

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

Naturetrek Tour Report

28th March – 4th April 2026



Pygmy Owl



Fire Salamander



Brown Bears



Grey Wolf

Tour report by Jan Kelchtermans



Naturetrek

Mingledown Barn

Wolf's Lane

Chawton

Alton

Hampshire

GU34 3HJ

UK

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

E: info@naturetrek.co.uk

W: www.naturetrek.co.uk

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

Day 1

Saturday 28th March

After arrival, all the clients quickly gathered, and we reached our first accommodation by around 5.00pm. The roughly five-hour drive was a classic journey through the Polish countryside: motorways gave way to secondary roads, urbanized areas transitioned into small villages, and eventually the sparsely populated Subcarpathian region and the Bieszczady National Park appeared on the horizon. Along the way, we made several observations: numerous White Storks, an active Rook colony, and even the first Red Deer of the trip.

At 7.00pm, we set out on our first evening excursion, and it certainly did not disappoint. Before long, we spotted a Eurasian Beaver, followed by a Long-eared Owl and a Fire Salamander. Displaying Woodcocks swept through the evening sky, while two European Bisons could be admired in the distance. A little later, Mark detected a Pine Marten with his thermal binoculars, although it was not particularly visible. A European Wildcat, however, gave us a brief view before disappearing back into the darkness. Another striking sight was the large number of Common Toads crossing the road en masse.

We had managed to observe two different Eurasian Lynxes during the first tour, but the landscape remained devoid of large cats for the moment this time. Nevertheless, common species such as Roe Deer, Red Foxes, and European Hares made regular appearances. The absolute highlight of the evening came near the accommodation, where the local Grey Wolf pack turned out to be present. Not long afterwards, an impressive chorus of howls echoed through the night: it was a magical end to our first evening in this wild corner of Poland.

Day 2

Sunday 29th March

The Wolves we had heard howling a few hours earlier now revealed themselves in daylight as well: we managed to observe no fewer than five individuals. A little later, we spotted a pair of Black Woodpeckers on our way to the location where, earlier in the week, we had found a Lynx at a kill. There was also plenty of activity around the lodge, including Dipper, Goosander, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker and Black Redstart.

At 4.45pm, we headed towards an extensive mountain meadow in the middle of a forested area. To reach it, we descended into a valley and settled at a viewpoint overlooking a Beaver pond. Before our attention could fully shift to the Beavers, we were surprised by a Golden Eagle perched in the top of a tree, while a Wolf wandered through the meadows, clearly searching for Moles.

Thanks to the overcast weather, the Beavers became active early. We watched them swimming around their lodge, foraging along the banks, and carefully inspecting their dams for any damage. The wetland habitat they created also attracted a wide variety of other wildlife. Teals, Mallards and a Grey Heron searched for food in and around the water, while Snipes could be heard performing their distinctive display flights. As dusk approached, several Roe Deer and Foxes also appeared in the rolling landscape around us.

The walk back to the vehicle was uphill and took place in darkness, making the hike considerably more demanding. Fortunately, this caused no real problems. Around 8.30pm, the second spotlighting session of the trip began. Large mammals were less cooperative this time, but two outstanding bird observations more than made up for it.

The first highlight was a female Hazel Grouse, discovered by Mark with his thermal. We were able to leave the vehicle, switch on our flashlights, and enjoy excellent views of the bird. The second highlight followed not much later: a calling Tengmalm's Owl. It took some effort, but those who ventured into the dark forest eventually succeeded in getting superb spotlit views of the owl.

Day 3

Monday 30th March

The area around the lodge remained remarkably Wolf-free throughout the morning. The border pack was nowhere to be seen either. A dawn drive through both Wolf territories in the rental car produced plenty of other wildlife instead: Red and Roe Deer, a Fox, and even a Fire Salamander crossing our path. Nevertheless, large carnivores were clearly present in the area. Fresh Wolf scat and Brown Bear droppings revealed that we were only just missing them.

After the morning excursion, everyone enjoyed some free time until lunch. At around 4.30pm, we headed once again towards the Ukrainian border, for a walk which began through dense spruce forest. Just like yesterday, we were treated to several outstanding species which perfectly suited this rugged landscape and its habitat: Black Woodpecker, Nutcracker, Crested Tit and even a Pygmy Owl were seen and heard. Along the way, we also discovered some fresh tracks of a young Brown Bear which had clearly passed along the trail before us. In addition, a Ural Owl made its presence known vocally.

Back at the vehicle, we grabbed a quick bite, before starting the spotlighting session. Once again, it produced an impressive and varied species list, including both birds and mammals: Raccoon Dog, Wild Boar, Bison and another calling Tengmalm's Owl. Along the banks of the River San, a Polecat was seen foraging, and a little later came the undisputed highlight of the evening: a magnificent Wolf walking parallel to the river before eventually crossing the San itself. At around 11.15pm, we returned to the lodge, thoroughly satisfied with the day's observations.

Day 4

Tuesday 31st March

Today was dedicated to changing accommodation, with some free time to fully enjoy the surroundings, the birds, and the bird feeding station around our new lodge.

In the evening, nature once again revealed its most beautiful side, although not every target species was willing to show itself right away, especially not in daylight. Then again, that is the rule rather than the exception here. We first tried to spot Bison at a nearby location, but they were nowhere to be seen. Further east, we checked two well-known sites where both guides had observed Brown Bears in the past. Yet here too, all remained remarkably quiet. There was sign of Brown Bears this time, although we were rewarded with a wonderful encounter at a familiar Beaver pond: a Eurasian Otter made an appearance.

This site was clearly serving as a regular fishing spot for Otters. Based on previous observations, they forage here particularly frequently, as the nearby River San provides an ideal travel corridor, as well as a quick escape route. During their nightly search for food, Otters can easily cover twenty kilometres, using rivers as an energy-efficient way to move between productive feeding areas.

Following the River San and crossing a mountain pass, we continued towards Łopienka. Along the way, we enjoyed a pleasing sighting of a Pine Marten near the river. Unfortunately, the animal was moving at quite a pace, making the observation rather fleeting. At a bridge further along the route, where friends of Mark had seen a female Brown Bear with two cubs the previous night, we observed only a few Beavers. A little later, at a crossroad in a small hamlet with scattered houses and gardens, our luck improved. A Stone Marten allowed excellent views in a tree, before disappearing. A Long-eared Owl was equally cooperative, and could be approached and photographed without difficulty.

Bison eventually appeared on a hillside further ahead, although they remained largely concealed within the forest. Even with the spotlight, they were difficult to see. But then came the highlight of the evening. During a seventeen-kilometre drive back towards the lodge through prime habitat, we stumbled upon a female Brown Bear with three cubs. The Bears were startled and immediately took off, but to reach the safety of the forest they first had to cross an open area. This provided us with a fantastic observation. Once at the forest edge, the animals displayed their characteristic heavy, swaying gait, moving the front and hind legs on the same side forward simultaneously. The trio of cubs, waddling along behind their mother, created a truly unforgettable spectacle.

Back near the lodge, we continued driving westward, where several groups of Bison emerged. First, a small herd were found deep within dense spruce forest, then seven animals were in a meadow right beside the vehicle, and finally a third group appeared higher up on the hillside. All in all, it had been a highly successful evening, filled with wonderful sightings and unforgettable moments in the wild.

Day 5

Wednesday 1st April

After breakfast, we drove eastwards for one of the classic highlights of the trip: a walk along the River San. As is so often the case, the first part of the trail formed a mosaic of tracks left by large herbivores and predators, animals which have become rare in Western Europe, have only recently reappeared through reintroduction programmes, or have disappeared altogether. Here, Bison, Wolves and Bears left signs of their presence everywhere.

Around a bend, the high, sharp “pit” calls of Hawfinches rang out. Their calls immediately gave them away, but obtaining a clear and unobstructed view of the birds themselves proved far more challenging. The same applied to a shy White-backed Woodpecker, which foraged close to the ground, and only revealed itself briefly. Near our accommodation, towards dusk, we attempted to lure in a Ural Owl to the spot where we had heard one briefly yesterday. Unfortunately, the owl remained completely silent this time.

Although conditions during the later evening session were wet and chilly, the excursion started promisingly. At a Beaver pond, an Otter appeared once again, and further east we encountered the same

female Bear with her cubs. Initially, they were inside a livestock enclosure and seemed rather displeased by the beams of our flashlights. Once they managed to leave the enclosure and move higher up the slope, however, they visibly relaxed. Again, we watched them ambling along in single file with their characteristic lumbering gait: it was an impressive sight.

This time, a Wildcat also allowed much better views, and we additionally spotted one of the first Badgers of the trip. It was clear that the milder weather had greatly increased activity among these nocturnal mammals.

Day 6

Thursday 2nd April

After breakfast, we headed towards two authentic Beaver ponds, hoping for better luck with several woodpecker species. However, the strong wind had other plans. Bird activity remained limited, although we were treated to a fine sighting of a Nutcracker. Even so, the location itself was more than worth the visit. The Beaver ponds perfectly illustrated how Beavers naturally shape the landscape. By building dams, they created a variety of wetlands that make the area visibly more natural. Moreover, Beavers provided enormous ecological benefits: they increase biodiversity by attracting amphibians, insects, birds, Otters and even larger predators. They also help retain water during dry periods, and reduce the impact of flooding. Throughout the Bieszczady region, their influence is clearly visible.

Towards evening, the group split up. Mark once again chose the trail where fresh tracks the previous day had shown that a herd of Bison had crossed the river. Unfortunately, the long wait proved unsuccessful, and Europe's largest land mammal remained out of sight. Jan and Chris headed to a nearby waterbird observation site. Their outing was more rewarding, as both Teal and Garganey provided excellent views.

When the group reunited later, we once again travelled eastward in search of nocturnal wildlife. Near the border, a rooting Wild Boar appeared in our spotlight, but otherwise the area remained rather quiet. Fortunately, more action followed later in the evening. In the so-called "Wolf Valley," near our first accommodation, we enjoyed excellent views of a Ural Owl. Shortly afterwards, a male Badger appeared, identifiable by its longer, narrower, and more wedge-shaped tail. An impressively large Beaver completed the scene.

Back at the lodge, the evening was far from over. During one final drive westward, the night became remarkably productive. We encountered large herds of Bison and Red Deer, followed by an encounter with another Wolf pack: groups of two and seven individuals. The Wolves showed little appreciation for the bright spotlight, but as soon as it was switched off, their howls echoed impressively through the night. Once again, it had been a truly memorable and successful evening in the Bieszczady Mountains.

Day 7

Friday 3rd April

After a slightly later breakfast, another mid-morning birding excursion was scheduled for 10.45am. This time, we headed to a nearby summit with ancient beech forest. Unlike last week, the White-backed Woodpeckers failed to show themselves here. At the Beaver viewing platform a little further on, however, a Black Stork appeared, instead of the hoped-for Black Woodpecker: a 'luxury problem', one might say.

From there, we continued through the forest toward a meadow, which we approached from above. Along the way, we were once again reminded of the presence of Bison and Bears, with fresh tracks visible beside the trail leading to the viewpoint. Once there, a Golden Eagle suddenly took flight, while two Roe Deer crossed the meadow below. Unfortunately, we did not get to see any Bison, although a sunbathing Sand Lizard somewhat made up for that.

The evening excursion took us westward. It produced sightings of Badger, Fox, Roe and Red Deer, the familiar and widespread species of the area. In addition, we spotted a Stone Marten in a tree. The circuit where we had regularly observed Lynxes in previous years remained cat-free this time. We did, however, see a Wolf, which marked its territory on two separate occasions. A final attempt deep into the night was eventually rewarded with one last species: Pine Marten.

Day 8

Saturday 4th April

Breakfast was at 8.00am, with departure an hour later. Around the lodge, Red Crossbills could still be heard calling, while Skylarks sang exuberantly in the bright morning light.

On the way to Kraków, we made one final stop for a roadside observation of a Great Grey Shrike. Upon arrival at the airport, we said farewell to the clients as they began their journeys home.

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Species lists

Mammals

Common name	Scientific name	March - April 2026							
		28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4
European Hare	<i>Lepus europaeus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Eurasian Beaver	<i>Castor fiber</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Eurasian Red Squirrel	<i>Sciurus vulgaris</i>				✓				
Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>	✓				✓	✓	✓	
Western Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
European Bison	<i>Bison bonasus</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓		
Wild Boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>		✓	✓		✓			
European Wildcat	<i>Felis silvestris</i>		✓			✓			
Chinese Raccoon Dog	<i>Nyctereutes procyonoides</i>			✓					
Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Grey Wolf	<i>Canis lupus</i>	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	
Brown Bear	<i>Ursus arctos</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>				✓	✓			

Birds (H=heard only)

Common name	Scientific name
Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>
Garganey	<i>Spatula querquedula</i>
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>
Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</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>
Eurasian Woodcock	<i>Scolopax rusticola</i>
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>
Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>
European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>
Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>
White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>
Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>
White-tailed Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>
Tengmalm's Owl	<i>Aegolius funereus</i>
Eurasian Pygmy Owl	<i>Glaucidium passerinum</i>
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>

Common name	Scientific name
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>
Great Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius excubitor</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>
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>
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>
European Pied Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>
Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>
European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>
White-throated Dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
Duncock	<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>
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>
Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>
Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>
Common Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>