



## South East Poland 1st - 6th April 2018

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### INTRO

This trip materialised thanks to Jan Kelchtermans. I've known Jan as a friend for a few years and he suggested I come out to Poland the week before a Naturetrek tour for some wildlife watching. Jan also invited three other people he knew well. So given the situation, I couldn't resist another opportunity to finally nail tickable views of a Eurasian Lynx - a species that was fast becoming my nemesis! Besides Poland I have used Jan's EB5 services on two very successful trips to Spain for Iberian Wolves and Cantabrian Brown Bears. Both reports of these trips are available on his website – details below.

Of course there's more to Poland than just Lynx as it is a fabulous destination for the mammal watcher looking to find some cool European mammal species. Jan has been visiting South East Poland for at least 9 years and knows the area extremely well, he has made some good contacts and has even had a wildlife watching hide built.

Jan is the founder of his own wildlife watching tour company - Europe's Big 5. See: <https://www.europesbig5.com/> for more information and tours.

The weather wasn't at all bad. We started off in winter like conditions but the weather improved and so ended six days later in Spring!

## DAY REPORTS

**Sunday 1st April.** I flew from London Stansted (in Essex) to Krakow and met up with Jan and the others early afternoon. We were away quickly from the airport in our hire vehicle - a Peugeot nine seater van, as the rain fell and continued to fall during the daylight hours. We headed south east to the Bieszczady region adjacent to the Ukraine border. The only mammals seen en route were a few **Roe Deer**.



We arrived in time at our small hotel accommodation in Ustrzyki Górne to be able to go out on a drive for two hours before it got dark. By now the rain had turned to sleet/snow, however, we didn't do too badly seeing two **Brown Hares**, two **European Beavers** and two **Red Foxes**. After our evening meal we went on a night drive spotlighting from 21:00 to 24:00. We had six **Red Foxes**, three **Brown Hares**, two possibly four **Beavers**, four **Pine Martens** and a rather distant but definite **European Wildcat**. So a very pleasing first spotlighting session. However, being so close to the Ukraine border we were stopped three times by border guards who wanted to see our passports, driving papers and generally ask us questions as to what we were doing. This was repeated most nights which although a minor nuisance only held us up for 10 minutes or so and after all they are only doing their job. They did get to know us after a couple of nights and after the first stop of the night usually waved us on.

**Monday 2nd April.** A pre breakfast drive with stops for scanning 05:15 - 08:00. The highlight, watched from the van, was a superb view of a **Wolf** on the edge of the road which just looked at us for a short while before trotting a little way into the forest, stopped and looked at us again before moving on and melting away amongst the trees. Soon after that Jan picked up a further two **wolves** in

a valley bottom but these were some way away but we had them under observation for a good while before they disappeared behind some trees. Before going back for breakfast we also clocked up one **Red Fox**, one **Brown Hare**, two **Red Deer** and two **Red Squirrels**. During the rest of the day driving, walking and scanning we found five **Red Foxes**, one **Beaver** and a few **Red** and **Roe Deer**.



Evening spotlighting drive 21:00 - 23:00. The best was very good views of a **Wildcat** close to the road which we saw twice - once when driving up the road and about 15 minutes later when we drove back down the road. We also saw two **Red Foxes**, two **Beavers**, about four **Brown Hares** and Jan got a brief view of a **Pine Marten**. We also came across a **European Bison** with a collar on which was released last year from a nearby wildlife Park in the hope of boosting the wild Bison gene pool. Apparently three Bison had been released but two of them had died.

**Tuesday 3rd April.** Pre breakfast drive 05:00 - 08:30. The highlight of this morning was watching a **European Otter** fishing in a Beaver pond. We also came across a **Roe Deer** a **Red Fox** and a **Brown Hare**.

Out and about for the rest of the day was very enjoyable but we didn't see much in the mammal department apart from some **Roe Deer**. Unfortunately at 17:00 we had a minor disaster when the van sprang a rather bad oil leak probably after we hit a pot-hole in the road! To cut a long story short Jan and his friend Ronan did an excellent job on their mobiles to get us sorted out with the hire car company as our van wasn't going anywhere and we had to wait for

a tow truck to take it away. We would then have had another long wait for a replacement vehicle had it not been for one of Jan's local contacts who gave us a lift back to our hotel an hour's drive away. We got back at 22:00 and of course without a vehicle we couldn't go spotlighting that evening. I have to say here some of the local Polish people who were complete strangers and nothing to do with the hire car company went out of their way to try and help us when we were stranded - so a big thank you to the Poles.

**Wednesday 4th April.** The hire car company came up trumps as they delivered a replacement vehicle at 07:30 this morning. Another Peugeot but only a five seater so a tad cramped after the massive amount of room we had in the van. Not the best vehicle for five people to go out spotlighting but you just have to make do with what you have got and get on with it.

We spent a very pleasant day driving, scanning and walking forest tracks seeing **Red Fox, Red Deer** and **Roe Deer** but also a great spectacle of hundreds of Common Frogs mating/spawning.



Then just before 17:00 we spotted a **Brown Bear** in a meadow - absolutely brilliant and great views as it munched on spilt corn.



At one point it ran off to the edge of the forest, although still in view, after about five minutes it made its way back to the middle of the meadow and resumed eating the corn.



It was obviously nervous but it wasn't aware of us as we had the wind in our favour and we remained very quiet. It appeared to be spooked by the noise of the trees when the wind gusted.



After being on view for at least 15 minutes the bear ran off into the forest and didn't reappear.



We then drove to a watch point above a river valley where we remained until dusk. It was good to catch up with a couple of **European Bison** - a cow with last year's calf in tow - along with the usual **Red** and **Roe Deer**.

We got back to our hotel around 19:30 and after our evening meal we went spotlighting from 21:15 to 00:15. At least six **Red Fox** sightings, two **Brown Hare**, two **Beaver**, two **Pine Marten** and a single **Wildcat**.

**Thursday 5th April.** After breakfast we drove to an area of rolling grassland and scattered trees adjacent to the border with the Ukraine. A beautiful area to walk and scan but unfortunately we didn't see the hoped for wolves.



We did see a few **Roe Deer** and two **Red Foxes** but the best was a couple of **Brown Hare leverets** laying side by side motionless on a track relying on camouflage and stillness to go undetected - maybe the female Hare shouldn't have chosen a track to leave them on - we did see at least three vehicle on it! We then drove back to our hotel and rested for a couple of hours before going out again around 17:00. We went to a hill that afforded really good viewing opportunities and stayed put scanning the surrounding slopes and woodland edges until 19:00. But unfortunately all we could come up with was four **Red Deer** and three **Red Foxes**.



After our evening meal we went out on our final spotlighting session from 21:00 to 01:00. We got four **Brown Hare**, six **Red Foxes**, two **Red Deer**, five **Roe Deer**, a **Raccoon Dog** (which was unexpected), two **Pine Martens** and two **Stone (Beech) Martens**. It wasn't easy to be sure that we had seen Stone Martens as the views didn't always show the diagnostic features very well to eliminate Pine Marten. We may have actually seen four Stone Martens on the trip, but, at least these two showed well enough for most of the group to be happy with the identification.

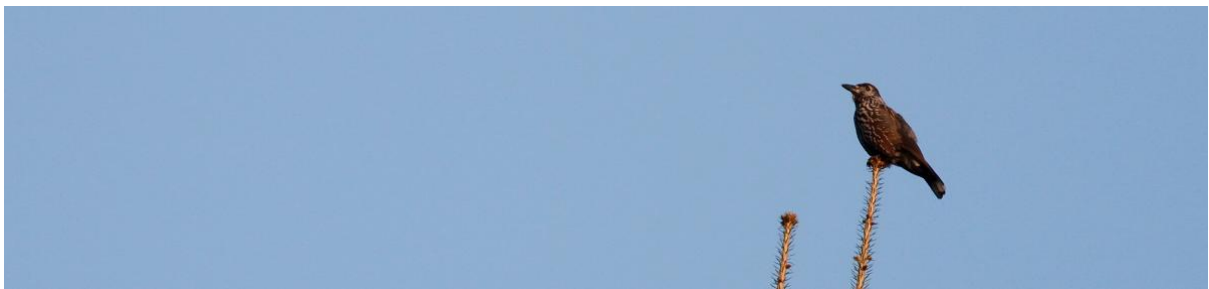
**Friday 6th April.** Didn't really get time to do much this morning as we had to leave for the airport plus it was pouring with rain. I had a major scare after departing the hotel when I realised my jacket wasn't in the car boot. My jacket contained my passport, credit card, flight boarding pass and mobile phone - I was somewhat worried to say the least especially after Jan phoned the hotel to see if it was there only to be told it wasn't! To cut another long story short Jan drove me back to the hotel as I was sure that was where I had left it. On route the hotel phoned back and said they had found it on the track at the back of the hotel. What had happened was that I had put my jacket in the boot but the boot wasn't closed properly and the jacket had fallen out and had not been noticed when we stopped and shut the boot properly. Anyway as that caused a delay of nearly two hours we cracked on straight to the airport for our flights home. We saw a few **Red** and **Roe Deer** on the journey. Jan stayed behind to welcome the Naturetrek group who were arriving later that day.

**14 Mammals seen:** *Wolf, Raccoon Dog, Red Fox, Brown Bear, Stone Marten, Pine Marten, Eurasian Otter, European Wildcat, Red Deer, Roe Deer, European Bison, Brown Hare, Red Squirrel, Eurasian Beaver.*

**Best Birds:** *Goosander, Hazel Hen, White Stork, Black Stork, Black Kite, Goshawk, Ural Owl, Tawny Owl, Hoopoe, Black Woodpecker, Dipper, Ring Ouzel, Great Grey Shrike, Nutcracker, Brambling, Common Crossbill.*







**Reptiles & Amphibians:** *Sand Lizard, Adder (Viper), Common Frog.*

*The following week when Jan was guiding for Naturetrek he found them a Lynx - oh well sometimes you just can't win, hopefully I'll have better luck with Lynx next time. For information Jan also found them, amongst other things, Pine and Stone Martens, Wildcat, Wolves and Bison.*

The End