

FINLAND 18-22 APRIL 2014

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Introduction

I first visited Finland in 2002 when one night at one of two lodges in the area produced as many as a dozen Brown Bears. However still needing Wolverine and having read Steve Morgan's report of a trip at the same time of year I decided to visit Finland again and opted to stay at Wild Brown Bear one of the best-known lodges. Over the course of 3 days and nights with 52 hours spent in the hides (including one 22-hour shift!) I had a dozen sightings of at least three different Brown Bears. However I only had one Wolverine for less than a minute and I wasn't even in the hides at the time (see below for more details). Consequently the trip was quite frustrating.

Wild Brown Bear Lodge. www.wbb.fi

Compared to 2002 when the lodge I visited only had two hides, Wild Brown Bear has at least 14 small photographic hides and 4 or 5 larger hides, and to be honest this detracts a lot from the experience in my opinion. In hindsight I wish I had visited one of the 'less commercial' lodges in the area (see the Finland page on www.mammalwatching.com for further details).

The cost per night was 170 euros plus 20 euros per night single supplement. Transfers to and from Kajaani cost 100 euros each way regardless of the number of passengers! This is extortionate given it is only 130 kilometres or thereabouts. Consequently I hired a car for four days which was cheaper and gave me more flexibility, allowing me to stop to look for things on route. The lodge is easy to find and although the access track was still covered in snow on my arrival it was still easily negotiated in a standard car.

The standard routine in April is to go to the hides at about 1630 and to leave them at 0800 the following morning. Bait is put out mid-afternoon. There is also the option to spend the day in the hide as well. Breakfast is served at 0830 and dinner at 1530 and snacks and hot water are provided in the hides. The food was generally very good. The hides have bunks, sleeping bags (which would have been insufficient for April temperatures had I not had two), chairs and toilet pails. The small hides are really set up for photography rather than wildlife viewing and if the main target is to see mammals and birds avoid hide 1 which had very narrow viewing windows. I had one night in hide 1 and two in hide 6 but hides 4 and 5 are probably best placed. They also have hides to photograph lekking Black Grouse and Capercaillie.

Fortunately the lodge only had four other people staying while I was there so I had a hide to myself. Two people in some of the hides would have been very cramped. There was still a lot of snow on the ground in

April and you are not allowed to wear shoes in the hides so warm clothing including very warm socks are essential.

Itinerary

- 18th Evening arrival at Kajanni followed by drive to WBB Lodge in the rain arriving mid-evening.
19th Most of day catching up on sleep ahead of the first night in the hide with a short walk along the access road. Headed to the hides at 1630 and stayed until 0800 the following morning.
20th Short time in bird hide near lodge then catching up on sleep. Returned to hide at 1700.
21st Left hide at 0800 and returned to lodge for breakfast. Back in hide at 1000 where stayed until 0800 on 22nd.
22nd Returned to lodge for breakfast before returning to Kajaani stopping several times to bird on route.

Mammals



- Brown Bear** 19th The first bear of the night arrived quite early at 1820 but was incredibly nervous only staying around for 5-10 minutes. What appeared to be the same bear reappeared at 2240 and an apparently smaller bear appeared at 2315 in the gathering gloom.
20th Three sightings for up to 15 minutes at 1912, 2112 and 2200. At least two of the sightings were the nervous individual from the previous night. The third appeared to be a second individual.
21st Having elected to return to the hide during the day a new bear arrived at c.1230 and performed superbly both at the bait and in the forest just beyond the clearing feeding on vegetation and apparently rooting around for food as well. It frequently chased off ravens and was on view for almost two hours. The same individual re-appeared for about 20 minutes at 1933 at the same time a second bear entered the forest but only reappeared after the first bear left.
- Wolverine** 20th There had been no sightings for over a week when I arrived but on the 20th Ari, the owner, found lots of fresh tracks as he was baiting. Dinner was frustratingly late that evening and as we walked down to the hides there was a Wolverine out on the bait. It was on view for about a minute and the views through binoculars were good. Unfortunately the two staff from the lodge decided to go straight to the hides rather than wait for the Wolverine to leave and in doing so flushed it. Surprise, surprise it did not return. Ari had already said that they tend to collect food go and stash it and then return and had we been patient I suspect that this would have done the same. Sadly the other visitors were all photographers only interested in getting to the hides, hence it was flushed. To say that I was ***** off is an under-statement. One of the photographers thought that he may have seen one distantly for a few seconds at 0600 on the 22nd.

Red Squirrel Not seen personally but seen several times around the lodge and bird hide while I was there.

Bank Vole On the second night two Dutch photographers in hide one reported 'mice' disturbing them all night and the lodge staff removed a nest and trapped one the following morning. I was in the hide the following night and two traps that had been left set contained dead Bank Voles on my arrival.

Birds

Given the early visit and the fact that Steve Morgan had only encountered 11 species in 5 days I had expected a paucity of birds but actually saw or heard over 30 species including.

Whooper Swan One on a roadside lake near Kajaani.
Goosander Seen at two river stops along route N89 to WBB.
Goldeneye Seen on most open water.
Goshawk A fabulous young male hunting ravens outside the hide for over 30 minutes on the 21st. It would perch up chase a raven for up to a minute and then perch for a few minutes before repeating the routine.
Merlin One along the 89 on the return drive to Kajaani.
Crane Five over the lodge, others heard. Two in roadside wetlands along the 89 and another soaring over the road.
Capercaillie A female from the hide on the 22nd and a male along the access road on my way out.
Black Grouse Two females from the hides on the 19th.
Black Woodpecker Heard daily but unfortunately not seen.
Waxwing Heard over the hides on the 22nd but unfortunately not seen.
Crossbill By the lodge on the 20th.
Brambling On route back to Kajaani