

Twitchable Eurasian Lynx, Estonia

3-5 March 2017

SUMMARY

A brief report on a quick trip to Estonia during which I successfully twitched Eurasian Lynx. The thinking is that the female & up to three cubs will remain twitchable for the next couple of weeks, as long as snow remains on the ground (and thus prints can be seen). To maximise chances of success, contract the local hunter guide Ivo, who can (only) be reached through Marika Mann at Estonian Nature Tours.

DETAIL

[Marika Mann at Estonian Nature Tours](mailto:infor@naturetours.ee) (infor@naturetours.ee) arranged my trip to two sites each roughly 1 1/4 hours from Tallinn (we saw no mammals at the other site, so I will not cover that here). She and Tarvo Valker joined me. My aim was to see Eurasian Lynx at [Kõrvemaa Landscape Protection Area](#); Marika had told me that a local hunter-guide, Ivo, had reported a female and three cubs residing in a relatively small area in recent weeks. Marika was keen to establish a Eurasian Lynx-viewing product, so I joined her and guide Tarvo Valker in trialling 'twitchability'. We were successful on only our second afternoon, seeing a female and one cub shortly before dusk.



We arrived mid-afternoon on 3rd, and spent several hours either side of dusk driving along tracks that ply through Kõrvemaa. We did the same before and after dawn the following two days, and the same before and after dusk on the second day. Mammals were most active either side of daybreak/nightfall, so we focused efforts

on those times. Accordingly, we were not in the forest between 10h00 and 16h00, as we chose to rest instead.

A 4WD is essential in Kõrvemaa: tracks are sometimes narrow, usually either muddy or snowy, and often over rough ground. We used the vehicle of Ivo, a local hunter-guide contracted by Estonian Nature Tours. Quite aside from his vehicle, Ivo's services were essential for seeing Eurasian Lynx. Ivo knows the site and its maze of roads inside out, understood the movements of our target Lynx family, and has remarkably sharp eyes. He speaks little English, however. If you wish to see Eurasian Lynx, you absolutely maximise chances by going with Ivo; approach through Estonian Nature Tours. Put bluntly, you won't see Eurasian Lynx here without Ivo.

The area for the Eurasian Lynx family we were looking for lay west of Aegviidu. I make no apology for not giving the exact location where we saw the female Eurasian Lynx and cub. There are a couple of reasons for this. First is hunting pressure; although it is currently illegal to kill Eurasian Lynx in Estonia, that does not stop it happening occasionally. The second reason is practicality: all the family is faithful to the area indicated, the only way to determine more precisely where they are on any particular day is to check for print on snowy/muddy tracks. You can do this yourself, of course, but contracting Ivo is a much better bet. So I *could* indicate precisely where we saw Eurasian Lynx, but it wouldn't actually help you! The third reason is simply respect for the investment of time and effort that Ivo has put into tracking the Eurasian Lynxes here!

While we were resting on the second day, Ivo spent the time trawling the forest tracks until he encountered fresh prints from the Eurasian Lynx family. When he found some, he came back to pick us up. We targeted the area with prints and intended to wait there for an hour before dusk and as long as it took after dusk. As it transpired, however, after dropping us off here, Ivo drove off and spotted the female on a track about 1km east. He returned to collect us, and we speedily had views of a female and one cub crossing the track before vanishing into some scrub. I have written up the encounter in greater detail on my blog:

<http://www.jameslowen.com/blog-7-mar-2017-the-lynx-effect-2.html>

Record shot below, taken through the vehicle windscreen at ISO12,800!



TWITCHABILITY

Ivo plans to keep tabs on this particular Eurasian Lynx family for as long as possible. Realistically, this will be principally (exclusively?) while snow remains on the ground. This clearly depends on weather conditions, but I suspect this means the next fortnight at most. If you can go now, do! More widely, however, my experience (and the learning that Ivo & Estonian Nature Tours have got from this 'trial') suggests that Eurasian Lynx will be twitchable here in future winters. So if you cannot go immediately, but want to see Lynx, I suggest you email Marika Mann and express your interest in Eurasian Lynx trips.

OTHER MAMMALS AND BIRDS

Mammalwise, while driving around Kõrvemaa, we had three Elk, a score of Roe Deer, Mountain Hare and (outside the forest) Brown Hare. We noted plenty of evidence of Beaver and had fresh prints of Grey Wolf, Otter and Badger. Ivo pointed out an area where Brown Bear had a den. Avian highlights were several calling Eurasian Pygmy Owls, a couple of vocal Ural Owls, several Black Woodpeckers, a few Hazel Grouse, Black Grouse & Capercaillie. Plus a supporting cast of Crested & Willow Tits, Northern Bullfinch etc.

ACCOMMODATION

We stayed at Jäägri Villa guesthouse in Albu, which Marika says is the only suitable accommodation in the area. This is a hunting lodge (plenty of stuffed mammal specimens in the communal areas), with nice boutique hotel-style rooms and a flexible approach to providing food (e.g. giving us pre-dawn packed breakfast and a full breakfast on our return; delaying dinner until our late return from the forest). Little English spoken.

FINAL ASIDE

This was my second Lynx species in Europe in eight days, as I had fun with Iberian Lynx the previous weekend, seeing a female at close range and a copulating pair in the Sierra du Andujar. I would be interested in learning whether anyone has succeeded in seeing both species in such a similarly short timeframe!

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