

Finland's Mammals

Naturetrek Tour Report

5th – 12th July 2026



Elk (Moose)



Brown Bear



Grey Wolves



Forest Reindeer

Tour report by Jan Kelchtermans



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

Day 1

Sunday 5th July

The airport was particularly busy due to a large number of incoming flights, but since Jan was already there and had the rental car, we were soon on our way to the hotel. Before dinner, we received a briefing about the programme for the coming days. Afterwards, we headed to a location where hoofed mammals were on the agenda. The native species were Moose and Roe Deer, while the non-native ones were White-tailed Deer and Fallow Deer, which have been introduced for hunting.

Before turning onto a gravel road, we first scanned a meadow where small groups of Greylag Geese and Whooper Swans were feeding. Common Cranes, Lapwings, Yellowhammers and Skylarks could also be seen or heard here. White-tailed Deer and Fallow Deer were by far the most numerous; the Roe Deer we could count on one hand. On the way back to our accommodation, we spotted some more Moose in the twilight. In total, we saw eleven individuals during this first excursion.

A particularly noteworthy sighting was a Raccoon Dog, a species which had never previously been recorded during this tour. The animal crossed the meadow where we had first searched for wildlife earlier that evening. Interestingly, the animal looked quite different at this time of year compared to its appearance in the colder months: it was much slimmer and less rounded in shape. Because of the considerable distance and the tall grass, however, this was not easy to see.

Day 2

Monday 6th July

After breakfast, we set off on a long journey to a small village south of Vaasa. Unfortunately, the weather was far from cooperative: for almost the entire drive, we were treated to persistent, mostly heavy rain. Fortunately, conditions improved somewhat during the final hour, sparing us from the relentless wet weather. Once we arrived at our lunch stop, we briefly met our guide for the evening. Everyone was then free until dinner. Before heading to the site of the evening excursion, we first received a fascinating presentation about the Siberian Flying Squirrel, a small and elusive nocturnal mammal.

Unfortunately, the excursion itself was less successful. The Siberian Flying Squirrel only emerged once it was completely dark. With the heavy cloud cover, dense vegetation and almost total darkness, it was extremely difficult to see the animal properly. The squirrel coming out of a nest box deep in the dark forest meant that not everyone managed to see it. This was disappointing, but it is always a challenge when searching for nocturnal and crepuscular wildlife.

Day 3

Tuesday 7th July

After breakfast, we once again embarked on a long journey, this time heading north-east. Along the way, we made a brief stop for one of the most difficult mammals to find during the summer months: the Finnish Forest Reindeer. We parked the car and walked back along the road. Many people confuse the rare Finnish Forest Reindeer with the 'ordinary' Reindeer, which occur in large numbers in Lapland. The latter are semi-domesticated and are regularly seen along, and sometimes even on the roads during summer. The Finnish Forest Reindeer, by contrast,

is a completely wild, shy and rare animal that primarily inhabits vast, remote forest areas. The longer legs and larger hooves are adaptations to life in dense, often marshy forests. They allow Finnish Forest Reindeer to move more easily through the difficult terrain. During summer, they generally retreat deep into remote forest and peatland areas, where they feed and try to avoid both human activity and the abundance of insects as much as possible.

The fact that this individual was standing right beside the road, in a small grassy clearing, was therefore exceptional. Moreover, the animal displayed clearly atypical behaviour for the species: there was hardly any sign of shyness, and it allowed us to watch it closely for a remarkably long time. The difference in numbers between the two forms of Reindeer is enormous. While more than 200,000 semi-domesticated Reindeer occur in Finland, the population of the wild Finnish Forest Reindeer is estimated at only 3000-4500 animals across the entire country. Seeing such a rare and elusive species was undoubtedly one of the highlights of this trip.

Once we arrived in Kuhmo, the mecca for large-carnivore enthusiasts in Europe, we settled into our hotel rooms. There was little time to relax, however: after lunch and a quick refresh, we packed our belongings and set off again, this time towards the border with Russia. Just before reaching the base camp, we encountered another Finnish Forest Reindeer.



Brown Bear



Grey Wolf and Brown Bear



Osprey



Grey Wolf

At the base camp, we were provided with a picnic for the evening and night. We had barely taken our seats in the two hides reserved for our group, when an enormous Brown Bear appeared! The huge animal was soon followed by a young Wolf, which was also interested in the carcass that had been laid out.

And it did not end there: the resident alpha pair of Wolves also arrived. It was wonderful to watch the trio interacting, with the young Wolf clearly behaving submissively towards the adults. A little later, a second young Wolf also appeared on the scene.

Meanwhile, the number of Bears increased as well. Several adult animals approached the carcass and attempted to claim their share of the prize. A female Bear then appeared with two tiny cubs, but she quickly decided to leave when she noticed the trio of Wolves. The small size of the cubs indicated that they had been born this year. They were so tiny that they barely cleared the grass.

What initially promised to be an exciting evening quickly developed into an extraordinary spectacle involving Brown Bears, Wolves and White-tailed Eagles. From our hides, we had front-row seats to watch their interactions. It turned into one of the best evenings we had ever experienced on this tour.

Day 4

Wednesday 8th July

Tired but satisfied after an evening, night and morning spent among Brown Bears and Wolves, we left the hides in the morning. Thermos flasks and sleeping bags were dropped off at base camp before we returned to the hotel. After breakfast, we took some time to catch up on sleep.

Following a late lunch, we spent the evening exploring the Kuhmo area. In contrast to the busy previous evening, night and morning, the taiga now showed its empty side. During the four-hour evening drive, we saw hardly any birds, let alone mammals.

From a small jetty, however, we spotted a Black-throated Diver floating on one of the many lakes, Bramblings high up in a Scots Pine and, on the way back, a Short-eared Owl flying high overhead.

Day 5

Thursday 9th July

As today's drive was a short one, we did not leave until around 10.30am. In Lieksa, the next base where we were staying nearby, there was a brief opportunity to stock up on some extra provisions for the next hide session. There was just enough time to drop our luggage in the rooms and have lunch before heading to the next base camp. During the briefing, Red Squirrel, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Siskins and Bullfinches could be observed from the window.

Jan and two participants took up positions in the hides by the lake, while four other participants settled into the forest hides. The spectacular Brown Bear and Wolf activity of the previous days was unfortunately missing this time. At both locations, we had to make do with a single Brown Bear sighting. The remainder of the seventeen-hour session was mainly an exercise in patience!

Day 6

Friday 10th July

After breakfast, there was some time to sleep for a few hours before heading out again. As we had already had the briefing, we could arrive at the base camp a little later. There, we learned that the owner of the hide complex had encountered a Wolverine during his drive from the site towards the centre of Lieksa. This happened along the same route we had taken earlier that morning on our way back to the hotel. Despite their absence during the previous night, the animals were clearly present in the area!

For the second hide session, everyone took up position in the hides near the lake. Twice a duo occupied a pro hide, while one couple settled into the large observation hide again. The same Bear as seen during the previous night was present again, and a young female Wolf made an appearance. The Bear, which returned regularly, once again meant that our second afternoon, night and morning passed without a Wolverine appearing on the scene. For the first time during all the Naturetrek tours that Jan has conducted here to observe large carnivores, we failed to see a Wolverine. Once again, shows just how unpredictable animals can be: sometimes, they simply didn't show up!

Day 7

Saturday 11th July

After catching up on some sleep, we left at around noon and drove on to Lake Saimaa to look for our final target species: the Saimaa Ringed Seal. Conditions during the evening were excellent. Ideal summer temperatures and hardly any wind were perfect for the excursion. We managed two brief sightings of foraging freshwater seals. They surfaced and floated briefly, before diving again and remaining underwater for a long time. The many Black-throated Divers and Ospreys around their nests completed the picture. Just after 9.00pm, we arrived back at the harbour. A Red-necked Grebe provided a pleasant final sighting before we headed back to our villa.

Day 8

Sunday 12th July

As flights back weren't leaving until late afternoon, and as some participants were staying overnight in Helsinki, there was still time to plan one final excursion.

After the long drive south from Lake Saimaa, we concluded the tour where it had begun: in and around Nuuksio National Park, north of Espoo. At the visitor centre, there was time to buy souvenirs, after enjoying the extensive and delicious buffet. We ended the tour in style with a visit to an idyllic little lake, home to a pair of Red-throated Divers. Back in June, the birds had still been on their nest; now we saw an adult and a juvenile on the water. Many Common Gulls were also busy feeding their young.

Afterwards, it was only a short drive to the airport, where Jan said goodbye to the clients. Some headed to their hotels, while others made their way to the check-in desks to begin their journeys home.

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Species lists

Mammals

I=introduced	
Common name	Scientific name
European Hare	<i>Lepus europaeus</i>
Mountain Hare	<i>Lepus timidus</i>
Eurasian Red Squirrel	<i>Sciurus vulgaris</i>
Siberian Flying Squirrel	<i>Pteromys volans</i>
Northern Serotine	<i>Eptesicus nilssonii</i>
Fallow Deer - I	<i>Dama dama</i>
Western Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>
Elk (Moose)	<i>Alces alces</i>
Finnish Forest Reindeer	<i>Rangifer tarandus fennicus</i>
White-tailed Deer - I	<i>Odocoileus virginianus</i>
Chinese Raccoon Dog - I	<i>Nyctereutes procyonoides</i>
Grey Wolf	<i>Canis lupus</i>
Brown Bear	<i>Ursus arctos</i>
Saimaa Ringed Seal	<i>Pusa saimensis</i>

Birds (H=heard only)

Common name	Scientific name
Whooper Swan	<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>
Common Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>
Red-breasted Merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>
Goosander	<i>Mergus merganser</i>
Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Mareca penelope</i>
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>
Common Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>
Red-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps grisegena</i>
Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>
Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>
Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</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 Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>
Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</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>
Red-throated Diver	<i>Gavia stellata</i>
Black-throated Diver	<i>Gavia arctica</i>
Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>
Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>
European Honey Buzzard	<i>Pernis apivorus</i>
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>
Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>
White-tailed Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>

Common name	Scientific name
Black Woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus martius</i>
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>
Great Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius excubitor</i>
Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>
Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>
Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>
Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>
Carrion (Hooded) Crow	<i>Corvus corone cornix</i>
Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>
Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>
Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</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>
Eurasian Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>
Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>
Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>
Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</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>
European Pied Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>
Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>
Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>
Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>
Duncock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
Western Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>
Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>
Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>
Eurasian Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</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>
Common Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>
Rustic Bunting	<i>Emberiza rustica</i>
Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>