

Finland's Mammals

Naturetrek Tour Report

23rd – 30th June 2025



Eurasian Lynx



Brown Bears



Grey Wolf



Wolverine

Tour report by Jan Klechtermans
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Tour participants: Jan Kelchtermans (leader) with eight Naturetrek clients

Summary

Despite the low temperatures, this trip turned out to be nothing short of spectacular: it was easily one of our best mammal adventures ever in Finland! We were treated to incredible encounters with all four of Scandinavia's apex predators. Multiple Grey Wolves and Brown Bears graced us with their presence, we witnessed fascinating Brown Bear-Grey Wolf interactions, and a Wolverine strutted about in broad daylight. But the absolute showstoppers? Not one, but two elusive Eurasian Lynxes, making this an unforgettable wildlife experience!

Day 1

Monday 23rd June

Despite the grey weather, the evening took us to a well-known ungulate hotspot. We first settled into a new hotel used for the Naturetrek Finland tours, near Nuuksio National Park. Not only was the accommodation an upgrade, but so was the dinner. The meal prepared exclusively for us was outstanding: it was beautifully cooked and delicious.

A vast meadow, in particular, soon delivered familiar sightings of ungulates resident in the area: Elk, White-tailed Deer and a single Roe Deer, all offering excellent viewing and photographic opportunities. To reach the far end of the meadow bordering the asphalt road, we took an additional gravel track. As we stepped out of the vehicle, several Ravens called overhead. Was this a sign of a large carnivore nearby, or simply a typical sound of the Scandinavian landscape?

Back in the car and rounding a bend toward another field, we encountered a large herd of Fallow Deer. Along with the White-tailed Deer (both introduced decades ago for hunting) these ungulates thrive here in good numbers. Further north, you would never see such numbers; there, both are replaced by Moose and Reindeer, though they are very hard to find. Knowing that, we were happy to see all these herbivores here on the first evening!

After a client had spotted the first Moose of the trip earlier in the evening, it was her husband who suddenly spoke up from the back seat: "Jan, there's a cat!" With several Brown Hares visible in the field, Jan didn't take the comment too seriously at first. But when Lee insisted again, pointing to the edge of the field, an encounter unfolded that seemed almost impossible: a Eurasian Lynx, concealed in the grass and fully focused on the Brown Hares in front of it!

Jan immediately explained that this was a very, very rare sighting. Because of the short distance to the animal, everyone initially observed the Eurasian Lynx from the rental van. Once all had had a good look, the group carefully exited the vehicle one by one to photograph, or simply admire the Lynx. And the Lynx? It occasionally looked up but showed remarkably little interest in us. Unbelievable!

When Brown Hares ventured closer, the Eurasian Lynx sometimes stalked its potential prey, but a successful hunt never materialised. The young animal appeared to lack the experience needed, and the heavy rain didn't help either. As darkness deepened and photography became impossible, a sudden gust of wind caused the Eurasian Lynx to lift its head. Moments later, the encounter ended. The animal turned and disappeared into the long grass behind a rock, where it briefly settled before vanishing from view.

In a state of pure euphoria and disbelief, the group returned to the lodge. Remarkably, two of the clients had now spotted a Eurasian Lynx with Jan on two consecutive Naturetrek tours in a row, first in Poland in March, and now again in Finland during midsummer!

Day 2

Tuesday 24th June

In the morning, we set off on a long drive toward the Gulf of Bothnia, near the city of Vaasa. After last year's 100% success rate, we returned to this area in hopes of once again observing Siberian Flying Squirrels. Upon arrival around noon, we enjoyed a buffet lunch, together with the guide who accompanied us to the squirrels later that evening.

Unlike last year, the squirrels were not active in the afternoon, so everyone was given some free time. There was also the option to attend a presentation by our guide. His photographs and deep knowledge of the Siberian Flying Squirrel clearly reflected years of dedication and passion for the species we were hoping to see. With a bit of luck, the evening would reward us. Fingers were crossed!

On the way to the squirrel site, we made a brief stop near a marsh and an adjacent lake. Spotting a Citrine Wagtail perched atop the nearby cattails was a rare treat. It appeared to be paired with a male Western Yellow Wagtail, which was truly remarkable.

Afterwards, we continued on the long drive to the squirrel location. Seated on folding chairs, we focused our attention on a nestbox known to be occupied by our target species. The familiar long wait, watching the cavity, put our patience to the test. Then, at last, the female's head appeared in the opening of the nest box. Her large, protruding eyes unmistakably revealed her nocturnal nature.

Moments later, she spiralled up to the top of the Spruce tree to which the nest box was attached. Only those with the right viewing angle were able to spot and photograph her briefly before she vanished from sight. The glide to another tree that we had hoped for never happened. Through his thermal imaging camera, Jan observed that the female chose instead to return to her young inside the nest cavity. After that, she remained hidden and did not reappear.

This time, we had to settle for a fleeting glimpse, but after already seeing Moose and Eurasian Lynx, we were still perfectly on schedule with our target species.

Day 3

Wednesday 25th June

The second, long drive followed in the morning, towards Kuhmo. After a meal at the rural location where we stayed for the next two days, the remaining one-hour drive took us to a former border guard post, now used as a base for ecotourism in the no-man's-land on the border with Russia. Everyone quickly packed a picnic to spend the night in Paradise; the nickname for a location where large carnivores ruled. And this quickly proved to be true. Barely had we settled in when a young Grey Wolf appeared on the scene. The interaction around the laid-out carcass with the Ravens present was a delight to watch. The scene proved to be a harbinger of a night with plenty of activity from several Brown Bears and Grey Wolves.



Citrine Wagtail



Elk (Moose)

A female Brown Bear with two cubs, competing with Grey Wolves to conquer and devour the available bait, was undoubtedly one of the many highlights of the night. Colossal males followed in the wake of females still willing to mate. A shy, passing Wolverine was only visible briefly and from a distance during the darkest part of the night, when there were no Brown Bears or Grey Wolves in sight. It was clear that this largest member of the mustelids wanted to avoid encounters with other carnivores at all costs! But there were no complaints about Brown Bears and Grey Wolves, especially not with the interaction between the two species. Memory cards were being filled! Tired but satisfied, we left Paradise the next morning, and headed for the hotel to have breakfast and rest.

Day 4

Thursday 26th June

After resting and enjoying lunch, the search for Forest Reindeer began. The wild Forest Reindeer population in the Kainuu region, to which Kuhmo belongs, has faced challenges. The population has declined significantly since its peak of 1700 individuals in 2001. High predation pressure from the resident Grey Wolf population in the area and habitat changes due to commercial forestry pose the greatest threats to this subpopulation, which currently numbers around 800 individuals. So, in less than 25 years, the population had halved.

Moreover, the cold spring of 2025 had left very little green vegetation in the Kuhmo region, causing the animals to migrate elsewhere. Jan's local contacts had informed him that this year's excursions, for both Moose and Forest Reindeer, were practically hopeless as a result. On top of that, the quiet area where Jan had consistently found the species in recent years during Naturetrek tours had also been affected by increased human activity.

In short: the species wasn't found during the afternoon and evening excursions. Fortunately, the coming night was one with plenty of sleep!

Day 5

Friday 27th June

During breakfast, one client shared his observations from an early-morning excursion. In addition to numerous bird species, he had briefly spotted a wandering Forest Reindeer! We could, to our great surprise and rather unexpectedly, add this rare mammal to the trip's species list.

After breakfast, we made a relatively short drive to Lieksa, where, just as in Helsinki, we stayed in a new hotel for the first time on our Finland trips. Upon arrival at the Wolverine base camp, we received a short briefing before splitting into subgroups to take up positions in the hides, both in the forest and by the lake. The night resulted in sightings of a Wolverine in good light.



Grey Wolf



Wolverine



Wolverine



Wolverine

Also, Grey Wolves appeared, although most activity of these canids occurred during the darkest hours. This was a phenomenon we've noticed many times here in recent years: animals are less likely to show themselves in broad daylight. And with Grey Wolves or Brown Bears nearby, the Wolverines were much shyer in behaviour and appearance.

Day 6

Saturday 28th June

The second night proved, initially at least, to be one quickly to forget. Jan, who was prospecting a new location, experienced a blank hide session, large carnivore wise. It was a real shame, because the untouched environment he overlooked was a dream habitat for observing Brown Bears, Grey Wolves, and/or Wolverines! Sometimes the animals are simply absent, not hungry, or searching for natural prey instead of foraging at feeding grounds. But that's just wildlife. Even here, where animals are lured with bait, nothing is guaranteed. No two nights are identical in terms of sightings!

And yet, the night took a completely different turn in the morning when two clients messaged Jan, asking "Are there any Eurasian Lynx here?" Jan was initially dubious. It was probably a sighting of a shy Red Fox that had passed by briefly in the dark. Besides, Eurasian Lynx never appear at feeding sites like this. But the clients reiterated that they had seen a bobtailed animal walking across the log into the water, around midnight. They said it was definitely a Eurasian Lynx. They also asked if the camera trap near the log was still working. If so, it might be worth checking the footage from 11.57pm. And sure enough, it was! At breakfast, the camera trap owner confirmed: at 11.56pm, a Eurasian Lynx had indeed appeared on camera!

So, the night was anything but carnivore-free. With this sighting, we had actually achieved two Eurasian Lynxes on one trip. In Finland! Not in Poland or Estonia! Who would have ever dreamed it?

Day 7

Sunday 29th June

The next morning began with the third long drive of this trip. We were heading to Lake Saimaa, where we had a boat trip for the Saimaa Ringed Seal, our last real target species of the trip. But while we had every target species spot on so far, this time we were out of luck. Despite good weather conditions, we failed to spot the only endemic species of the trip. We didn't spot a single seal floating or sunbathing on a rock on the shore. We had to settle for a few striking bird species: Ospreys on and near their nests, Black-throated Divers with young, and a Red-necked Grebe.

Day 8

Monday 30th June

We made the 'classic' drive to Helsinki, from where most participants headed home, and Jan prepared the rental car for the next trip, which started tomorrow!

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Species lists

Mammals

Common name	Scientific name	June 2025						
		23	24	25	26	27	28	29
Mountain Hare	<i>Lepus timidus</i>	✓	✓		✓			
Eurasian Red Squirrel	<i>Sciurus vulgaris</i>			✓	✓	✓		
Siberian Flying Squirrel	<i>Pteromys volans</i>			✓				
Western Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>	✓						
Elk (Moose)	<i>Alces alces</i>	✓						
Finnish Forest Reindeer	<i>Rangifer tarandus fennicus</i>					✓		
Eurasian Lynx	<i>Lynx lynx</i>	✓					✓	
Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>	✓						
Grey Wolf	<i>Canis lupus</i>			✓		✓		
Brown Bear	<i>Ursus arctos</i>			✓				
Wolverine	<i>Gulo gulo</i>			✓		✓		

Birds

Common name	Scientific name
Whooper Swan	<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>
Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>
Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>
Common Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>
Goosander	<i>Mergus merganser</i>
Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>
Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>
Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>
Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>
Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>
Red-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps grisegena</i>
Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>
European Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>
Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>
Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>
Eurasian Woodcock	<i>Scolopax rusticola</i>
Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>
Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>
Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>
Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>
Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>
Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>
European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>
Black-throated Diver	<i>Gavia arctica</i>
Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>
European Honey Buzzard	<i>Pernis apivorus</i>
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>
Eurasian Goshawk	<i>Astur gentilis</i>
White-tailed Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>
Eurasian Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>

Common name	Scientific name
Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>
Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>
Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>
Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>
Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>
Bohemian Waxwing	<i>Bombycilla garrulus</i>
Willow Tit	<i>Poecile montanus</i>
Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>
Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>
Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
Western House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>
Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>
Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>
Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>
Garden Warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>
Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>
Eurasian Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>
Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>
Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>
Redwing	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>
Fieldfare	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>
Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>
Thrush Nightingale	<i>Luscinia luscinia</i>
European Pied Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>
Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>
Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>
Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>
Western Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>
Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>
Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>
Eurasian Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>
Brambling	<i>Fringilla montifringilla</i>
Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>
European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>
Red Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>
Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>
Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>
Common Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>