

## Georgia and Armenia 27.4-7.5 2019

During a bird mainly focused on birds (185 species, 17 WP ticks, see <https://www.birdforum.net/showthread.php?t=376283> for a full birding report) we saw only very few mammals, but there was definitely some quality over the lack of quantity!



In Stepantsminda area, we met an **Eurasian Lynx** at 42.562600, 44.707835 shortly after sunset (there was still some light), from a car on the road to Juta. The road just above this place was closed due to a landslide (we went there in order to camp by the stream below the road). We first actually thought it is a stray dog, as it was casually walking on the road but the dark end of tail quickly gave it up; it climbed on a rocky ledge and then observed us for a while, allowing for a basic photograph.





The Kazbegi mountains are famous for **Eastern Tur** and I was thus quite surprised how relatively hard it was to see the species. Only when we climbed (partly in rather deep snow) about 500 altitude meters from Trinity Church to approximately 42.664877, 44.589927, we saw several groups of them climbing on the steep opposite slopes of the ravine to the north.



However the biggest moment of the trip was the encounter of two **Syrian Bears** in the hills above Yelpin in Armenia. Having a capable vehicle (Toyota 4runner), we drove all the way up to 2300 meters a.s.l. and walked at dawn a few minutes to a small bump on the ridge at 39.84976, 45.15536 from where we searched the surrounding theater of mountains looking for Caspian Snowcock (in vain). When looking up from the scope, I suddenly noticed the bears swiftly approaching us, surely less than a 100 meters away. “Oh shit, bear!” I uttered and we both picked up all our stuff and started retreating. This alerted the bears and they turned around and run downhill, making funny slapshes in the deep snow on the slope – they seemed to either not have known about us beforehand (we were downwind) or not having realized how large we are. Despite the panic, I still managed to get some shots.

Apart from these highlights, we only saw several **Red Foxes** (one above Armash in Armenia, one close to Meghri and some more in places I have not recorded), a glimpse of some **Deer** (females, Red or Roe) in a forest in southern Armenia and a **Muskrat** in the Armash ponds.

However both Georgia and Armenia are countries with immense supply of natural landscapes and very free access to it (with the only major exception being the closed Arevik NP near Meghri). Local people are very tolerant to european tourists doing weird things in their nature (as we repeatedly found out while birding at unusual places), so despite having not found a time for any spotlighting, I think it should be without problems with the exception of immediate surroundings of any sensitive borders and thus a dedicated mammalwatcher should be able to find plenty of targets for the area.