

According to some of my friends and family, an American playing professional basketball and Polish wildlife filmmaker trolling around the woods looking for mammals sounds like a set-up to a joke. Others reading this would say it's commonplace for mammalwatching. I'm currently in my first year of playing in Europe and living in Toruń, Poland. In the fall and early winter, I had some fruitless day trips looking for mammals. Thanks to a helpful fan of our club, I got connected with Marcin Kostrzynski. Marcin lives in Toruń and is an expert on Polish wildlife. My brother affectionally called him Polish Steve Irwin at a celebratory dinner on our trip. We spent several days around Poland looking for mammals and I broke them down by date. His Instagram is @marcin\_z\_lasu\_ for those who may be interested.

#### Species List

- Fallow Deer
- Roe Deer
- Moose
- Wild Boar
- European Bison
- Red Deer
- European Beaver
- Eurasian Otter
- Red Fox

#### What we missed

- Wolf
- Eurasian Lynx
- European Badger



**January 15<sup>th</sup>**

On 1/15, Marcin and I drove about 30 minutes outside of Toruń to a beautiful area that was loaded with signs of mammals everywhere you looked. We found multiple sets of Wolf tracks and scat. This area in February is supposed to be a reliable spot to find wolves with relative ease compared to other times of the year. Tracks of large Moose and Red Deer were readily available although we didn't see any in our 3 hours in the area. However, we did see two male Fallow Deer and about 200 yards further up, we saw what appeared to be eight-ten female Fallow Deer. After this incredible sighting, we saw four Roe Deer as the sun was beginning to set. For our first time out and my lack of luck on my own, I was thrilled.



## January 19<sup>th</sup>

To follow up our first trip, Marcin and I spent the afternoon outside of Górzno looking for Moose and Wild Boar. Again, we found tons of wolf tracks that seemed relatively fresh, but still no wolves. While we followed a set of Red Deer tracks and walked two separate routes, I luckily was able to see a family of Wild Boar cross right in front of me and proceed to head off to a different area of the forest.



In the last hour, Marcin and I saw three different Moose, two of them being together. With being a mammalwatching rookie, I appreciate seeing any mammal and made my day off pretty exciting. In our first two times out, Marcin delivered.



**February 11<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup>**

Our schedule allowed us some time off from basketball, so Marcin and I planned to spend a couple days near Bialowieza looking for the local European Bison. My brother flew in from the U.S. and so he was there to partake in his first (maybe of many) mammalwatching experience. We met up with Marcin near our hotel in the early afternoon and he had a grin on his face. He told us to follow him, and he had a good idea on where to go. Within 20 minutes we had found a herd of European Bison that had close to 100 individuals. As we approached them, my brother laughed and said this seemed pretty easy.



We went to another location to try to find a bull that was closer to the Bialowieza forest and ended up seeing four beautiful Red Deer. They appeared unbothered by our presence and let us watch them before we continued our walk. Strong start to the trip.





### February 12<sup>th</sup>

Day 2 involved seeing another sprawling herd of European Bison and finding a lone bull a little while after. The people at our hotel told us we didn't have much of a chance to find any bison. At dinner that night at our hotel with Marcin, we enjoyed getting to brag on him to anyone that would listen about his knowledge and skill. I'd imagine they were pretty jealous.





**February 13th**

Without any snow on the ground, Marcin thought it would be improbable to find any Wolves or Eurasian Lynx that frequent the area, so we made an audible to look for Eurasian Otter, European Beaver, and Moose at Biebrza National Park a couple hours away. We went three for three on our search there and provided some extended time with a female moose and her growing calves. My brother spotted the first and by the time we got out of the car, we saw the other two just behind the mother.



Marcin had a general idea on where to look for the Eurasian Otter and European Beavers. We didn't get the greatest view of the beavers, but there was a group huddled up near the water that was enough to check the species off on my list.



Initially, we thought we had struck out on the otter and were about to call it a day. On our walk back to the car, we gave it one more look and we spotted a lifer. Thankfully the combination of my fist-pump, my brother teasing me, and us both laughing didn't immediately make the otter dive back into the water.





For anyone to learn more about the wildlife of Poland or looking to get any advice on where to look, Marcin is a great resource and person. Very grateful for him showing me some of the beauty of Poland.



\*Watch out for stepping in Bison sh\*t while keeping your head up looking for the actual bison\*

