

Black Forest, Germany, January 15-21, 2023

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Black Forest (Schwarzwald) is a mountain range in SW Germany, separated by Rhine floodplain from France to the West and Switzerland to the South. The mountains are mostly covered with spruce and fir forests and plantations, with some larch higher up, beech at lower slopes, and extensive meadows along roads. The area has some boreal species such as capercaillie and boreal owl but is strangely missing others such as variable hare. The best sources of information about BF are *Bambi* by F. Salten and stories by brothers Grimm (mostly set here) plus 2012-13 [trip report](#) by Stephanie Lahaye.

My wife had a conference in Oberwolfach right in the center of BF, so I had to spend a week there. Both my kids were sick and I had the mother of all sinus infections, so I could spend only limited time exploring. The first two days had above-freezing temperatures with some rain, then it got colder and snowed, particularly at higher elevations where night temperatures dropped to -10°C. New moon was on January 19 but I still saw only one small nocturnal mammal.

Roads are rather busy except from 01:30 till 04:30. The most common mammals during night drives were **red fox** and **European hare**, seen about every two hours. **European mole** is incredibly abundant in meadows, but there was zero chance of seeing one on the surface in this kind of weather. Some molehills belonged to the fossorial ectomorph of **water vole**; one briefly showed up at dusk outside my hotel window (48.34966, 8.23705). **Wild boars** are common at lower elevations and often raid village lawns at night; I saw some in Schiltach (48.29462, 8.32941). Tracks of martens are common in forests; I saw **pine marten** twice (likely the same individual) along the access road (starting at 48.34505, 8.22999) while shuttling to and from the conference site. Snow-free fields had lots of grey herons hunting voles, particularly one at 48.28266, 8.20523 in Wolfach where I quickly thermal-scoped a **field vole** (shaggy-looking due to dark guard hairs) one morning. The entire BF has mostly similar habitats and an incredible number of great foot trails, so it's better to explore the area where you are staying rather than move around too much, but here are a few notable locations:

Nationalpark Schwarzwald ([visitor center](#) 48.56085, 8.22266) has a lot of trails through oldgrowth forests; one of the best is the trail to WilderZee (48.57051, 8.23980, trailhead 48.57344, 8.23622), a boggy glacial lake that had **ermine** tracks on the shore. That particular trail is officially closed in winter. The only mammal I saw in the park was a **red squirrel** but there was plenty of **fox**, **pine marten**, and **hare** tracks. Interestingly, the visitor center has photos of **forest dormice**, not occurring in this region according to IUCN and HMW range maps. **Lynxes** are recolonizing the area.

Schenkenburg (48.30158, 8.36582) is a ruined castle accessible by short climb; I saw a **wood mouse** and a **vole** burrow along the access trail. Would be a good place to walk around with a **bat** detector in summer.

Feldberg (1493 m; 47.87373, 8.00464) is the highest peak in BF; in summer it's an easy walk to the summit. There were **red deer** at 47.86215, 8.00708. Feldsee (47.87180, 8.03417), a nearby glacial lake, is worth checking for **weasels**. There is currently one **wolf** living in the area (and two more elsewhere in BF).

Obere Belchenhofe (47.81130, 7.82937) is a tiny village on the slopes of Mt. Belchen (1414 m), BF's third highest. It is reportedly easy to see **chamois** if you hike upslope from the village, but I was there on a very cold night, didn't have clothing and footwear for climbing through the snow, and couldn't see any animals with my thermal scope. I did, however, see a **chamois** upslope from 47.78189, 7.82498 in Kleine Wiese Canyon nearby.

Bat Cave (Fledermaushöhle, 47.82606, 7.94328; trailhead 47.82795, 7.94494) in Todtnau is an old mine tunnel, gated about 10 m from the entrance. It is very warm and wet and likely used mostly as summer roost. I could see one bat through the gate, tentatively identified as a **serotine** (mid-sized, brown, with dark face); it was not in torpor. Lots of **marten** tracks (possibly **stone marten** as the feet didn't seem to be particularly hairy, but I am not sure) along the trail.

Freiburger Rieselfeld (48.00831, 7.78178) and adjacent Opfinger See (48.00974, 7.76385), located in the far west of BF region, are popular among birders; lowland species such as **European hare** and **roe deer** are more common here.

Species list

1. Serotine	<i>Eptesicus serotinus serotinus</i>	1, Todtnau Bat Cave
2. Red fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes crucigera</i>	5, different locations
3. Pine marten	<i>Martes martes martes</i>	1-2, Oberwolfach
4. Wild boar	<i>Sus scrofa scrofa</i>	4, Schiltach
5. Roe deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus capreolus</i>	6, Freiburger Rieselfeld & Opfinger See
6. Red deer	<i>Cervus elaphus hippelaphus</i>	4, Feldberg
7. Northern chamois	<i>Rupicapra rupicapra rupicapra</i>	1, Kleine Wiese Canyon
8. Red squirrel	<i>Sciurus vulgaris varius</i>	1, Schwarzwald NP
9. Wood mouse	<i>Apodemus sylvaticus</i>	1, Schenkenburg
10. Water vole	<i>Arvicola amphibius "sherman"</i>	1, Oberwolfach
11. Field vole	<i>Microtus agrestis</i>	1, Wolfach
12. European hare	<i>Lepus europaeus europaeus</i>	9, different locations