

Italy, december 2016

Report by Sophie and Manuel

We went to Abruzzo National Park for New Year and did a tour with Ecotur entitled "New Year with the wolves".

Just to be clear, we don't want to talk badly about Ecotur at all. We would just like to clarify some points for fellow mammal watchers. Also, we don't talk about the organisation overall, just about the one experience we had with one guide.

It started off quiet well with the organisation realizing that we are passionate about mammal watching and putting us in a very small group of four people. What we didn't know and what our guide told us later in during our trip, is that most people booking this and other tours with Ecotur basically just want to hike and are not especially focused on mammal watching. Therefore, we started to hike at 10.30am the first day and at 10am the second day, it was the same for the third day. We then stayed outside until about 5pm (before sundown). This is still quiet a lot of time out but consider that your fellows might not be as focused on finding animal as you are and could be quiet noisy.

Furthermore, we thought this tour would be focused on finding wolves but the hikes were not necessarily planned to maximize our chances. We think that it was rather designed to show us the most interesting, beautiful and popular places of the park (we hiked to a much crowded waterfall during the first day for example).

Our last misunderstanding was about the night walk. You are not allowed to spotlight during the walk and the idea is to go in the dark, to spread the sound of a record of howling wolves and to hope for an answer.

You are however allowed to do your own thing outside of activities and that's what we did.

Mammals seen:

1. **Red deer** (*cervus elaphus*): The red deer is very common in the park. They have over a thousand deers in the park and we had sightings on every day. Scanning the sunny areas with the binoculars will almost certainly produce red deers.
2. **European roe deer** (*capreolus capreolus*): Less common than the red deer. We had one probable quick sighting far away.
3. **Least weasel** (*mustela nivalis*): One probable very quick sighting next to a stream from one of our tour members on the way from la Camosciara to Civitella Alfedena.
4. **Red Squirrel** (*sciurus vulgaris*): One sighting next to the road when leaving the park.
5. **European hedgehog** (*erinaceus europaeus*): One sighting next to the road during a night drive.



6. **Red fox** (*vulpes vulpes*): Quite common. Seen on every night drive we did.
7. **Grey wolf** (*canis lupus*): One sighting on the last night during a night drive between Pescasseroli and Gioia Vecchio. They roam around on lower altitude during the winter and apparently nearer to the population. Looking on the plains of Opi (between Pescasseroli and Opi) from above during sunrise and sunset is a good strategy for sightings as well.



Infos on other mammals:

1. **Abruzzese Chamois** (*rupicapra pyrenaica ornate*): No sightings for us. There are about 300-400 chamois in the park and it seems that they can be seen quiet easily in the region of la Camosciara.
2. **Marsian brown bear** (*Ursus arctos marsicanus*): Apparently best seen between mid-august and mid-september. In spring, they can be seen from Gioia Vecchio when scanning the plain. During the period mentioned above, they are higher up eating a particular fruit they particularly like. During this period, they stay in a greater number at this one place.

Conclusion: It is definitively a good place to have a chance of spotting the bear and the wolves since you are free to do mammals watching any way and any time you want. Also there are quite a lot of these specimen there and the park is filled with hillsides to scan. As for guided excursions we would suggest a private guide and maybe save free days for your own excursion.