

Finland 16 July – 12 August 2007 – Michel GERVAIS (France) : gervais.michel@wanadoo.fr
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For these holidays, my wife and I used our camper for Finland. In this way we were independent for bedroom and meals... Our targets were tourism and mammals watching.

To reach Finland, we drive through Belgium, Germany, Denmark, Sveridge : 2 days and half of travel on highways.

Along this long way, we noted many dead animals on the highways of Germany; those we identified: 1 Red Fox, 1 Polecat, 1 beech-marten, Hedgehogs. In Sveridge : 2 Roe-deer (cf) alive, and some dead Badgers : 6 going and 5 driving back (I hadn't seen such a large number of dead Badgers in any other European country, and I also saw this 20 years ago on another trip to Sveridge), 1 dead Polecat, many dead Red Squirrels and many sp...

In Finland:
roads are good, even the gravel ones.
the weather was sunny: only a couple of rainy days.
mosquitoes are bothersome during observations...
edible mushrooms and berries are plentiful in the forests...

finding fauna in Finland in the end of July and the beginning of August is very difficult :
forest is everywhere and, as everywhere, it's difficult to watch through the trees...
birds have left their nesting places and are scattered all over the forests...
mammals are very (too !) shy... However, there are mammals there: in spite of few cars we found many dead animals on roads. Along the roads many signs " Elk danger. "
In parks nobody to help us in our quest to find observation posts.

Trip :
19/07/2007-21/07/2007 : we drove to the north, from Turku to Oulu. Nothing to declare except 1 Red Fox crushed on the road ! Bird nesting places we visit were disappointing.
Night drive : 3 Mountain Hares.

22/07/2007 : Oulu to Oulanka National Park. En route we saw our first Reindeer...



23/07/2007-24/07/2007: Oulanka National Park. At the office of the park, when I enquired about where to spot fauna, they answered “ animals are there but it’s better we don’t see them! ”. The Finns are curious! Moreover, there is no guide.

Two days walk gave us: birds, 1 Red Squirrel, Reindeer.

Night drive (at this latitude, only 2 hours of quasi dark): 6 Mountain Hares, 1 Pine-marten, 2 micro mammals sp, 1 Elk (Moose).

24/07/2007-25/07/2007 : night drive to Hossa : nothing !

25/07/2007 : Hossa to Suomussalmi : one pigmy Weasel (*Mustela nivalis nivalis*) tried to cross the road in front of our van, with something in its mouth. It dropped it and ran back...

We stopped at Martinselkosen Eräkeskus wildlife center near Juntusranta

(<http://www.wildscentre.fi/>), in a place called Pirttivaara : guide said that each night about 20 bears come near the watching hut... We didn’t spend a night with this organization. Another organization for watching bear not tested: <http://www.arolantila.suomussalmi.net/eindex.html>

Night drive near the place for bear observations: 3 Elks and Mountain Hares. No bear!

26/07/2007: Suomussalmi to Vartius : at 1 PM we arrived at the office of Wildbrowbear (www.wildbrowbear.fi) near Vartius. As rain was forecast for the next day, we decided to reserve an observation post for the night. At 17h30 we walked it. At 19h30 the first bear appeared in very good light, marvelous. Then bears arrived one by one at the feeding place (salmon) just in front of us: the hierarchy was well respected. From midnight to 3AM nothing. Only one bear appeared at 3 AM in the mist. We identified at least 6 individuals (two of them wore a colored ring in one ear). A very good experience.



No wolverines: The boss explained that in April that wolverines came to the observation post 5 times a week but that there was only 1 in July!

Sabrina Logeais (sablgs@hotmail.com) a member of the staff of Wildbrowbear arranges trips for watching Elk, beaver, and flying squirrels.

27/07/2007 : Kuhmo. We slept late and walked and shopped in the town...

28/07/2007 : Kuhmo to Elimysallo. Visit to the very interesting Petola visitor centre and learned about Finland's large carnivores.

Arrived at Elimysallo reserve where we walked searching for old birch-trees for flying-squirrels in the night... Night walk (well protected against mosquitoes), one Canadian beaver (by Petri Hottola : these beavers have been introduced to Finland. The only European beavers live in a small pocket in SW Finland) came close to us looking after his dam : good observation. No flying- squirrels!

29/07/2007: Elimysallo to Jämäsvaara. Day walk in Jämäsvaara reserve with boots and camai : only wild berries, mushrooms and mosquitoes ! In the evening somebody came with traps for Mink !... Night walk : 1 bat flying, but always no flying squirrel... No beaver at a dam we found in the day light. Then we drive in the night without seeing any animal except one micromammal crossing the road !

30/07/2007-31/07/2008: Patvinsuo National Park. En route, Reindeers (by Petri Hottola it was definitely a wild, forest one, because there are no domesticated ones south of Kuhmo)... Even if we hadn't seen interesting mammals (only one red squirrel and a reindeer, perhaps a wild forest one), this park seemed to be a good opportunity to see bears (one was seen 29/07 at 9 AM), Elk... 2 day-walks (we found what looked like a bear dropping), 1 night-walk and 1 night drive (only a woodcock)...

01/08/2007: Patvinsuo-Koli. Rain all day long.

01/08/2007-02/08/2007: Koli National Park. Good exhibition room at the information. Nice sight views on lake and forest.

One day-walk: red squirrel. During evening meal, 3 Canadian beavers swam one by one in the river in the south of the park. Night walk for flying squirrels : once again: nothing!
During the night drive, we saw a Raccoon dog crossing the road and several hares.

03/08/2007 : Koli to Kerimaki. En route, visit to Joensuu, Kerimaki...

04/08/2007-05/08/2007: Kerimaki to Rantasalmi and Lappeenranta. Visit to Savonlinna and its interesting nature information center, where we inquired about Ringed Seal (*Phoca hispida saimensis*) in Lake Saimaa. This seal became an entirely lake-bound species at the end of the last ice age (8,000 years ago) when the lakes of eastern Finland were cut off from what is nowadays the Baltic Sea. We didn't see this animal, even though, last week, one was in the town!
Another information center with interesting exhibition rooms situated in Rantasalmi had no information about a trip to see seals... It's possible to take cruises for sight-seeing but not for looking for wild animals !
We didn't see seals even during a drive along the lake during which we spent hours behing binoculars... During drive we found : 4 red squirrels, 1 wolverines, 1 Mink, unfortunately all had been run over !

06/08/2007-08/08/2007: Suomenniemi. Our camper had an engine trouble ! We waited 2 days and a half for a part to repair the gear-shift of our van ! Walks and observations : birds, red squirrel and at 15 h, seat on a beach, surprise : an Mink run 2 m of us !

09/08/2007-11/08/2007: visit to Jaala (rock painting and an interesting mill), Helsinki, Lappi (burial rocks of bronze age) and Rauma (wooden houses). In Lappi we found 1 Bank Vole (*Clethrionomys glareolus*) dead.
En route between Tuohikotti and Jaala we found 1 dead Badger and 1 dead wolverine.

Mammals list

Alive:

Raccoon dog (*Nyctereutes procyonoides*) : Koli
Brown bear (*Ursus arctos*) : Vartius
Mink (*Mustela vison*) : Suomenniemi
Pine marten (*Martes martes*) : Oulanka
Pygmy weasel (*Mustela nivalis nivalis*) : Juntusranta
Reindeer (*Rangifer tarandus*) : north of 63th parallel.
Elk (Moose) (*Alces alces*) : 1 Oulanka , 3 Pirttivaara.
Red squirrel (*Sciurus vulgaris*) : everywhere
Canadian beaver (*Castor canadensis*) : Elimysallo and Koli
Moutain Hare (*Lepus timidus*) : Oulanka, Koli

Dead:

Badger (*Meles meles*) :
Wolverine (*Gulo gulo*) :
Polecat (*Mustela putoris*)
Bank Voles (*Clethrionomys glareolus*)