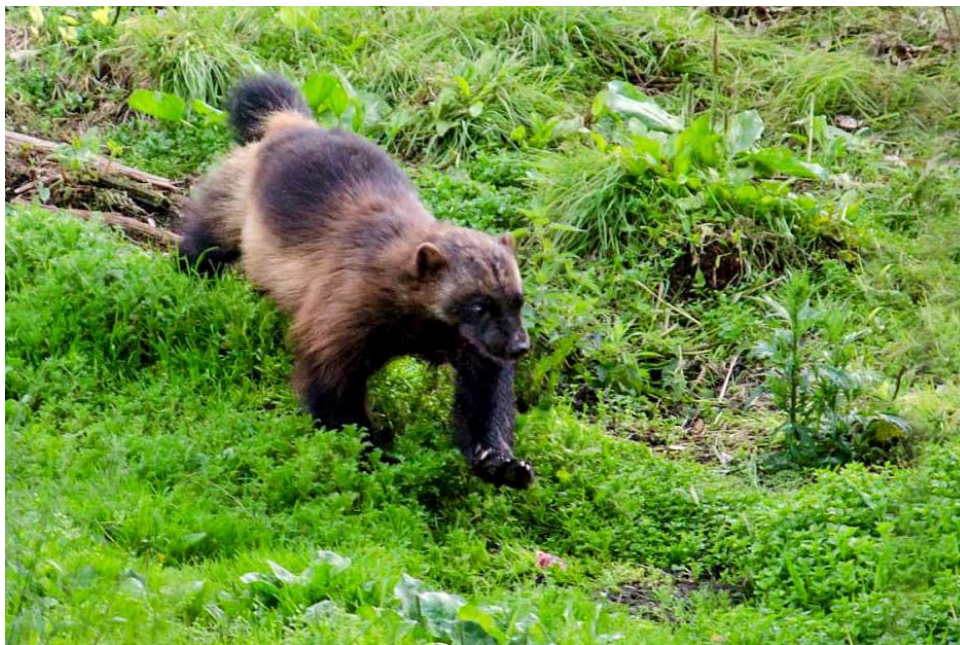
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Wolverine



## Species List

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

	Common name	Scientific name	July			
			9	10	11	12
1	Red Squirrel	<i>Sciurus vulgaris</i>		5	5	4
2	Wolverine	<i>Gulo gulo</i>		3		
3	Mountain Hare	<i>Lepus timidus</i>	3			
4	Brown Hare	<i>Lepus capensis</i>	1			
5	Brown Bear	<i>Ursus arctos</i>		4	2	

## Birds

1	Whooper Swan	<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>	2		5	8
2	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>		20	20	
3	Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>		2		
4	Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>		2	5	
5	Goosander	<i>Mergus merganser</i>			1	
6	Red-throated Diver	<i>Gavia stellata</i>		3		
7	Black-throated Diver	<i>Gavia arctica</i>	2			
8	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>			1	
9	Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>			1	
10	Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>			1	
11	Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	10		2	
12	Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>			2	
13	Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	20		1	
14	Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>			1	
15	Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	2		1	
16	Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	1	5	4	
17	Black-headed Gull	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>	✓	✓		10
18	Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>	✓	5	5	10
19	Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>		3		4
20	Caspian Gull	<i>Larus cacchianus</i>		1	1	
21	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus balticus</i>		1	1	
22	Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	2	3		
23	Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	2	1		
24	Rock Dove / Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	6	3		
25	Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>			4	1
26	Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	30	10		
27	Great-spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>		2	4	
28	Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	30	6	6	5
29	House Martin	<i>Delichon urbica</i>	1			
30	Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	1			
31	Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>	2			
32	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba alba</i>	5	5	5	
33	Grey-headed Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava thunbergi</i>			10	
34	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>		3		
35	Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	1			1
36	Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>		1	1	
37	Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>		1	1	1
38	Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>		10	10	2
39	Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>				5
40	Fieldfare	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>	4	30	30	10

	Common name	Scientific name	July			
			9	10	11	12
41	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	2	2	2	
42	Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenbaenus</i>		2		
43	Blyth's Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus dumetorum</i>		1		
44	Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>		2		
45	Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>		1		
46	Garden Warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>		1		
47	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>		2	1	
48	Pied Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>		8	4	
49	Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>			4	
50	Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>			2	
51	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		10	10	
52	Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		4	4	
53	Coal Tit	<i>Periparus ater</i>		2		
54	Willow Tit	<i>Poecile montanus</i>		2		
55	Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>		2	2	
56	Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	10			
57	Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		5	5	
58	Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus corone cornix</i>	20			5
59	Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		10	10	
60	Brambling	<i>Fringilla montifringilla</i>				1
61	Siskin	<i>Carduelis spinus</i>		50	50	
62	Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>		5	5	
63	Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrula pyrrhula</i>		4	4	
64	Common Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>		10		
65	Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>		4		
66	Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>	2			
67	Red-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius collurio</i>	2			1
68	Scarlet Rosefinch	<i>Carpodacus erythrinus</i>	1			

## Butterflies

Moorland Clouded Yellow *Colias palaeno*

Pearl-bordered Fritillary *Boloria euphrosyne*

Black-veined White *Aporia crataegi*

Boreal Large Wall Brown *Lasiommata maera borealis*

Cranberry Blue *Vacciniina optilete*

## Reptiles

Adder *Vipera beris*

Common Lizard *Zootoca vivipara*



Brown Bear