

Trip report Poland

'Bieszczady Mountains in search of wolf & bear'

9 – 15 July 2020



Dear reader,

Since the outbreak of COVID19 all things changed. Due to all restrictions traveling was impossible. Since June things became a bit more open but a trip outside of Europe is still no option. This probably will be the situation for a while..

In Europe trip options were possible again so I started planning a nice tour here. At the moment wolves have my interest since we now have in the Netherlands our 'own wolves' slowly coming to us from East and South. They are not easy to spot though so I hoped for a place with a higher chance of seeing them. Lately I met 'Mark Kaptein' a Dutch mammal enthusiast while searching for wolves at 'the Veluwe' our largest forest. He told me he had some good success in Bieszczady mountains, Poland with finding wolf, bear and even lynx there. He said he just searched in the area at dusk and down from the main roads. Well this sounded to me like music in my ears and so next week I was on my way to Poland 😊

In 2015 I had been here also to try and see wolves but then from a hide (with no success). Knowing that summer probably wouldn't be the best season I still wanted to give it a try. At first I had the idea to fly to Krakow and take a rental car but in the end I decided it would be more safe to drive there myself and be free to go if COVID19 restrictions would get more strict again and just drive back. It is however a 15-16 hour drive...

Normally finding new wild cat species is my 'bucket list'. But for new cats I need to go outside of Europe and probably that won't be possible in 2020. The hope is for 2021 but even that will be uncertain... probably no sooner than a vaccine is available. But finding wolves and bears is just as good and getting some photos would be nice.

I hope you'll enjoy this report. Feel free to commend or ask questions!
At last always thanks again to www.mammelwatching.com for presenting such valuable trip reports.

Best regards,

Janco van Gelderen

Utrecht, Netherlands (Holland), Europe

info/contact:

e-mail: jancovg@hotmail.com

Facebook: Janco van Gelderen, Utrecht area, the Netherlands (feel free to connect!)

Instagram: Janco van Gelderen, Utrecht area, the Netherlands

internet: www.pbase.com/jancowildlifephotography > **facebook photo albums** are more up to date (see post from this tour)



General information

Preparation

The information of Mark was promising. I basically followed his instructions to drive around at dusk and dawn at night I spotlited mostly the same routes checking open field areas but also the forests. See the map to find yourself the best places and remember it is a large area so you have to choose since time of dusk is limited.

Sleeping/ Camping

I first wanted to look for a B&B but when I arrived in Cisna it seemed to be full of holiday tourists, mostly Polish people who seem to be fanatic hikers. I didn't see any other than Polish license plates, beside one of Ukrain. All parkings at the hotels were full and I soon skipped stopping to ask for a place and just tried a campsite. I found one a few km east of Wetlina: 'camping Wetlina'. It had a friendly host and was cheap. Bathrooms and warm showers were good. Only problem is a low cell phone range here. You can get food in the reception and also they have tickets and maps of the area. For a day hike you need a permit (2 euro). Another good thing was they didn't bother me going in and out by car at night, which is usually not allowed on campsite in Europe.

Border area to Ukrain

You are in the border area between Poland and Ukrain and Poland - Slovakia so there is a lot of 'EU-border' patrol. Mark told me that he was checked several times when he was there while driving around. And yes, they will check you! Mostly it was ok and you just only have to show your passport and car papers. The first time I did feel some tension.. how will they respond? But during other checks I just told I was in the area to watch wildlife and I stayed in the campsite Wetlina. Usually there were quite relaxed. The people from the border patrol seemed not to be surprised by seeing wolves. Some told they saw it lately themselves or they saw a bear. The officers are all in different cars and shifts so you probably will have to explain what you are doing everytime again. Beside that I think they also just find it very interesting to check a 'foreign car'. One officer said after giving back my documents: 'So, you have been in many countries', because of all the stamps in my passport.

Spotliting

I spotlited mostly one hour after dark and tried to avoid places with buildings. The border patrol saw me doing it a few times but they did not say anything about it (to my surprise). I still would suggest not to do it in front of them. Fog and rain spoiled it some nights. Being able to do spotliting in Europe is quite good!

Money

You can pay in Euro or Zloty but your change will be in Zloty. Price level is quite ok. Camping was 10 euros a night and 'a coke' from the fuel station is around 1-1,50 euro. Restaurants are also quite nice and for around 20 euro you can have a three course meal with a drink. I don't know how busy it will be off season in better wildlife watching periods though.

Roads/Safety

Roads are good. In Cisna is a fuel station. There are also a lot of 'forest roads' which are mostly closed and forbidden to enter by signs for cars. If you go to the forest department in Cisna or Baligrod you probably can get a permit to drive these roads. I got a permit in Cisna at the forest department, open weekdays 7-15. I only drove one night such a road but I did not see much beside 1 red deer and a hare. I guess if you want to try for lynx these roads might be better. The forest area is divided into 'districts' and the part I was interested in was not 'Cisna zone'. So you have to do some research to find your area and office if you have a special interest in this.

Daily schedule

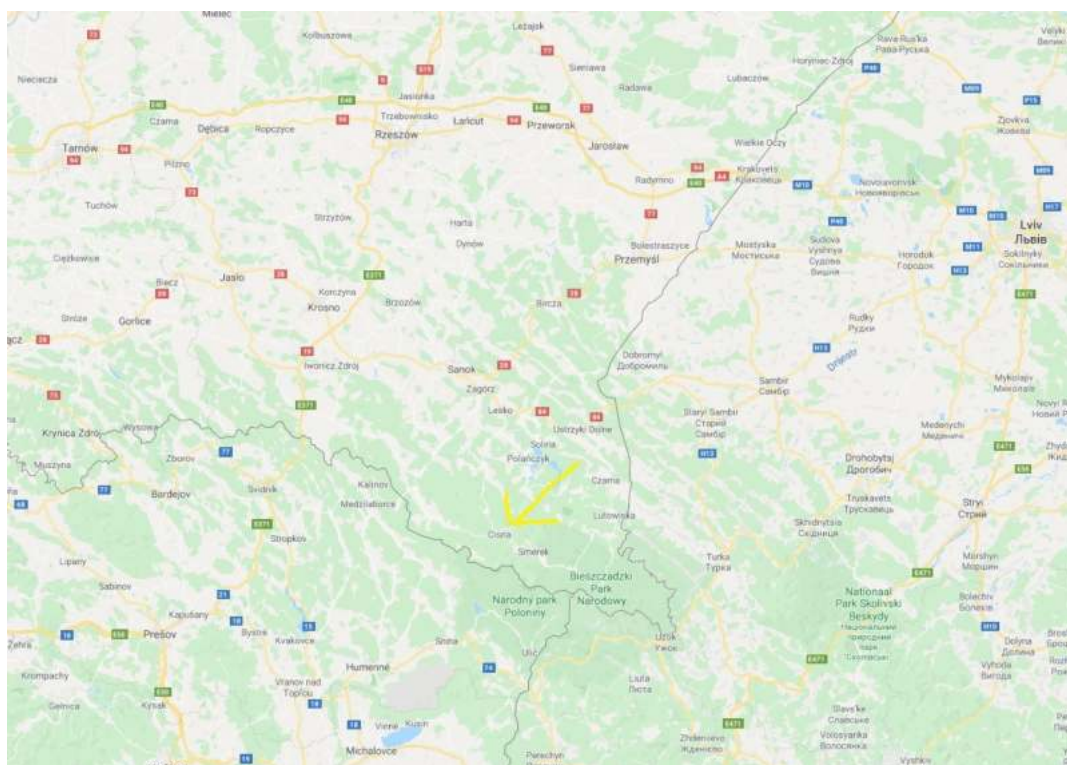
Nights are rather short in July getting dark between 21.00-21.30 and light around 04.00 in the morning. I decided to change my rhythm to the night and slept during the day. I choose the roads I wanted to try for wolves and mostly tried the road going west of Cisna to 'Wola Michowa'. A police officer told me the area just north-west of Baligrod from 'Michaw' to 'Kalnica' was also good. Here I tried one morning but with no luck. The area around the San river where a road goes west of 'Procisne' is also good. In summer the vegetation is rather high. Also distances between the good stretches are quite far so you have to make choices where to spend the time of dusk. I guess in early spring or winter the view is more open. Further I suggest to have a look on the map yourself to try which areas are good. Drive around in daytime will help also. I think there are multiple good spots to look for wildlife in a wider area.

Weather

One night heavy rain spoiled spotliting. Two other nights there was fog over the open fields also spoiling good spotliting. On the other hand the mornings with some fog were far better for seeing deer. Also the animals 'stay out' longer time. Funny thing was that I saw my first wolf in the rainy night in very first light.

I also made a day hike from the campsite up to the open mountain ridge on a nice sunny day. It takes around 1,5-2 hours to get to the ridge and you get to see some nice views here. I think it is possible to scope the area from here looking for wildlife.

Maps of the area (google) with 'Cisna' marked and 'Wetlina'.



TRIPLIST MAMMALS

Red deer – 42 animals seen in total and usually very skittish. Seen mostly in earliest part of the morning or at night. A very good sighting of a hind with her calf during the day hike at the mountain ridge and a young stag in one of the lower meadows.

Roe deer – 20 in total, I was surprised that they are not so commonly seen. Mostly at night or early morning and also very skittish.

Red fox - 35 animals seen, of which 2 in daytime. Mostly in the roadside some in the fields. Mostly skittish but not all.

Brown bear – a female with 2 cubs at night in a small side track just half a km up the road next to the San River of 'Procisne'. I hit some 'strange eyes', two lower pairs and one pair higher. The weird movement made me think it was something special 'a bear' in full spotlight I could see them walking away. Another one crossed the road at night somewhere around 'Smerek'. This was only very brief since the bear was running rather quick.

Wolf – 2 animals seen. One for only a few seconds jumping from the road and looking at me for 2 seconds. Another one in a meadow for about a minute. When it walked away I tried to follow it by driving backwards but that was a wrong decision, it then stopped and ran off in the forest away from me....

Hare – 8 seen in total, mostly running on the road at night and some in the fields.

Stoat – 1 animal crossing the road in the late morning.

Pine marten – 2 animals on different nights crossing the road. One near the campsite and one west of Cisna.

Headhog – 2 animals seen both crossing the road at night. Stopped for one to take a photo.

Rat – 1 animal crossing the road in the grassfields. It was quite a big size, around 15-20 cm body length.

Shrew – 1 animal was hunted by a feral cat in front of the car at night. The cat played with it for a while and then took it in the bush. Amazing to see how small a shrew is, only 3-4 cm long.

Moose – 2 animals in the roadside from the highway on my drive home. Seen west of 'Katowice' in dusk. Wasn't expecting to add this one to the triplist, nice surprise 😊

Stuff I missed:

European Bison, I tried a few evenings watching in a forest edge walking a side road of Wola Michowa. Only saw red deer and a roe deer. I had seen them in my previous visit so was not really focussed on them.

Lynx, I didn't spotlight much in the forest and I think that is better for lynx, this is also a hard one to find of course.

Wild boar, I don't know if there are many wild boar but I didn't see any.

Badger, I think they are around but just didn't see one.

Wild cat, They are there but the grass was quite high. Every eyeshine I got were when checked better fox.

Interesting birds:

Ural Owl

Lesser spotted eagle



Bieszczady views



San River



Sunset view from the mountain ridge



Red deer and calf in the meadow on the ridge from the Wetlina walking track



Rather exceptional photo opportunity of red deer for me



A roe deer at night



A young red fox



Brown bear and 2 cubs (left)



See the 'golden' patch on the bears neck



Wolf in very low light hence the rather grainy quality, but it was a wolf 😊



red deer stags on the run



European goldfinch



White stork



Probably lesser spotted eagle (above and under) (anyway a type of eagle...)





Ural Owl



Red deer



Red deer from the walking track in the afternoon





Beautiful sunrise morning view at Ukrain border



Evening sunset at the plateau ridge from the Wetlina walking track



Daytime sighting of a red fox



Another one from the wolf



hedgehog