

**Finland:
Kuikka Base Camp and Era Eero Lodge:
3-9 August, 2018
Stuart Chapman and Nick Cox**



Wolverine at the “caravan hide”, Kuikka

This was my first trip to the Boreal forests of northern Europe, with both Kuikka Base Camp and Era Eero lodge recommended by a colleague who has spent most of his professional conservation career in this region. In short, it was an incredible experience. The proximity, frequency and numbers of encounters with Europe’s top carnivores was beyond all expectations. I would even go so far as to say that in terms of encounters with carnivores, this would be in my top five globally.

For the first two nights at Kuikka we had encounters with bears, wolverines and wolves arriving in a constant procession starting in the early evening and tailing off by 11pm with some viewing in the early hours. The hides are located in a diversity of settings to give different photographic opportunities overlooking, grassland, forests and lakes. The hides are equipped with camera mounts, viewing windows and bunk beds. Lassi will rent ball heads / other tripod mounts, sleeping bags etc. – both of which we’d recommend as essentials to enhance the experience. In several hides it’s possible to mount cameras in multiple positions on different sides, which is

good for those with two or more camera bodies and lenses. A couple of hides also have power outlets but don't rely on these for charging batteries, and anyway the inverter is quite noisy.

The animals approached to within 5-10 meters of the hides and showed no interest or concern with the proximity of the hides and the constant clicking of cameras. This is explained by the supplementary feeding in front of the hides, with salmon, dog food and pig meat to attract carnivores. That said the proximity of Kuikka to the Russian border in the "green belt" between the two countries where access is restricted and no hunting is allowed has resulted in this extraordinary safe-haven for wildlife. The contrast to Era Eero lodge where feeding also habituates the wildlife but local hunting quotas can result in the shooting of habituated bears has resulted in a situation which is completely incompatible with eco-tourism and needs to be stopped.

Given the size and proximity of the bears, it is surreal at times having these powerful animals so close to the hides and separated only by glass and canvas. But the memory that will stay with me and bring me back is listening to the melancholic howls of wolves throughout the night at Kuikka.



Brown bears at the "Paradise hide", Kuikka

Youtube links:

Wolverine

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y3d3XbFhLZ4>

Brown bear:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BhrZEljgi0Q>

Wolf:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FZjIM3fgRqs>

For booking the hides at Kuikka Base Camp contact:
Lassi Rautiainen – Wildlife Safaris Finland

www.Wildfinland.org

For booking the hides at Era Eero contact:

www.eraeero.com

Itinerary for Finland trip

3 August As we were late in leaving Helsinki , we drove 4 hours and spent the night in a roadside motel, which as far as I could see, was the only sign of human habitation for miles around.

4 August Arrived at Kuikka Base Camp after a 2 hour drive. Spent the night in “Paradise hide” which overlooks a boreal grassland fringed by pine and affords a wide scope of view. Visibility up to 500m. Wolves, bears and wolverine seen. If you only had one night, I would recommend staying at this hide.

5 August Spent the night in the “Lake hide” at Kuikka which overlooks a small pond surrounded by a small area of grassland and forest. Visibility up to 100m. Wolves, bears and wolverine seen at close range, including a swimming bear at least twice in the night.

6 August Night at the “Caravan hide” which is located in a woodland next to a rocky outcrop with visibility under 30 m. Superb 5 m encounter with wolverine at 10pm but then a quiet night.

7 August Evening in a small hide adjacent to the Paradise hide. Extremely close encounters with bears feeding 5-10 m away. We left the hide at 10.30pm and drove along the main access road looking for other wildlife that included mountain hare and moose.

8 August Two hour drive to Era Eero lodge. Night in the luxurious observation hide overlooking a lake and small clearing amongst the pine trees. Wolverine visited the area during the evening but compared to Kuikka it was a quiet night.

9 August Drive back to Helsinki and depart.

MAMMALS SEEN

1	Brown bear <i>Ursus arctos</i>	5-6 animals seen every night at Kuikka lodge all within very close proximity of the hides and often for periods of 30 minutes or longer.
2	Wolf <i>Canis lupus</i>	Two spectacular light grey animals seen on the first two nights.
3	Wolverine <i>Gulo gulo</i>	One animal seen on the first night at long range in the Paradise hide. Very close encounter at the Lake hide and the Caravan hide on the second and third night. Also seen at Era Eero lodge at the observation hide. Observed while feeding for roughly 15 minutes each time.
4	Red fox <i>Vulpes vulpes</i>	One animal seen at the Caravan hide at Kuikka
5	Bank Vole <i>Clethrionomys glareolus</i>	Several individuals near the lodge at Kuikka
6	Field vole <i>Microtus agrestis</i>	One animal seen near Kuikka lodge
7	Red squirrel <i>Sciurus vulgaris</i>	Seen near the bird feeder at the dining area at Kuikka.
8	Mountain hare <i>Lepus timidus</i>	Two animals seen at night on the road near Kuikka lodge
9	Elk (moose) <i>Alces alces</i>	One animal seen at night on the road near Kuikka lodge.

Wolf and bear at the "Lake hide", Kuikka.



