

Trip report Finland

Probably the world's best place for bear, wolf & wolverine: 'No man's land'.

4 – 11 July 2021



Dear reader,

June 2021 the COVID19 restrictions in the Netherlands started to get a bit more open. So I started again to check for a trip to Finland as I already had this plan for the summer of 2020 (which was impossible... 😞).

The Finland trip reports on www.mammalwatching.com were quit promising. Reports from visits to the hides in the Kuhmo area of *Lassi* and *Sami Rautiainen* seemed to be one of the best places for this.

I contacted again Lassi Rautiainen from [Wildlife Safaris Finland \(wildfinland.org\)](http://Wildlife Safaris Finland (wildfinland.org)) for availability begin of july. Since I got my full COVID-vaccination in june and with Holland quickly out of Euro2020 I was free to go and try find bears & wolves and who knows a wolverine... according to the tripreports Finland seemed the place to be 😊

Normally my main goal is focussing on finding all worlds wild cats, but this goal is on hold because travelling outside Europe is not allowed and my targets left are not to be find in Europe... Well hopefully next year another chance for that. But I am also a fan of other carnivores with wolves among them my favorite. Last winter and spring I spend a lot of time searching for them in the Dutch forests where we now have our own 'Dutch wolf pack'.

I have had the luck to see one, but good or close sightings are scarce and chances for good photos even more difficult... So after all 'Coronatime' I wanted to go to a place where there would be a 'rather high chance' of seeing wolves and with the possibility to get hopefully good photos.

Lassi told me there would be a spot in a hide for me first week of july. He also said sightings were good at that time with wolves, bears & wolverine 'almost every night'!

Well, that was quit a teaser... 😊

Since it was a sort of mammaltrip I also wanted to try some of the other wildlife Finland has to offer. So I added some spots in the week roundtrip. One interesting animal was the famous endemic 'Saima seal' herefore I went to *Linnansaari National Park* on my way back to Helsinki.

Well it became a spectacular trip to remember...!

Oh '**Spoiler alert**'... if you don't want to see what the hide views and sightings are like I would recommend you only to read the text and skip the photos (which are in the end pages). I can imagine that you might want to have a sort of surprise feeling (At least I did a bit).

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

At last always thanks again to www.mammalwatching.com for presenting such valuable trip reports.

Best regards,

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General information

Transport and overnight

I booked my flight from Amsterdam to Helsinki and a rental car for a week. I brought a small tent and planned to camp during my stay in Finland. All worked out pretty well. It is about a 10 hour drive up north if you stop here and there for shopping food/drinks and watch for scenery and birds. I camped in the 'Kuikka basecamp' and on regular campsites which you'll find on your way. I also visited some other highlights of the country that fit in my one week route.

Money

It is all euro in Finland. I paid the hides in cash, so bring enough, especially if you want to extend (which might be possible, it is addicting 😊). Prices in supermarkets were same like in the Netherlands maybe a bit more expensive. Restaurants are slightly more expensive.

Roads/Safety

Roads are good and mostly rather empty with many 'speedcameras' (which are clearly visible). To the base camp and the hides leads a gravel road of good quality. Watch for your orientation one can easily get lost since scenery and side roads all look more or less the same (but if you go for a second night it is rather easy to find).

Daily schedule

Nights half way Finland are more or less only dusk this time of year. So you can stay awake all night, birds get quiet and when cloudy it will be rather dusky. I decided to change my rythem for the hides into the night and slept mostly during the day in my tent. Musquitos are annoying during dusk but hides are musquitofree (if you have a check and don't leave 'the camera openings' open).

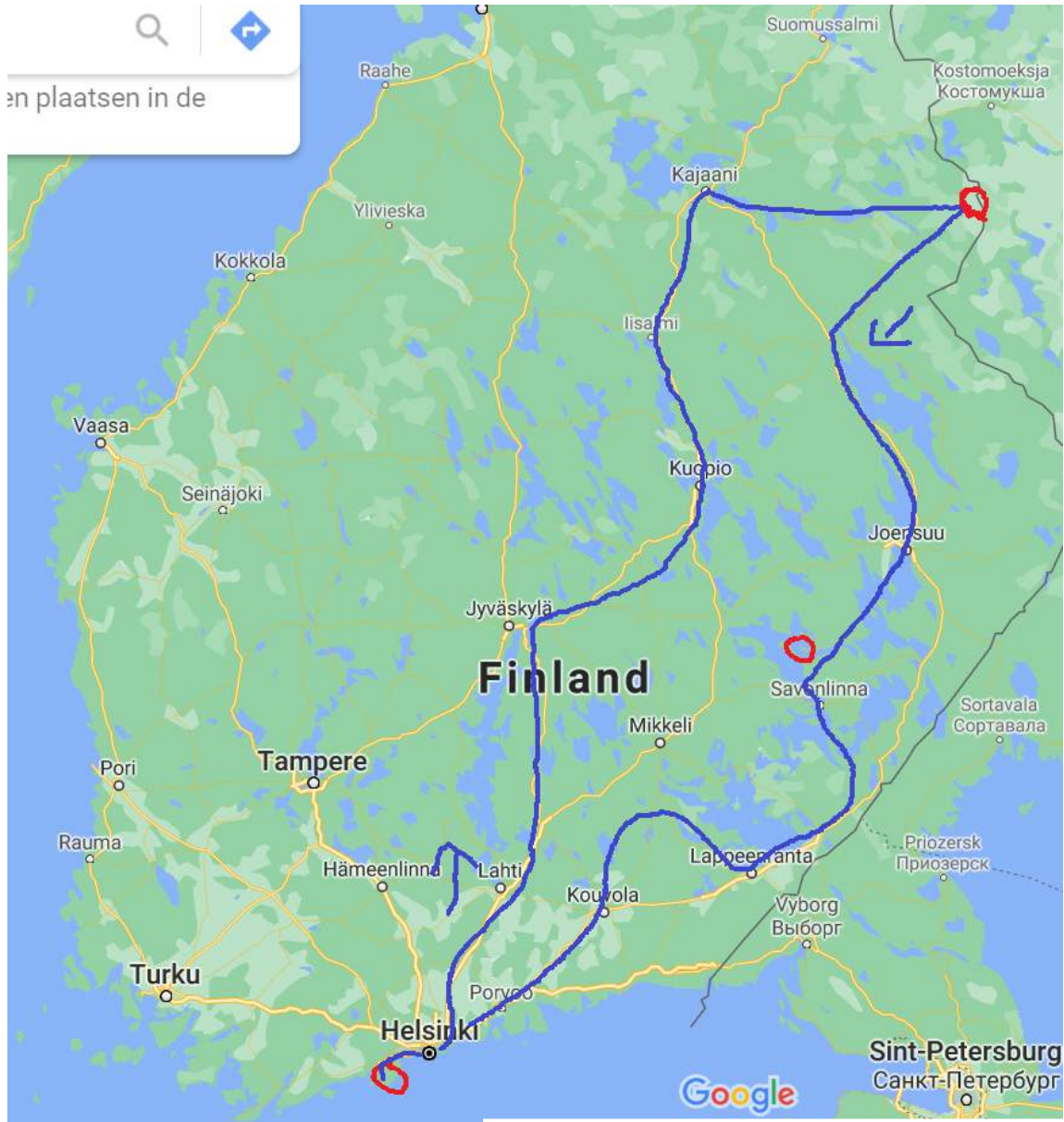
Weather

According to the locals it was exceptional warm in Finland and over a long period (40 days in a row I was told). In my week the weather was mostly sunny ry with temperatures 25-30 Celsius and 15-20 C at night. Sometimes it was cloudy and I had only a few drops of rain the last morning in the camp. There were some thundershowers over the country but I drove in between them south.



Koli national park, one of the best views of Finland

Map of the route marked and places visited (google).



Oravi: starting point for Saima Seal boat excursion
(go to large restaurant/camp)



Porkkala: moose & deer in late evening/early morning

Wildlife sightings

First of all seeing mammals on the way north from the car, even in dusk, is a very hard thing. A lot of signs for 'moose crossing' but no moose... I did see on my way up: **2 hares, 1 fox** and a *roadkill badger* in **700km** drive. On my way back south I got: **1 squirrel** and **1 hedgehog** and some (**mountain**) **hares** and another **fox** just before Helsinki.

Around Kuhmo I did see a few **mountain hares**. Most surprising was a sighting of a *hare and a mountain hare together* in a field (see photo). Another good one was a **beaver** on my way to the basecamp in a river that you cross over a narrow bridge. A rarity to see here according to Lassi.

Besides mammals I saw a few *common cranes* some *black-throated divers* and only one *whooper swan*. Another remarkable notice was not to see *any birds of prey* like busards or kestrels on the whole route.

Later Sami told me it was a '*low year of rodents*' which also ment *owls* were hard to find. I also told Sami about me *not seeing any Moose* on my long drive and he said indeed hunting was rather popular in Finland so animals are shy. He also said that moose mostly move between 3 and 6 in the morning and that was just the time I did not travel so far. Another thing he told was that wolves disappeared in the 'wind'... (a poacher story) so it is not really a safe haven in Finland for wildlife...

At the base camp a local guide from Sami gave a good advice to look for moose and deer just south-west of Helsinki in the 'Porkala' peninsula. He said moose and deer were far more easy to find here since it was a more populated place and the deer & moose have to live together with people. So I decided to go there for my last part of the trip.

Finally I planned to go to Oravi in the lake area to look for the famous endangered Saima seal and reserved an evening boat excursion.

Kuikka camp

I camped first night in Kuhmo at the official campsite. There was only one other caravan. So a whole place for myself with a nice view on the lake. I wanted to be close to the basecamp for my first night in the hide. It was only about 1 hour drive from Kuhmo more. I planned to stay 2 nights in the hides and depending on how my luck would be maybe another night. In the end I stayed 3 because it was just so nice (It is quite expensive per night, so budget drops rapidly 😊).

Lassi gave good instructions for my drive to the camp and it was not so difficult to find. However you will notice you get quite far away in the wild. I arrived around 15.30 in the basecamp where Sami gave a warm welcome. He showed me a place to put my tent near the lake, a lovely spot. We talked a bit about recent sightings and he showed me the central dining room where was also the possibility to charge batteries. This room also had a small bookshop with all sort of photobooks of mostly local wildlife. Next I decided to have a nice fresh swim in the lake and at 17.00 we left to the hides by our own car following Sami in his jeep, the ride is about 20-30 minutes to both hide options.

Day by day

Day 1 'Paradise hide' (sunny, clear sky all night)

In total 4 other cars with guests were there the first night and we all stayed in different hides at the 'Paradise spot'. There are some 5-7 different hides here in a row on the side of a large field/swamp. I chose for a very small hide which was like a small 'sauna' as Sami said. Well it was hot and sweaty indeed! I brought a lot of waterbottles and energy drink to keep me hydrated and awake all night. This worked out well, only the last two hours were a bit tough because the air was warming up quickly in the early morning sun and activity was zero. Be aware that you have to stay in the hide until 8.00 in the morning which is quite a long stay! (17.30-8.00). If you have only one night I guess Paradise is the best option where you have the widest view and probably the best chances to see wildlife.

In general the way is that as you arrive you'll go to your hide and the guide puts out some food in front of the hides some 20-80 meters away. It is spread out so the animals will search the area.

As a welcome a lot of ravens, gulls and some hooded crows are waiting for you. This is why it is of no use to go more early as the birds will eat most of the food before the Big carnivores will come.

We did not even have to wait for the bears since we already saw **2 large male bears** in the far left in the forest just before entering the hide! (so I was not very afraid of not seeing bears 😊). The first bear (a large male) came out after 20 minutes and stayed for about 15 minutes at the main baiting place which is some 60-80 meters away.

Just 10 minutes after the bear left **2 wolfs** (one white and one brown/greyish) arrived from left! They were eating really quick and constantly watching around. They left then to the far right side with some chunks of bait.

From then on it was a sort of ongoing coming and going of bears and wolves more or less all night with periods of let's say half an hour to an hour in between. They'll scan most of the area in front of the hide so they get pretty close sometimes! It was very interesting to see how they react on each other and constantly are aware, especially wolves scan and watch around. The bears put their nose up. Sometimes a bear or wolf 'told me' by these signals that there was another visitor coming from right or left just by focussing one direction.

Also sometimes I looked at the other hides next to mine to see where the cameras were pointed to, mostly at a carnivore visitor 😊.

At a certain point a smaller female bear came, she was really beautiful with a nice golden/light patch in her hair. This bear also stood up a few times to scan for danger which made it one of my best wildlife experiences.

In the middle of the night when it gets dusk all the birds leave and it becomes quiet, although bears and wolves still come and go.

In the early morning I looked to the far right side of my hide and saw a dark animal running in the cotton grass. It was a **wolverine!**

The latest at 5.30 in the morning **four wolves** came around when the sun was already rather high up and you have strong light against you.

The hides have a small wide window over which is a layer of a plastic sort of suncoating. This makes everything slightly darker. And especially in the darkest hours (the sun is gone between 11.30-3.30) visibility is difficult. I sometimes find out there was a wolf in front of the hide by scanning with my camera (not seeing it through the window).

If you like you can sleep on a matras but I did not.

All in all this first night was truly a spectacular welcome to this place with so much activity of wolves and bears and a glimpse of a Wolverine. A bit over excited I returned to basecamp.

Day 2 'Lake hide' (sunny and a bit cloudy)

After all excitement of the first night and a bit overwhelmed by such good sightings I chose to see the other spot 'the lake hide'. I had seen some photos in the books and thought this would give another dimension.

This night there was only one other couple in the camp and they also chose for the lake. They had the central (large) hide and I could choose one myself. There are here also some 5 hides in a row on one side of the lake. After dubbing a bit I chose the most right one. Just after Sami left and I was still installing my drinks and cameras a **wolverine** already was chewing on something not far from my hide... you won't get time to relax 😊

Half an hour later a large **bear** came from the right and after a while another **bear**. The two large males had a little stare down and a small fight and one was pushed into the lake, quite impressive show!

Also a single **wolf** made a visit and later the **wolverine** had a second visit and came along a few times. At a certain point the **wolf** and **bear** were together with the **wolf** walking around the **bear**. As soon as a bear or wolf arrived the wolverine ran off. At one moment two wolves were together a bit further away in the forest.

One bear walked left around the lake and walked behind our hides really close that gave me a bit the shivers since it was just a few meters away... after standing still in my hide for a few minutes I had a sneaky look and

saw it was already 50 meters away making me calm again 😊

The wolverine was rather active and I saw it also running a bit further away in the forest. You can see what a stamina these animals have. It hardly sits and is always running. During the night another wolf visited this place. In total 3 different wolves brought a visit. Also a white-tailed eagle sat in top of one of the trees a bit annoyed by ravens and gulls. The activity in this hide was a bit less than in the paradise hide but still there were enough sightings. The mirror effect from the lake gives a special charm in the photos.

Next morning back to camp for a good sleep.

Day 3 'Paradise hide' (mostly cloudy)

After dubbing since I already had seen so many nice things I thought: 'I am here now, let's do another night'. So I was in doubt if I would do the forest hide or another time paradise. I chose for the last. This time I had a different hide the most left one this would give a different perspective to the sightings. This night there were also more guests and most hides were occupied with guests. After just 15 minutes a **wolverine** arrived rather in front of my hide and scanned the area only for a minute or so. It returned some 2-3 times but never really went to the right side of the field. So I was rather lucky with it quit close to my hide.

After 45 minutes a large male **bear** came. But from than it was far less active than the first night in this hide. **Wolves** visits were shorter and **bears** also came less and not so long. So it is different per night! (besides that it was cloudy this evening, I have no idea what influences there are for activity).

But what I heard is that if there are less large carnivores around the **wolverine** shows itself here more. This night it was at a certain point too dark (cloudy) to have good sight (no light for photo). So I did use the matras a bit this night.... but mostly as soon as you laid down there was a sort of alarm call and I jumped to see what was on. So I was actually more standing up than really sleeping 😊.

At a moment I heard some hard cracking noises really close to my hide. It was the wolverine that was chewing on a bone just 3 m left of my hide in high grass, not well visible but quit fun to hear. Later on there was another hard shout / noise: the **wolverine** chased away a **wolf**! Pretty cool to see this interaction.

A nice bonus this evening was the visit of 2 white-tailed eagles. They sat in the dead trees in front of the hide and flew around a few times and even landed on the ground mostly at a distance. Finally a black kite brought a brief visit. So it was a 'full house' with all target species you can expect having a visit at the hide this night.

The whole morning was quiet but at 7.30 a **bear** came for a last check for a snack.

Note: In the end I am not sure whether I was just very lucky during my visit or that all guest gets such a lot and good sightings. I guess most visitors will see good stuff but it does clearly differ a bit per night and probably location. One thing is for sure that keeping awake is important because activity is possible at all times.

Other places visited in Finland:

Day 4 'Koli'

I felt pretty relaxt after all these nice sightings from the hides. I had a last look in the camp for birds and than would start my way down to try for the Saima Seal next evening in Oravi. I also wanted to a have a visit to Koli National Park which should have one of the nicest Finish views over the forest and lakes. But I drove of rather late so I was in Koli only just before sunset (around 23.00), well the sunset and views (there are two major viewpoints which I both gave a brief visit and they were all fantastic! After that I drove to Oravi and camped there.

Day 5 'Oravi - Linnansaari National Park'

I had a bit a relaxing afternoon and planned a short cultural visit to the castle of Savonlinna and the wooden church of Kerimaki, both are nice to see. At 20.00 the boat excursion started untill 23.00. A friendly lady was our guide and I was there with an elderly Finsh couple that also booked the tour. She told us that it would be some

50% chance to actually see one and she expected us to see a swimming one. The weather was nice and calm evening with some cloudes that resulted in a spectacular sunset. We sailed over the waters and searched the rocky shores of the lake sides and the isles for the seals. After a while I spotted a blackish spot on a rock. A better look gave the answer, it was a **seal!** What a friendly look these seals have. It had a beautiful sort of leopard look on its fur.

We had a look from a descent distance for a few minutes and than had a further look on the lakes. She showed us an osprey on it's nest and we spotted a young beaver in front of a beaver dam. On our way back we had another glimps of the resting seal and than went back to Oravi. All in one it was one of my best 'boat safaris'. I would definitely add this to your trip I you have time. (may is the best time to see the seals)

Day 6 'Repovesi National park - Porkala'

The last night I slept on a regular campsite and next day made a long drive and had some stops. I still hoped to see the black throated divers a bit better but it was not easy to find them. I planned a visit to Repovesi National park which was on the way to Helsinki. I made the short hikes to the viewpoints, it is a nice place! Also it was clearly popular for locals to go there for camping.

After this short visit I drove to Parvoo which is a nice old town. Made a brief sunset visit here and than drove to Porkala via Helsinki. In Helsinki I had a midnight ride through the city center which was fully crowded with people for a saterday summers night out. I went on for a quick try for moose and deer in Parkola. It was almost completely dark when I got there around 1.00. It gets far more dark down south so you have a short 'night'. I soon spotted a **white-tail deer**. (it is an escape population here). Than I found a **roe deer** and finally a **moose** in last light! So that was a good finish for the triplist 😊. I parked the car in a a sort of day recreational area and tried to sleep a bit in the car.

Day 7 'Porkola - Helsinki area

Because I couldn't sleep much I woke up around 4.00 and decided to just drive the same roads again. It was a very nice morning and I saw a lot of deer: **4 moose, 10 roe deer, 30+ white tail deer** and some **15 fallow deer**, some **8 hare** and a **fox**. Well the guide from Kuika Camp was surely right!

I would definitely add this one to your trip if you want to see ungulates.

I only drove the main roads here, the smaller side roads seem to be private. But I still managed to see all targets rather easily.

End of the morning I drove back to the airport for my flight home.



Raven will for sure be waiting for you for the hides

TRIPLIST MAMMALS

- 1) **Brown bear** – a least 6-7 different animals I could identify out of the photos, mostly large males and at least one smaller female.
- 2) **Wolf** – 5 different animals seen of which most 4 together in one sighting. One white wolf, two grey, one brownish and a grey one with a lot of white in the face.
- 3) **Wolverine** – at least two different animals seen of which one had a clear light colour ring on it's back.
- 4) **Red fox** - 3 different animals seen, two in a field and one young in the roadside of the highway close to Helsinki.
- 5) **Hare** – some 15 seen in total, of which most seen in Porkala area.
- 6) **Mountain hare** – some 6 animals in total
- 7) **(some) Vole** – 1 animal on the ground in front of the lodge in the basecamp.
- 8) **Beaver** – 2 different animals seen, one in the river to Basecamp and one at the boat safari in Oravi.
- 9) **Saima seal** – 1 animal seen on a rock shore of an island in Linnansaari National Park.
- 10) **Red squirrel** – 1 young animal crossed the road late afternoon on the way north
- 11) **Hedgehog** – 1 animal crossed the road early morning on the way south
- 12) **Moose** – 5 animals seen in parkola area. First in last light in a wheat field. The others in the early morning of which two crossing the road.
- 13) **Roe deer** – around 10 in total in the Parkola area. A roe goat and two fawns, four single buck and three roe goates
- 14) **Fallow deer** – 15+ seen, a group of stags and a few hinds
- 15) **White tail deer** – 30+ seen, groups of stags, single stags and single hinds, one hind with a fawn
- 16) *Badger (dead) – 1 roadkill up north.*

Stuff I missed:

- *Reindeer* I did not look for them and didn't see them.
- *Raccoon dog* could be possible but seems difficult like most other animals.
- *Flying squirrel* did not look for this.

Interesting birds:

- *Common crane*
- *Black-throated diver*
- *Red neck grebe*
- *White-tailed eagle*
- *Black kite*



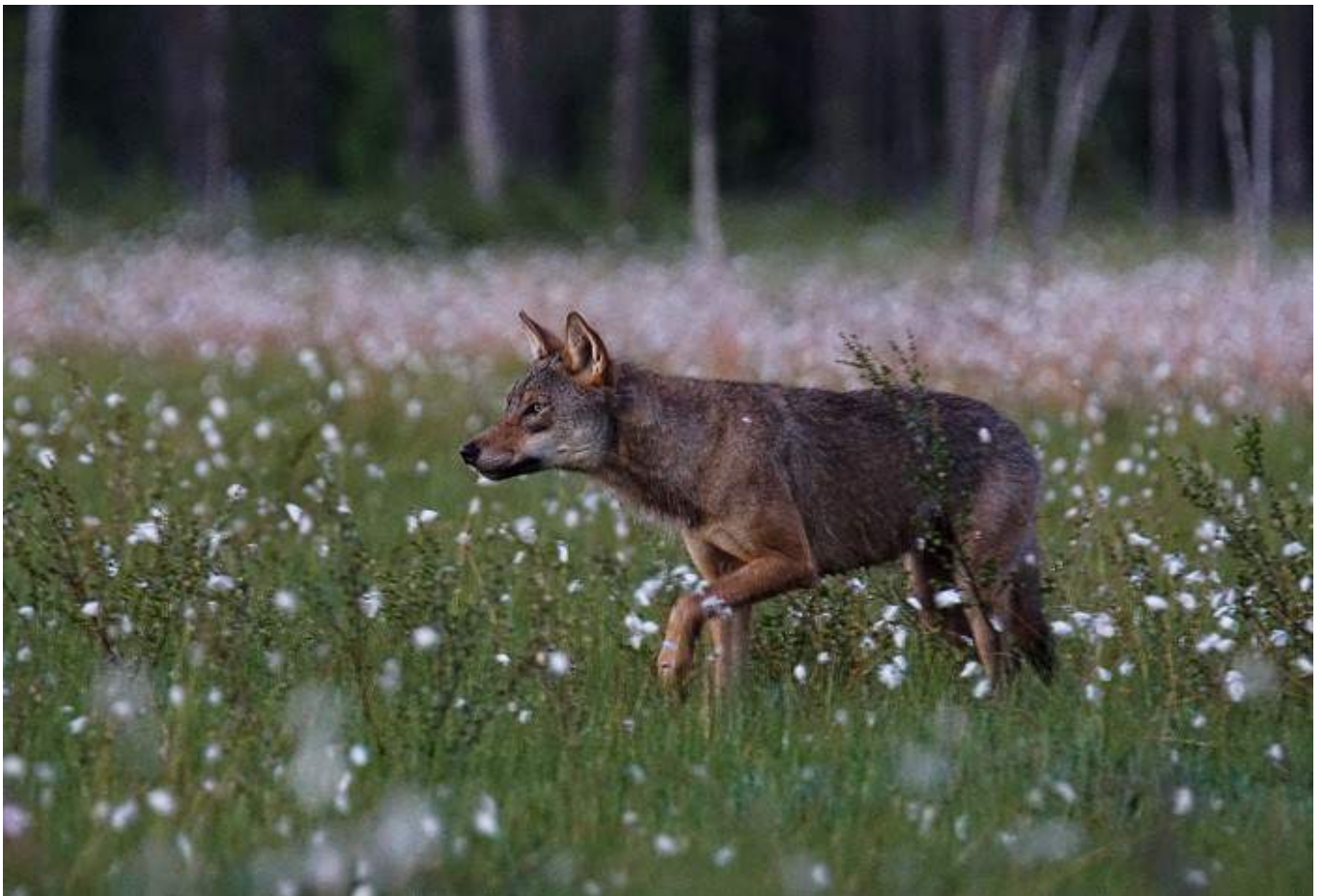
Paradise hide view



A bear seen in the far right side (Paradise hide)



Bear and wolf in front of Paradise hide





Early morning wolf visit at Paradise hide





wolf and wolverine together!





Close encounters: bear & the 'fifth' white faced wolf seen only one time





Wolverine at Paradise hide





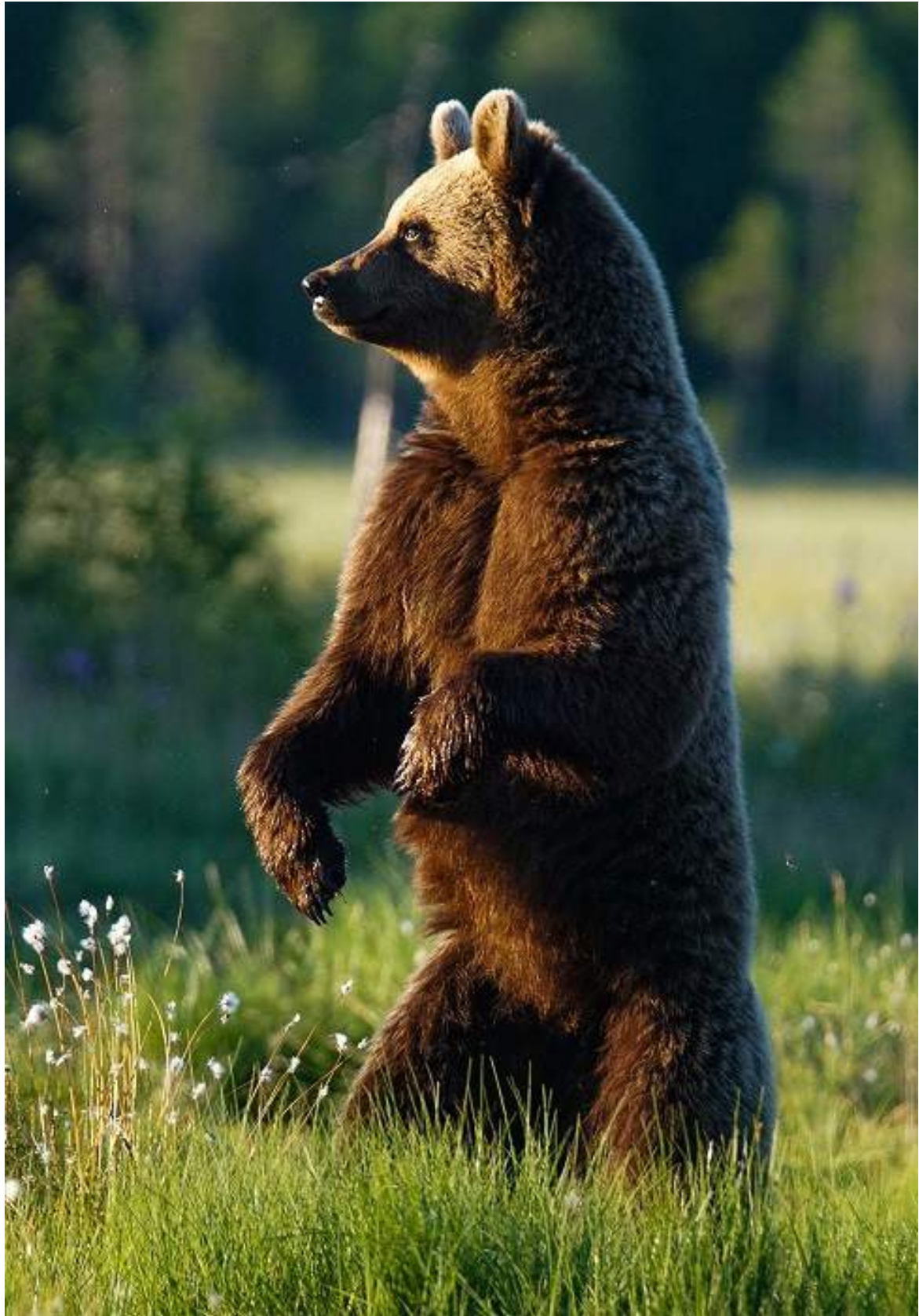
White-tailed eagle and black kite ('target species 4 & 5')





Female bear and the white alpha male wolf (paradise hide)





A lucky shot of the female bear having a scan around (the Paradise hide).



Lake hide view

White-tailed eagle ready for landing





A bear in evening sun (Lake hide)





a short stake out and a little fight between two 'big uys'





Wolverine and bear stake out (lake hide)





Wolf has a look at the lake



Wolverine with a light color patch at the lake



Face to face with a wolf a great experience



Linnansaari National Park looking for seals



Saima seal in Linnansaari National park





Hares and a Mountain hare





A mountain hare and a hare together in a field (rather special?)



Red fox



Moose (Porkala peninsula)





White-tailed deer (Porkala peninsula)





Probably only possible in Finland to see roe deer & white-tailed deer together.





Roe deer buck and fallow deer (Porkala peninsula)





Common Crane & Black-throated diver

