

Trip report USA

Part I: A quest for Canadian lynx in Minnesota

&

Part II: a road trip to Yellowstone

21 feb – 8 march 2022



Dear reader,

September 2021 I planned together with Andreas Jonsson (Sweden) a visit to Minnesota, USA to search for the Canadian lynx. Another cat we both would really like to see in the wild. We did earlier two succesful trips to China (2017) and Bolivia (2019) and this would be our third quest for a new cat species. My English friend Stuart Hill initially also planned to join us this trip, but he had to cancel.

We hoped to do this tour already in 2021 but as everybody else we had to wait for the pandemic to be over... Around september / october 2021 we decided to book flights for february-march 2022. Hoping that by than all (travel) restrictions would be released. Well in a way they were, just in time.

USA got 'green' on the Dutch 'Covid country travel map' only in the last week before departure. For Andreas it was a bit more relaxed since Sweden already had released restriction. So we both presented our vaccination and a negative test and we were on our way 😊.

The trip reports on www.mammalwatching.com were quit promising and Minnesota seems the place to be to try for this cat. Although reading a bit better in the reports it seemed not to be an easy pick-up...

Both our main goal is focussing on finding all worlds wild cats and the Canadian Lynx was the next one we both hoped to add to our list. Offcourse some photo proof would be best, but seeing one comes first. Beside seeing the cat we also wanted to fill-up a nice list of mammals for this trip report.

After the first week together looking for the lynx, I had another week to spend for myself with a roadtrip to some other parts of the USA. I will split therefore this report in two parts: first part 'the Canadian Lynx quest', second part 'my roadtrip to Yellowstone and some other parks'. The report is written by me, Janco, but 'the Canadian lynx part' you can read as if it is a report of both me and Andreas. I will write about daily activities and most interesting sightings. In the final '*triplist*' all the mammals seen are mentioned and where.

Spoiler alert: the Lynx part was intens and nerf-racking, a trip to remember!

I hope you'll enjoy this report, feel free to commend or ask questions!

As always thanks again to www.mammalwatching.com for presenting the trip reports for inspiring for new trips.

Best regards,

Janco van Gelderen

Utrecht, Netherlands (Holland), Europe

info/contact:

e-mail: [jancovg\(at\)hotmail.com](mailto: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** & **instagram** are more up to date > USA will follow soon.

General information part I: Canadian lynx @ Gunflint Trail

Transport and overnight

We both had the direct flight from Amsterdam to Minneapolis and Andreas booked a rental car via Avis (small SUV > Kia Sorento) for a week. We stayed our first night near the airport. From Minneapolis it is about a 5 hour drive to Grand Marais. The day we left there was a snowstorm warning and it took us a few hours more... We were happy we could make it, with not too much delay.

We booked a few nights in the 'Aspen lodge' in Grand Marais. We wanted to be a bit flexible and would decide if we would stay longer or not depending on how lucky we would be with the lynx. So we didn't have a fixed plan. This was a bit a mistake since we didn't see the lynx soon and then we heard that the lodge was already fully booked for the coming weekend, it is quite a popular touristic area. So we had to arrange another place and that was a bit of a hassle. We went to the visitor info and asked for other places, a friendly lady helped us out by contacting other hotels for availability of rooms. She also told us some very good information of which other roads to drive to look for lynx. At the end of the day we were lucky with a cancellation in the Aspen Lodge and we do could stay there for the rest of the week. The Aspen Lodge is comfortable and fairly priced. With shops, restaurants and gas stations around it is a good basecamp for exploring the 'Gunflint trail'. The trail starts just less than one mile from the hotel. Do realise that the drive up to the end of the Gunflint trail takes around one and a half to two hours driving depending on road conditions.

Money

We both used creditcards and ATM. Gas prices were for European standards rather cheap, but for locals it seemed to be very high. On every radio station we listened the talk was about 'high Gas prices'.

Roads/Safety

Roads were good and quickly 'plowed' when it snowed. We had not too much problems with the snowy conditions. Do remember that you have to drive carefully all the time on ice roads. Even for being winter it seemed to be pretty cold. We had -40F/C in the late night early morning... There are only a few roads to drive so navigation is quite easy.

Daily schedule

Driving up and down the Gunflint trail was more or less our daily activity, from 1-2 hours before sunrise until 2-3 hours after sunset. Usually we had a sort of mid-day relax. This seemed not to be the best idea in the end since a lynx family was seen at that lunch time... We also explored some of the other routes where we drove north to Grand Portage and south to the 'Kariboo-' and 'Sawbill/Grade tracks' (see second map).

Weather

We had everything from windy and snow, to sunshine. Temperatures were mostly cold and (far) below zero Celsius. We heard this winter had the highest amount of snow in 25 years, about 1 meter of snow.



Lake Superior view on a sunny day

Map 1: Route of the two trips, places visited marked (google maps)



Map 2 Grand Marais & Gunflint trail

We also drove the blue parts (Sawbill- and Kariboo track and route to Grand Portage).
From: 'Official Minnesota state Highway Map' (free at airport).

Gunflint trail

We started in Minneapolis early morning with a 'snowstorm warning'.... We decided to give it a try anyway and drove of to Grand Marais. Lots of snow and bad visability made we didn't see a sinlge mammal on our way. We had a short stop at Tettegouche State park where there was a short walk to some very spectacular views. Everywhere there was a think layer of ice on the rock cliffs. We continued an arrived in Grand Marais in the early afternoon and checked in the Aspen Lodge. By than luckily the snowing stopped and the strong winds layed down. So we decided to directly give it a try to check for some wildlife. We drove north in direction of Grand Portage. On the way we spotted our first **white-tailed deers** on the car porch of a house. Deer seem to hang out in the gardens mainly because of protection for wolves. They also tend to stay close to the lake since the snow deck is here less deep than inland. There are spread out many houses along the coast with big lots and forest around. We did not see any deer further than half a mile driving inland from the lake. Looking for *white-tailed deer* is best along the coastal road just north and south of Grand Marais.

In the afternoon we decided to drive up Gunflint trail. Road conditions seemed ok and we just couldn't wait. We experienced how difficult spotting wildlife is... We only spotted **2 moose** in last light after 2 hours driving up the track not seeing anything else. On the way back in dark we spotlited a bit. We were thrilled seeing half way fresh tracks of *lynx* in the roadside. The tracks were on and of on both sides of the road, so it was clearly marking or hunting. We tried to pinpoint driving up and down where it was heading and hoped for it to come back to the road. But it was quit busy with traffic and it didn't come back to the road. It seemed to be the end of 'a holiday weekend' so that was why there were so many cars on the trail. We felt comfortable knowing lynx were around. Sadly the next days we drove the track up and down many times but couldn't find any new tracks. Only before day 4 and 5 was that we found some new fresh tracks. To our surprise these both were from the middle part of the day... Just the time we had a sort of break and were not looking on the track... We more or less had the same schedule of driving up gunflint in dark and sunrise would be somewhere half way up. End of the morning we had stops at the Gunflint Lodge to look for birds and **red squirrels** at the feeders. We usually than drove back to Grand Marais for lunch and gas. In the afternoon we drove up again and returned well after dark. Over the days we managed to see in daylight **1 red fox, 1 American marten** and **two red squirrels** (besides the ones at the feeders of the lodge). We further saw in dark **3 snowshoe hare, 2 red fox, and 2 times moose**.

Over the days we tried also some other routes: we drove to the Canadian border and only saw **white-tailed deer**. We drove '*Devils track road*' and '*the Grade*' and also '*Kariboo-*' and '*Sawbill track*'. These tracks start south of Grand Marais in *Lutsen* and *Tofte*. Although the routes are nice and quit we only saw one mammal but a good one: a **wolf** ran in front of the car on Devil's track tracks at night. So conclusion is that it is hard to see things here. Andreas also had a nice brief view of a **wolf** in roadside just before the Cascade river State park. Unlucky when we turned to look for it again but it was gone. When we drove on we could see it's tracks followed the roadside for miles, so we were just a bit too late otherwise we could have seen it well in the open.

In total we searched some 72 hours, so we had lots of time to talk about everything (movies, old trips and planning other trips). On day 6 we decided to go for a visit to *Sax Zim bog*. This area is know for it's *owls* but also *wolf* and *bobcat* are possible here. It is a 3-4 hour drive up there and probably better to plan in the end or beginning of your trip. We didn't see the owls. We heared that just in the days before two (bold) owls were hit by a train. A birder told us that at the visitor information centre a **porcupine** was seen in some certain pine trees. So we gave it a try and indeed it was still eating bark in the same tree. We had a late lunch in a restaurant along the highway when we got a message from Chris Townend that he just had seen the Canadian lynx on the Gunflint trail... auch! That obviously was a quit a shock we missed it...

On the other hand it also gave some energy to keep trying... We knew we had only one full day left so we would try even harder that day. But even the last day it was quiet as ever... until the very last evening. We were again at the last stretch of 10 miles of the Gunflint-trail and talking about how tough this tour had been sofar with so little mammal sightings. We were talking about waht tour options would be next when suddenly in the headlights a grey animal walked left in the roadside. As we slowed down we could perfectly see the high hind legs and the large head with the eartuffs, we had a very brief eye to eye contact before the **Canadian lynx** crossed behind our car into the forest. We finally got to see a Canadian Lynx, what a relief!!!

We checked the stretch a few times but the cat didn't come back to the road. We could see that the cat had walked a mile along the road and at a certain point it was even clear that there were even *two lynx* that had walked some parts together.

In the end we didn't get the photo we hoped for, but we were very happy we finally did see a Canadian lynx after all these hours of driving in a winter wonderland. We again had another succesfull trip and a new cat on our list.

Note: the week after our tour Charles Foley and his daughter had some excellent sighting of a lynx in the same area we searched for. So we were eather a bit unlucky or Charles was extremely lucky. I guess he focussed in the best area the last stretch of Gunflint. But even than you have to be in the right spot at the right time.

Part II: Yellowstone & some other parks

Transport and overnight

I booked another rental car for myself at the airport and picked it up when we dropped the first car. It was a nice small SUV (Acura). I didn't plan any overnight and just looked for a place to stay on the way. Almost every exit from the interstate highway has 'food' and 'lodging'. So I was not worried not to find a place to stay. In a warmer season I would go camping but now I stayed in motels.

Route

I more or less mostly drove the interstate 94 (West) and the 90 (East) which was comfortable and easy.

Daily schedule

I planned to drive a northern route West to Yellowstone and bring a short visit to Theodore Roosevelt National Park on the way. After a couple of days in YS I would drive the southern route back to Minneapolis and catch up some other interesting parks on the way.

Weather

The weather was warmer than in Minnesota, most days were dry and even sometimes sunny.

Trip experiences

Drive to Fargo – visit Theodore Roosevelt National Park - drive to Livingston 50 miles north of Yellowstone

After I dropped off Andreas at his hotel for his flight home I drove further in direction to Yellowstone knowing it would be a huge drive of some 1000 miles... It was the end of the afternoon and in dusk I saw some **white-tailed deer** and **2 red foxes** in the fields and forest edges on the way to Fargo. I overnighted just west of Fargo in an 'Econolodge'. Next morning it was pretty cold, cloudy and misty with time to time a bit of ice-rain. I drove some 4 hours to Theodore Roosevelt National Park which borders directly to the Interstate. In the park there was no snow cover, only some ice on the river. The weather improved a bit, it was dry although still a bit misty. The views were not that clear because of the low clouds. I was more or less the only visitor in the park so I had a whole National park for myself 😊 Driving down 'the loop' I spotted a few **bull Elk**, **4 mule deer**, only a some **black-tail prairiedogs** were out their burrow in 'the prairiedog town'. I also find a herd of **American bison** and further some more. Also the *feral* horses where active. The scenic views in the park are great but the misty conditions were a bit a bummer. After spending some 3 hours in the park I continued my long drive to Livingston where I arrived around 22.00. Livingston is some 50 miles north of the Yellowstone Gardiner entrance. I decided to use this as my 'basecamp' for the next days.

Yellowstone

Early morning I drove to the park but I was a bit late so it was already light, however it was still early (7.00). On the way to the park you pass through 'the paradise valley'. Which has very scenic mountain views. I saw large groups of **elk** (hinds) and some **white-tailed deer** in the farmfields on the way. Just after the Yellowstone park entrance I saw a few **pronghorn**. A bit further inside the park you pass a sort of narrow canyon along a river. At the end of the canyon some people with big cameras walked in the roadside and I asked what they were looking for. They told me they had seen wolves! So I quickly tried to find a parking spot. In the park you have to park 'over the white line' otherwise you get a ticket from the park rangers. Specially if there is seen something nice the scarce parking spots are quickly taken. But there were not yet that many visitors in the park so I managed to find a spot and could also try and look for the wolves. It seemed to be the wolves of the 'Wapiti pack'. The pack was split along both sides of the road and the river nextby. **9 wolves** were sleeping up a hill a few hundred metres away and some **5 wolves** were a bit more distant on the slopes of the other riverside. The wolves where howling to eachother and after an hour all of the wolves slowly started to move in direction of the river valley. Some of the wolves from the other side crossed the river to join the 9.

A single wolf suddenly ran down the hill rather close to where I was standing next to a ranger. It happened rather quickly but I could take some close-up photos. Since park rangers control where the public must stand to watch wildlife you mostly keep a certain distance (100 metres). By than all the wolves got together and held a sort of a playfull meet and greet together, **14 wolves!** After there show they decided to give it a go and all of them walked up the higher slopes and out of sight. Well this was a great start of my visit to Yellowstone 😊

My intention was to look here for wolves, and this was a rewarding welcome and completely different from the

'tougher times in Grand Marais'. The rest of the day I explored the other parts of the park like Lamar Valley. On the way at the pertified tree parking people watched at a bear den which was clearly visible since snow had melted away. You actually could see the (brown) **black bear** in the opening of the den. It was a mother with 2 cubs. I only got to see the back of the mother.

Further that day I saw some **mule deer**, lots of **bison**, some **elk** (they are far more common outside the park) and one **coyote**. In the late afternoon on my way back I checked an area left of the river just outside Gardiner Entrance (follow the old 'arch'). Somebody had told me that often bighorn sheep and pronghorn were seen in this area. After some searching I found both a herd of female **bighorn sheep** and some **pronghorn**, also a **rabbit** crossed the road into some bushes. I couldn't make out what sort it was.

I went back to the first large parking just inside the park wehre the '**Wapiti wolf pack**' still was visible but now only by scope now very high up the hill at least some miles away. Many people were watching and to our surprise on the other valley side another pack the '**8 mile pack**' was also seen! Some 8-10 wolves laid here together on a high slope. This seemed to be a pretty rare sight to see two wolf packs in one wide view so relatively close to each other. It was almost sunset and that ended a very good first day in Yellowstone 😊

Next morning no wolves were seen in the first part, so I drove further in the park. Half way to 'Tower station' a group of people spotted **8 wolves** of the 'rescue pack'. They were rather far away about 1,5 mile, 'typically a more regular Yellowstone wolf sighting'. The wolves walked out of sight behind a ridge. So it was only a few minutes sighting. The rest of the day I wanted to find *moose* and other wildlife. But at the end of the Lamar valley another wolf pack '**junction pack**' was seen. The wolves where very high on a mountain ridge. Some **6 wolves** had eaten from probably a bighorn sheep carcass high up the hill. The wolfs were walking down moved in a open part of the forest but soon got into more thick pine forest. I than decided to bring a visit to the Mammoth Hotsprings for a break in the day. In the afternoon I drove back to Lamar where by now **3 wolves** of the junction pack had crossed the road and wandered in the flat area of the Lamar river. But it seemed they wanted to return to the rest of the pack that was still in the forest. One by one they crossed the road in some distance while rangers controlled the public. So again a good 'wolf' day seeing two different wolf packs.

My final day in Yellowstone. This morning at the same area of the first day again **wolves** were seen. This time on the other hillside. **8 wolves** were hanging out on a slope some 200 meter above the river. The wolves had made an elk kill in the river. All had probably eaten well and were sleeping. After a while one by one the wolves walked down the hill to eat some time from the carcass and than walking up again to sleep. I watcht at least 3 single wolves having their diner this way. I wanted to have a last further look in the park and would come back later. I wanted to try the *Moose* that I still had not seen here. But before I got in the willow area at the end of Lamar valley somewhere halfway I stopped at a parking where some people looked with scopes. They told me they saw a *puma*! I was very far away on a steep rocky and forested mountainridge. I could have a brief look through one of their scope and yes I saw a **puma** jumping from a rock! The people with the scopes left the place to somewhere else but I wanted to try to see it again. Than a friendly man I had seen the day before at the wolves sighting stopped also at the parking and he had a scope. I pointed him the area where to look and while he was searching scanning he said 'oh yes I see it!'. He said I see two, no three pumas! It was a mother with two subadult cubs. I also had some short looks through his scope, what a nice clear view. I tried to take some 'proof shots' knowing it was pretty far for any good photos. The puma disappeared and we couldn't find them anymore. So after this exciting bonus I drove further on to the willow stretch in the Lamar valley where I finally spotted **3 moose**, they even can hide quit well in the relatively short willows.

I also saw 3 male **bighorn sheep** that were grazing on a hillside, nice to see the impressive horns. I drove back to the wolf kill and waited here the rest of the afternoon. Another **2 wolves** took a bite from the carcass. Having had another very good day in Yellowstone I was ready for my long drive back to Minneapolis.

Devils Tower & Mount Rushmore

I drove the southern route and visited *Devils Tower* and *Mount Rushmore* for the scenic views. Devils Tower is a weird big rock with some forest around. Her I saw **black-tail Prairiedog** in the pairiedog town and some **white-tailed deer** that are also common here. I walked the track around the 'Tower' and saw one **red squirel**. In the afternoon I continued my drive to Mount Rushmore. This is a spectacular sight! You can only have one look, but it is pretty bizar how these faces were carved in the mountain. From here you also have a very nice view over the great plains that are down in the east. I drove on to Badlands NP where I overnighed in Walldrug.

Day 7 Badlands National Park & drive to Minneapolis

Next early morning I drove to Badlands and enjoyed the beautiful scenery at sunrise. I stopped at most viewpoints. In the park I saw a few **bighorn sheep** and some **mule deer**. Also I saw two **mountain cottontail** next to the short wooden trails to a viewpoint (they had their burrow under the wood). I also visited the **prairiedog** town in the western part of the park and saw here a few **American bison**. Around lunchtime I started my drive back to Minneapolis. I overnight in a place some 45 minutes drive from the airport and had my flight home next day.

TRIPLIST MAMMALS (21 mammals trip total)

Part one: Gunflint trail

- 1) **White-tailed deer** – seen mostly along the coastal route, check both sides of the road.
- 2) **Red fox** – 3 animals seen on Gunflint trail and one in a field on the way back close to Minneapolis.
- 3) **Snowshoe hare** – 3 animals at night crossing Gunflint trail and one daylight sighting in Sax-Zim-bog.
- 4) **Gray Wolf** - 2, first animal along the coastal roadside close to Lutsen, only seen by Andreas. Second seen by both of us at night running in front of the car on 'Devils track road'.
- 5) **Moose** – 6 seen in total, 3 in dusk and 3 at night all on Gunflint trail.
- 6) **American marten** – 1 animal at the end of Gunflint trail
- 7) **American Porcupine** – 1 animal feeding in a tree at the end of the walking track at the Sax Zim bog visitor information centre.
- 8) **American Beaver** – 1 animal 'on the beach' of Tettegouche State Park.
- 9) **American Red squirrel** – several animals seen at the feeders of Gunflint lodge, 2 along the Gunflint trail and another 2 seen at Tettegouche state park.
- 10) **Canadian lynx** – 1 animal on our very last night at around 7pm, left in the roadside on last stretch of Gunflint trail.
- 11) **(black phase) Eastern Gray squirrel** – 1 animal in the roadside of the highway driving back to Minneapolis

Stuff we missed:

- *Flying squirrel* We looked for them in the evening on most nights at the feeders of Gunflint lodge but never saw one.
- *Bobcat* could be possible also at Sax-Zimbog but seems difficult like most other animals.

Interesting birds:

- *Pine Grosbeak, Blue jay, Several species of Woodpeckers, Bald Eagle, Grouse, Siberian tit*

Part two: Yellowstone and other parks

- a. **White-tailed deer** – seen quit common in forested areas in farm fields and close to rivers, also seen at Devils Tower and road to Yellowstone.
- b. **Red fox** – 4 in roadsides and fields.
- c. **Black-tailed Jackrabbit** – one just outside Badlands NP crossing road at night.
- d. **Gray Wolf** - 4 different packs seen in Yellowstone. Wapiti-pack (14 animals), 8 Mile-pack (8), Junction-pack (8) and Rescue-pack (6).
- e. **Moose** – 3 animals seen in the willows close to north east entrance of Yellowstone.
- f. **American Bison** – Seen in Theodore Roosevelt NP, Yellowstone NP and in Badlands NP.
- g. **Wapiti/Elk** – 4 bulls in Theodore Roosevelt NP and lots seen in and outside Yellowstone.
- h. **Mule deer** – 4 in Theodore Roosevelt NP and 6 in Yellowstone NP and 8 in Badlands NP.
- i. **Black-tailed prairie dog** – Seen in the prairiedog 'towns' of Theodore Roosevelt NP, Devils Tower and Badlands NP.
- j. **Mountain cottontail** – two seen in Badlands NP along trail (and an unidentified rabbit in Yellowstone)
- k. **Pronghorn** – two groups seen from highway and small groups seen in and outside Yellowstone
- l. **Bighorn sheep** – a herd of females outside yellowstone, a group of males just inside Yellowstone and 3 males end of Lamar valley.
- m. **Puma** – distant view of a mother and two adult cubs in Yellowstone.
- n. **Common Raccoon** – 1 animal in roadside at night just before Minneapolis.
- o. **Coyote** – 4 seen in Yellowstone and a few in fields aside from the highway.
- p. **Black bear** – a mother bear with at least one cub in her den at petrified forest in Yellowstone.

Stuff I missed:

- *River otter* - looked for them at the rivers in Yellowstone but not seen.
- *American Badger* - with some luck could have been possible.
- *Black footed ferret* - nocturnal, didn't spotlight in Badlands.
- *Bobcat* – with some luck

Part one: Gunflint trail



White-tailed deer around Grand Marais





Moose seen a few times on along the Gunflint trail





American Red Squirrel at the feeders of Gunflint lodge & the only red fox in daylight on Gunflint trail





Red fox (night) & American Marten both along Gunflint trail





White-tailed deer in forest and on the lake shore around Grand Marais





American Beaver at the beach of Tettegouche State Park & American Porcupine at Sax Zim bog



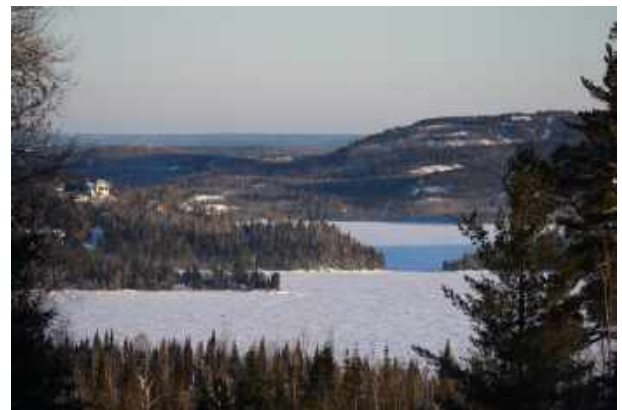


Snowshoe hare with somebodies head in front... (Sax Zim bog) & Bald eagle lake superior





Lake superior coast in stormy and sunny weather, the Gunflint trail and Gunflint overlook
Andreas (l) and me (r) after our Canadian lynx sighting
Canadian Lynx tracks of mother and cubs, tracks of our lynx & freezing temperatures as low as -40F = -40C!



Part two: Yellowstone and some other parks



American Bison & feral horses in Theodore Roosevelt NP, above Wind Canyon view





Mule deer in Theodore Roosevelt NP



T:

Bull elk in Theodore Roosevelt NP





Black-tail prairiedog in Theodore Roosevelt NP

Yellowstone: North entrance valley, central view and Lamar valley view





The 'Wapiti' wolf pack





Wapiti wolf pack 14 wolves together in one frame (under)





Lucky close-up of a wolf crossing the road to join the others





Wolves going to eat from the carcass in the river



Wolf eating from the carcass





Young Pronghorn outside Yellowstone





Bighorn sheep outside Yellowstone





Black bear in it's den seen from the parking of the petrified tree





Bighorn in Lamar valley





Elk in roadside outside Yellowstone (be carefull driving here!)



Elk in Yellowstone



Coyote in Lamar Valley





American Bison common sight in Yellowstone





Wolf from the junction Pack in Lamar going to cross the road



Moose in the willows at the end of Lamar valley



Pumas in Yellowstone (mother and two sub adult cubs) & mule deer in Yellowstone





Devils Tower NM, Mount Rushmore NM & Badlands National Park





American Bison & black-tail prairiedog in Badlands NP





Bighorn sheep and Mountain Cotton tail in Badlands NP

