

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

Naturetrek Tour Report

20th – 27th March 2026

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Eurasian Lynx



Grey Wolf



European Wildcat



Eurasian Lynx

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Tour participants: Jan Kelchtermans and Mark Kaptein (leaders) with five Naturetrek clients

## Day 1

Friday 20th March

### Krakov Airport to the Bieszczady Mountains

We left Krakow Airport at around 4.00pm to start our journey to the Bieszczady Mountains, stopping for dinner in the town of Jaslo. Along the way, we observed White Storks busily maintaining their nest platforms, which were visible in the last of the daylight.

After dinner, the first evening safari started immediately, even before we had reached the hotel. It quickly yielded some wonderful sightings. In addition to common species such as Roe Deer, Red Deer, Red Foxes, and European Hares, we were rewarded with two European Beavers at a lodge known to the guides. A solitary European Bison bull also appeared in the beam of the spotlight.

Somewhat later than planned, we finally arrived at our accommodation around 11.15pm. After the room assignments, our first (and unexpectedly long) day on Polish soil came to an end.

## Day 2

Saturday 21st March

### The first wolves, and a double Lynx encounter

The day started early, even before the sun had fully risen above the hills. During a first morning session near the hotel, we quickly noticed the presence of border police on a hilltop, a spot both guides knew as a classic rendezvous area for Grey Wolves. Since observation was impossible there, we immediately moved on to a second location where a Wolf pack was also known to be present.

Along the way, a Black Stork flying overhead near a Beaver pool immediately provided a first highlight. At the second Wolf location, however, we were once again faced with an encounter with the border guard, rather than with Wolves. Nevertheless, there was more than enough to experience. A Black Woodpecker flew overhead, and we had sightings of a Nutcracker, a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, and another Black Stork, this time foraging at a small Beaver pool between a few houses and horse stables. Green Woodpeckers and Grey-headed Woodpeckers also made themselves heard.

In between, we made an extended stop at an impressive Beaver lodge and a beautifully dammed Beaver pool. A little further on, a small grassy field provided a remarkable scene: no fewer than five species of thrushes were foraging there together. Blackbird, Song Thrush, Mistle Thrush, Fieldfare and Ring Ouzel created an exceptional view.

After a long afternoon break and some free time, we headed towards the border region with Ukraine for an evening walk. At the same field as earlier, Ring Ouzels turned out still to be present, but now joined by Redwings, making for a sixth thrush species of the day.

The walk took us through dense spruce forest, where typical inhabitants of this habitat made an appearance: Nutcrackers, Bullfinches and even a Eurasian Pygmy Owl. Because we took ample time to observe and photograph these species, the final part of the walk took on a slightly more adventurous character. It had grown dark by then, and some parts of the path were still covered by a treacherous layer of icy snow. Accompanied by Woodcocks flying overhead and calling everyone, each at their own pace, reached the car safely.

Where we had photographed a Beaver lodge earlier in the day, the Beaver itself now appeared in the darkness. But what followed truly surpassed everything. Having only just set off again, Mark spotted the first large mammal through the thermal viewer at the edge of a meadow. A Lynx! At first, the animal remained somewhat hidden, but a moment later it walked past, barely fifteen metres from the car. It turned out to be a sturdy male, which also made itself heard and, with its tail raised, clearly marked its territory.

As if that weren't spectacular enough, the same Lynx reappeared a short time later. It crossed a meadow and even walked across the tarmac where we were parked, making an arc around us, before disappearing in the direction of the San River, which it crossed. We spotted him again when a Roe Deer, on the Ukrainian side of the border region, suddenly stared intently in his direction, and fled. Moments later, the Lynx crossed the river yet again and reappeared right in front of us. His wet fur clearly betrayed his double crossing. Moreover, Mark noticed the animal's remarkably fat belly. Perhaps we had discovered him shortly after he had eaten fresh prey.

Not much later, some confusion arose when a sound we initially interpreted as a Lynx call turned out to be coming from a Red Fox. It proved once again how misleading sounds and thermal images can sometimes be. Checking with a flashlight remains essential. But in any event, during our first real night session of the trip, we had already had a fantastic view of an adult Lynx, three times. And the evening was far from over.

Hardly had we recovered from this experience, when another highlight followed. A second Lynx! This animal was sitting quietly on the road which wound slightly upwards through a valley in the wooded landscape. As we moved closer, the Lynx stood up and walked slowly ahead of us, towards a steep slope with dense beech forest. Thanks to the night vision through the guides' thermals, we were able to locate the animal again. We left the car and got ample opportunity to observe and photograph the Lynx in the light of the flashlight. Even more striking, based on size and spot pattern, this was certainly a different individual from the first Lynx of the evening. As is so often the case with Lynxes, it became clear just how long such observations can last. Eventually, we boarded our van once more, while the Lynx quietly dozed off in its spot. It sounded improbable, but it was true: we left a Lynx location while the animal itself was still visibly present!

And even then, the evening was not over. On the way back, an Otter appeared in a Beaver pool, after which the howling of a Wolf pack suddenly echoed through the night near our accommodation. One Wolf even briefly walked down a slope, while higher up, two other animals were visible at a known pack hotspot. We decided to give the animals some rest, hoping they would still be there in the morning. But what an evening! What a day! It was probably one of the most spectacular sessions of the entire trip...although in Bieszczady, you never know what the next day will bring, of course.

## Day 3

Sunday 22nd March

### The full Wolf pack and Ural Owls

At dawn, three Wolves showed themselves again near the hotel. Only Ian and guide Mark enjoyed this special sighting; the other participants chose to catch up on some extra sleep after yesterday's long day.

After breakfast, Jan took those interested on a birding excursion. The first stop was a trail close to the hotel. Unfortunately, woodpeckers were neither heard nor seen there, but there was still plenty to experience. A Short-toed Treecreeper foraged along a trunk, a Dipper darted past under a small bridge, and a pair of Willow Tits carefully inspected a tree cavity which might potentially serve as a nesting site.

At the spot where Wolves had been looked for earlier that morning, we now stopped at a local Beaver lodge. Two Waxwings perched in the surrounding trees and bushes, while a pair of Ravens flew over the valley. Yellowhammers also made their presence known loudly. Further along in the same valley, we listened again for drumming woodpeckers, but without success.



Common Frogs



Long-tailed Tit



Eurasian Pygmy Owl



White-backed Woodpecker

From an old bridge over the River San, we did get what we were looking for: a Dipper posed beautifully on the protruding rocks in the flowing water. The photographic highlight of the day followed a little later, when we took a seat by a Beaver pool, which was of enormous attraction to amphibians. Thanks to the sunny weather and pleasant temperatures, numerous Common Frogs in particular allowed themselves to be photographed from very close up, provided guide Jan's instructions were followed closely.

Those who returned to the trail near the hotel on their own after the excursion were rewarded further. A Grey-headed Woodpecker allowed itself to be admired from very close up, while it furiously attacked a wooden electricity pole.

We spent the evening near a well-known Beaver platform. A few Mallards were foraging on the open water, and as soon as dusk set in, we heard three species of owls calling: Pygmy, Tawny and Ural. As we got closer to the Ural Owl's location, a large bird suddenly flew towards us across the tarmac. But it was not an owl. Instead, it was a Black Stork, which wanted to forage in the Beaver pool.

Only when it was completely dark did the resident pair of Ural Owls fly over our heads from one patch of forest to another. In terms of mammals, it was not the Beavers that showed themselves, but rather two playful Otters. At the locations where the Lynxes had appeared yesterday, it remained remarkably quiet this evening. Apart from a few Roe Deer, a Hare and a Fox, the landscape seemed almost empty. Only three Bisons were standing on a firebreak.

But the evening was not over yet. At the Wolf hotspot, where three members of the local pack had been present both yesterday evening and this morning, we were now treated to an unforgettable grand finale: all eight Wolves in the pack showed themselves. As if that were not enough, two Stone Martens also emerged from an opening under the hotel roof. It was clear that in Bieszczady, you are never finished with sightings!

## Day 4

**Monday 23rd March**

### Camera traps and moving on

The morning started in the familiar valley near the accommodation, where we were once again on the lookout for the local Wolf pack. This morning, however, a Lynx took centre stage. Together with two of Mark's companions, who were also present in the area, we headed towards a Roe Deer killed by the Lynx: Mark had managed to locate the exact spot of the kill, on the afternoon of day three.

Meanwhile, however, we were already on day four of the trip. In temperatures of no more than  $-7^{\circ}\text{C}$ , we checked the camera trap that Mark had placed near the carcass earlier. The footage on the memory card immediately provided beautiful evidence: after we had observed the Lynx, the animal had returned to its hidden prey the following night. This happened at 11.40pm, and again around 3.45am. The recordings clearly showed how the Lynx continued to eat from the carcass, partially stripping it of fur and carefully covering the remains with leaves, soil, and branches. Mark later processed the footage into an impressive compilation, which perfectly demonstrated how precisely and instinctively this mysterious predator operates. Moreover, while setting up and checking the camera traps, we were treated to a few fine bird sightings. Firecrests and Crested Tits made their presence known in the area; during the return drive, we also got to see a Red Squirrel.

After breakfast, we observed various birds near the accommodation, before travelling on to the second stop of the trip. Among others, Willow Tits, Goosanders, Black Redstarts, and Dippers were seen beautifully, and just before departure, a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker also flew overhead.

On the way, we made a now traditional stop in Cisna to stock up on supplies, including alcoholic beverages and other refreshments, since the next accommodation had no bar service.

Upon arrival at the second accommodation, the participants spent a considerable amount of time at the bird feeding table, where bird activity proved to be particularly lively. Yellowhammers, Crossbills and Hawfinches provided wonderful close-up observations. Moreover, the sunny weather and relatively mild temperatures had another effect: the local Foxes also turned out to be remarkably active during the day. In the surrounding meadows, they clearly seized the opportunity to hunt energy-efficiently. Being cold during clear nights, hunting in daylight requires less energy than nocturnal activity.

## Day 5

Tuesday 24th March

### White-backed Woodpeckers and a Wildcat

After breakfast, we headed out again towards the famous river trail along the San River. The drive itself immediately yielded a first beautiful moment: a crossing Red Squirrel. Almost at the parking lot at the bridge, we also found a Grey-headed Woodpecker. Whereas the day before yesterday we had struggled to locate woodpeckers, members of this bird family showed themselves noticeably better today. We observed a pair of White-backed Woodpeckers engaged in a territorial conflict with a pair of Great Spotted Woodpeckers. Ultimately, it appeared that the White-backed Woodpeckers were winning the dispute, over a recently hollowed-out nest cavity in a decaying tree trunk. Both the male and the female were subsequently present at the suspected nest cavity.

Mammals also betrayed their presence, albeit mostly indirectly. We found hoof- and footprints of Bison and Wolf. We found Brown Bear droppings twice: one with natural remains (mainly beech nuts), and a second with unnatural remains, presumably grain. The latter likely indicated consumption at one of the winter feeding stations in the area, which are set up to provide supplementary food for Bison.

In addition, we heard a Black Woodpecker, a pair of Goosanders was present on the San River, and a few Hawfinches were foraging in the cherry trees among the beeches. Meanwhile, we were thoroughly enjoying being outdoors, under a radiant sun in an idyllic landscape!

After a slightly later lunch, we headed towards dusk to a nearby location where Bison were being fed. In the last light of day, we saw a bull at a salt lick. Later, we heard a second animal in the forest, near a feeding station with turnip remnants. When the animal approached, it was obscured from view by dense bushes, and disappeared back into the forest. We also heard a Ural Owl, as well as Woodcocks flying overhead.

The evening session started strongly, with a hunting Wildcat moving along a small forest stream running parallel to the road. In addition, we saw Beavers and a Badger. Further west, a group of six Bison bulls appeared, joined by a few Roe Deer, Foxes, and an Northern White-breasted Hedgehog.

On the way back, the temperature dropped noticeably, which immediately caused the animals' activity to decrease. A dark silhouette on a tree trunk caused a brief commotion, and briefly suggested a Lynx, but upon closer inspection, it turned out merely to be a curled-up Fox! Due to the decreasing activity, the evening session was concluded slightly earlier than planned. We were back at our accommodation around 10.30pm.

## Day 6

Wednesday 25th March

### Bear tracks and the grand final pack

We started the day early. At 8.30am, we sat down for breakfast, after which we headed back towards Baligród. There, we picked up a permit granting access to forest roads that normally remain closed to visitors. It was an exciting start to a day entirely dedicated to tracking wildlife.

At a first feeding station, where turnips were scattered primarily for Bison, we discovered the tracks of two Brown Bears. They did not seem very fresh anymore, but the mere idea that the animals had passed through here recently created a real buzz. Due to the strong wind, we did not stay long at a known Beaver location. Moreover, we lost some time due to a broken-down bulldozer completely blocking the road. When we finally did reach the Beaver platform, an encounter with the Beavers failed to materialize. We got a brief glimpse of a Grey-headed Woodpecker, as well as displaying Buzzards. Meanwhile, the resident Black Woodpecker remained unseen.

We continued our journey via Sukowate, where we came across a second abandoned feeding station. Here too we found old Bear tracks, along with clear signs of Bison activity. Afterwards, we drove back towards our accommodation via small hamlets, with one last stop on a mountaintop along the way. There, we were rewarded with a prolonged observation of a foraging pair of White-backed Woodpeckers. A moment later, a Grey-headed Woodpecker also took flight, although unfortunately it quickly disappeared back into the trees.

After dinner, we set off again for a long night excursion. At a well-known Beaver pool, we spotted a Beaver swimming almost immediately. Driving via Łopienka, we then checked a spot where Mark's companions had seen a female Bear with two cubs in the river the day before, but this time it remained quiet there. We drove further east along a gravel road running parallel to the winding San River. Suddenly, two Bison stood in the middle of the road, foraging on the bark of young trees. Just as startled as we were, the imposing animals immediately stormed down the slope, out of sight and towards the river.

At the location where we had previously observed Lynxes, the night-time tracking work with the thermals was rewarded once again. First, a rufous-morph Tawny Owl appeared, followed by a Wildcat which allowed itself to be observed head-on at close range: it was a particularly intense encounter!

The spectacle continued on the way back as well. Twice, Bison crossed our path again: one of the animals was right near the complex where the animals had been released in the reintroduction scheme. Later, we spotted a Badger with a bleeding ear on the roadside verge.

Then, suddenly, a phone call came in from Mark's comrades. We immediately speeded westward to a known Wolf location. There, we found eight Wolves lying close together. As soon as the spotlight turned on, the animals jumped up. Five of them immediately chose the safety of the dark forest, away from the bright beam of Mark's flashlight. The other three pack members remained remarkably calm, and remained lying or sitting down. They looked around a bit, even playing briefly with a bone or a piece of wood. In short: completely natural behaviour, without panic or a flight response. It was an unforgettable moment. We concluded the night with two more Otters in the plains around the Beaver pools. Once again, we had experienced an intense day full of tracks, encounters, and unexpected moments in the heart of the Bieszczady Mountains.

## Day 7

Thursday 26th March

### Fire Salamanders, other amphibians and a final Wildcat

After yesterday's long night, we started the day quietly. We did not sit down for breakfast until 9.30am, after which we set off at around 10.45am for the hidden and vast Beaver valley in the border region with Slovakia. It remains a magical place: pristine, quiet, and teeming with water and life.

The Beaver pools once again proved to be a true paradise for Common Frogs. Everywhere we looked, we saw pairs in amplexus, and masses of frogspawn. Just like in previous years, this last week of March confirmed itself as the peak time to see and photograph these amphibians in action. Amid all that frog activity, a few typical boreal bird species also allowed themselves to be admired. Nutcracker, Bullfinch, and Crested Tit showed themselves at their best, and added extra colour to the still wintry landscape.

After a particularly late lunch at 3.30pm, we headed east again. Along the same gravel road running parallel to the meandering San River, we stumbled upon the first Fire Salamander of the trip. It was a promising start. At the familiar viewpoint, we spotted three Bison in the distance. Due to the wet and milder weather, the Fire Salamanders suddenly seemed to be truly everywhere. After eight specimens at close range, we gave up counting!

Via a mountain pass, we crossed into the more open landscape around Luh. There, we were surprised by two Otters showing themselves in the river. Shortly afterwards, two more individuals followed, foraging in a Beaver pool full of frogspawn. Not long before, we had checked a location there for the possible presence of Brown Bears.

On the way to a valley near the border with Slovakia, we saw a Stone Marten walking along the river. Subsequently, a fifth Otter of the evening appeared in a nearby water reservoir: this was an exceptional result. As if that weren't enough, three Bison were standing at the top of a hilly meadow near a Beaver pool, just before we crossed another mountain pass towards our accommodation.

Once we arrived, one of our travel companions was dropped off, but for us, the evening was far from over. The night trek simply continued. We started off strong with two Badgers frolicking playfully in a meadow where a local Wolf pack had recently been active. However, the Wolves did not show themselves. They also remained absent on another slope towards a mountain pass, although Bison were present there, albeit well hidden among dense hazel thickets. Another Badger made an appearance there as well.

We then drove along a route known to both guides as a great hotspot for Lynx. Along the way, we saw Bison in the meadows again: once far away, another time even further. A beautiful Long-eared Owl with striking ear tufts hunted silently over the fields. At an old Beaver pool, a large Wildcat allowed itself to be admired for a long time from the car. A little further on, a Ural Owl sat majestically on a branch. Then the weather suddenly changed. The temperature dropped rapidly, and thick fog rolled into the landscape, causing visibility to drop to near zero. But even that could not detract from what had been, once again, an evening of absolute top class wildlife watching.

## Day 8

Friday 27th March

### Return to Krakow

After an early breakfast at 6.30am, we left this beautiful area around 7.30am. The weather was completely different today: grey, drizzly, and wet. We made two short stops along the way, after which we arrived in Krakow in plenty of time, around noon. This marked the end of the first of five consecutive Naturetrek trips in this impressive region, although even that word felt like an understatement. After everything we had experienced over the past few days.

After saying goodbye, everyone headed home. For the two guides, there was first a brief moment of rest and disconnection, before the next adventure began the following day. With the start of the second trip!



Eurasian Lynx

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## Species lists

### Mammals

Common name	Scientific name	March 2026							
		20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27
European Hare	<i>Lepus europaeus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Eurasian Beaver	<i>Castor fiber</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Eurasian Red Squirrel	<i>Sciurus vulgaris</i>				✓	✓			
Northern White-breasted Hedgehog	<i>Erinaceus roumanicus</i>					✓			
Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓
Western Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
European Bison	<i>Bison bonasus</i>	✓		✓		✓	✓		
Eurasian Lynx	<i>Lynx lynx</i>	✓							
European Wildcat	<i>Felis silvestris</i>					✓	✓	✓	
Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Grey Wolf	<i>Canis lupus</i>		✓	✓					
European Badger	<i>Meles meles</i>						✓	✓	
Stone Marten	<i>Martes foina</i>			✓				✓	
European Polecat	<i>Mustela putorius</i>			✓					
Eurasian Otter	<i>Lutra lutra</i>		✓	✓			✓	✓	

### Amphibians & reptiles

Common name	Scientific name	March 2026							
		20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27
Fire Salamander	<i>Salamandra salamandra</i>							✓	
Montandon's Newt	<i>Lissotriton montandoni</i>							✓	
Common Toad	<i>Bufo bufo</i>							✓	
Common Frog	<i>Rana temporaria</i>			✓	✓			✓	
Viviparous Lizard	<i>Zootoca vivipara</i>							✓	

### Birds

Common name	Scientific name
Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>
Goosander	<i>Mergus merganser</i>
Hazel Grouse	<i>Tetrastes bonasia</i>
Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>
Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>
Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>
Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>
Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>
Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>
Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>
Eurasian Woodcock	<i>Scolopax rusticola</i>
Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>
White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
White-tailed Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>
Eurasian Pygmy Owl	<i>Glaucidium passerinum</i>

<b>Common name</b>	<b>Scientific name</b>
Long-eared Owl	<i>Asio otus</i>
Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>
Ural Owl	<i>Strix uralensis</i>
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dryobates minor</i>
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>
White-backed Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos leucotos</i>
Black Woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus martius</i>
European Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>
Grey-headed Woodpecker	<i>Picus canus</i>
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>
Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>
Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>
Northern Nutcracker	<i>Nucifraga caryocatactes</i>
Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>
Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>
Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>
Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>
Bohemian Waxwing	<i>Bombycilla garrulus</i>
Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>
Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>
Marsh Tit	<i>Poecile palustris</i>
Willow Tit	<i>Poecile montanus</i>
Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>
Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>
Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>
Common Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>
Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>
Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>
Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>
Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</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>
Ring Ouzel	<i>Turdus torquatus</i>
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>
Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>
White-throated Dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>
Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>
Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>
Eurasian Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>
Brambling	<i>Fringilla montifringilla</i>
Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>
Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>
European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>
Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>
Red Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>

<b>Common name</b>	<b>Scientific name</b>
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>
Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>
Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>
Common Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>