



Finland – A Very Short Report. Jul 28 – Aug 2, 2021.

With COVID still around, and having just gotten married at the end of May 2021, I was looking for a summer honeymoon vacation which would also yield some highly-wanted mammals for me.

All of this pointed me to a Norwegian cruise of the Svalbard polar region – only to find out Norway is closed for visitors. We “settled” for a mammal-deprived honeymoon to Switzerland, which was amazing, but the only mammals I saw during a week’s trip were **Yellow-necked Mice** inside the Bear Pit at Bern, and several **Alpine Marmots** in the mountainous landscape between Zermatt and Rothorn Cable-car station. I was pretty excited about the latter, but I needed to squeeze-in another highly-wanted target for a short, “long weekend” trip. Something that would get my adrenaline flowing, like in the good old days.

I decided **Wolverine** would be it. It’s something I’ve always wanted to see: a large, unique carnivore with a fearless reputation, sort of like a honey badger, but with the added bonus of being a character in X-Men, and an animal most of my friends didn’t know existed. The kind of animal people would look at my pictures and say: “Oh, a racoon. We sometimes get them in the trash bins behind my apartment.” And then I would have to explain to them it’s not a racoon.

Long-story-short, I travelled to Finland on a short notice, and pre-booked with Erä Eero, the same place where Jon Hall saw his wolverine. I knew that wolverine would likely be my only lifer for the trip, but there was also a small chance for *Eurasian Lynx*, which was enough to keep me on high alert all night.

I was originally scheduled to spend 3 nights in the hides, but I ended up cutting it short by 1 night, because I felt like I was developing a cold with a slight fever – NOT what you want to happen, knowing you need to have a COVID test before the flight. (Luckily, it was NOT COVID. Phew.)

So the 1st night I arrived from Helsinki via a train to Joensuu, where I rented a car and drove the rest of the way to Erä Eero. Since I was there at 17:30-17:45ish and there was already a guest at the Uronlampi hide, and they didn’t want to disturb the area, I was taken to the Forest hide – a 15-minute walking distance from the main lodge area. It must be mentioned that the Finnish forests are very picturesque! Even magical.

10 minutes after Eero and Sini left me at the hide, 2 wolverines (apparently a mother and her nearly grown cub) appeared and stayed around for about 15 minutes. Then, after a several-minute-long break, a single wolverine appeared, and hung out for 15-20 minutes or so.

For the rest of the evening nothing was happening, until about midnight, when I couldn’t keep my eyes open, so I decided to sleep from midnight until 2:00.

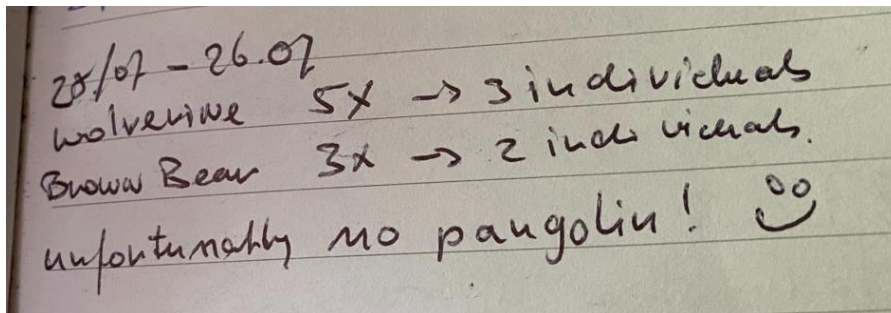




Before sleeping, I tried to thermal scope through the camera opening but saw nothing. It became almost completely dark around midnight, and then started to get light again around 2:50. Around 3:10, 3 **wolverines** appeared, and I could see mostly their shadows, except when they got within a couple of meters of the hide, where I could see their detail. They stayed around for about 30ish minutes. I can't tell whether they were the same 3 from earlier, or different ones. This would be the final sighting of the night. I left at 8:00 for breakfast and a sauna shower, before sleeping until lunch.

The following night I stayed at the Uuronlampi hide. I was taken there around 15:00 and stayed until 8:00 the next morning. I had high hopes, having heard that the guy who stayed there the previous night saw a mother *Bear* with 3 cubs, and 4-5 *wolverines*. Unfortunately, I was there for nearly 17 hours and saw... nothing! It was quite disappointing, though I can't help but wonder whether any of it was my fault... I had a very minor cough but was trying to contain it and remain as quiet as I could, even as I moved throughout the hide and when I was eating or drinking.

I did have plenty of time to read through the guest book, and it seems like I was particularly unfortunate. I did find a report from exactly 1 year ago, which seemed like a little bit of a mammal-watching joke meant specifically for me:



Other than that, **Red Squirrels** were hanging out at the lodge constantly, and Sini said she sometimes sees *Least Weasels* around the property as well. *Brown bears* are pretty common from the hides, and *Gray wolves* are occasional. *Lynxes* are very rare, with about 1 sighting a year at best.

Despite really loving the location and the people, the "dry" toilets, cold nights, and the lack of hot showers except in the sauna, combined with the cold I was developing – got to me. So together with the fact that I didn't want to risk taking a COVID test less than 24 hours before my flight back, I decided to cut my stay short by 1 night and return to Helsinki for 2 more nights in a cozy hotel, where I could rest away my developing cold before flying back to Israel.

