



EB5's **first visit to Belarus** in order to see Lynx **was simply stunning**. EB5's catchphrase fits perfectly with the whole experience and the pictures we took: **looking for enigmatic mammals in their natural surroundings**. This was **pure nature at its best**. During our nine day visit we saw only four cars. Just like the Snow leopard footage from the BBC in their Planet Earth series, one only knows these areas from the Wild Russia-dvd's that warm up many naturalists' winter evenings. We left Brussels in the morning, arrived in a remote field station after a two hour drive west from Minsk, in the evening. A local researcher guided us with his 4WD from Lynxterritory to Lynxterritory. Once there, we continued on foot through vast forests with a diversity we simply thought didn't exist anymore. **From the first day until the very last we continuously walked in the tracks** of our target: **Eurasian lynx**. **The target itself would change from day to day, from a female with a cub, solitary males, to immature animals and newly formed pairs**. Very exciting, something we never experienced before. The total surface of the core areas we searched was only a quarter of the two thousand km² forest in the area. Despite the amazing local knowledge of our guide, we knew that spotting a Lynx (there are 8 to 13 animals present in the area we searched) would be very difficult. Frozen canals and marshes made access to the area slightly less difficult, but to say it was easy would be a bridge too far. Lynxes are always on the move and only rarely stay in one location for long. Our guide had **one fleeting sighting** (keeping together / walking in line a mission impossible in these types of virgin obstacle forests), we were **close to another animal** and saw **amazing shots on the trailcams we placed**. In this forest, not only tracks from our target were found as **several packs, pairs and solitary Wolves left their tracks too, as well as Beavers, Otters, Elk (Moose), European Bisons, Raccoon Dogs, Fox, Polecats, Pine Martens, American Minks, Red and Roe Deer, and Wild Boars**. All this in densities we have never seen before. Of the mammals, we saw: Wolf, Fox, Polecat, American Mink, Beaver, Bison, Elk, Red & Roe Deer, Wild Boar.























Birds seen during our exploration were, among others, Pygmy Owl, White-backed, Three-toed, Grey-headed, Middle Spotted and Black Woodpeckers, Capercaillie, Hazel Grouse and Black Grouse, Golden and White-tailed Eagles, Rough-legged Buzzard, Waxwing and Great Grey Shrike.

Belarus will be high on the agenda of EB5 in the coming year! Going back is a certainty during late winter 2015/2016! Despite the two thousand seven hundred km² vast forest, there is only place for 5 participants accompanied by two local researchers and an EB5 guide. Do not hesitate to send an RFI email related with this tour to the following address: info@europesbig5.com.

All dates and rates details soon on the tour chapter of the EB5 website: www.europesbig5.com

This prospection wasn't possible without participants Kris De Keersmaecker and John Wright. Thank you so much guys!

Jan Kelchtermans - Belgium

