

Tour Report Boreal Predators Photography 15 - 21 July 2024

Brown bear



Grey wolf



Wolverine



Brown bear



Compiled by Bret Charman

Day 1:**Monday 15 July 2024**

Fly to Oulu (via Helsinki); transfer to Kuikka

The group were flying from either London Heathrow or Manchester. We all met at the gate in Helsinki for our onward flight to Oulu. We enjoyed a smooth flight and arrived in Oulu without any issues. All our bags arrived and we were soon aboard the bus to Kuikka Base Camp. The journey should have taken around four hours, but due to some traffic and large, slow moving vehicles, it took us closer to five hours to reach the lodge.

I showed everyone to their rooms and then made my way to my room, agreeing to meet for breakfast in the morning.

Day 2:**Tuesday 16 July 2024**

Day at Kuikka/Overnight in hides

We awoke to our first day at Kuikka and the woodland birds were busy on the feeders, while swallows and house martens were busy feeding and returning to their nests under the roof. The group met for breakfast in the dining area, and once everyone was done, I gave a bit of an introduction to hide etiquette and what to expect photographing over the next four nights, giving some tips on settings and showing my imagery from previous tours.

With the introductions completed, and with long nights ahead in the hides, we spent much of the rest of the day relaxing and getting our kit ready. We agreed to meet up for the afternoon meal at 4pm, where we had the chance to make sandwiches and fill thermos flasks for the all-night hide session.

After an excellent meal, and our picnics all packed, we grabbed our gear and met up out the front of the lodge. We loaded our bags into the van and I drove us 10-15 minutes to the hides at Paradise. The hides here overlook a large expanse of marsh and open grassland, flanked on all sides by pine forest. The weather was a little changeable with the odd short and sharp shower and then gorgeous sunshine. In order to attract the apex predators in front of the hides, a reindeer carcass had been left out in the open, and we just had to hope the wildlife would cooperate.

Once we were settled into the hides, the ravens returned and a black kite was swirling overhead. Hooded crows and even magpies joined in, landing close to the carcass hoping for an easy meal. Other birds seen from the hides included barn swallow, common gull, lesser black-backed (Baltic) gull and even a juvenile cuckoo perched high in a tree.

All was pretty quiet until just after 9pm when a lone wolf decided to make an appearance. It came from the left hand side, at quite a distance – around 150-200 yards – and started to walk across the open grassland right out in front of the hides. The light was magical and we were hoping he would work his way closer to the hides. Alas, on this occasion the wolf wasn't going to play ball. Instead, he carried on walking to the right, sticking at roughly the same distance from the hides. He did stop a couple of times and allowed everyone in the group to get a nice environmental shot in the warm light of the evening sun. Within five minutes of his arrival he was heading off into the forest to the right, and that would be the last we would see of him on this particular night in the hides.

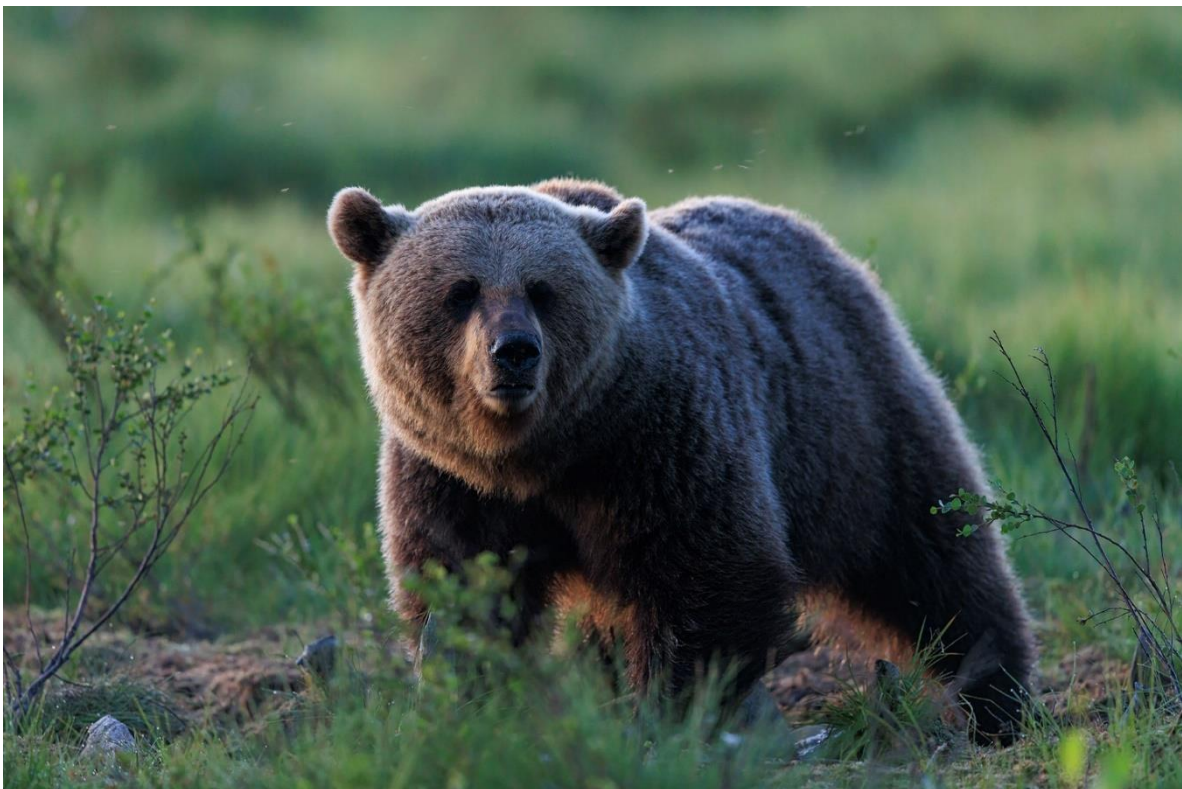
At 11.15pm a bit of magic happened. Something that, unfortunately, we weren't able to photograph, but it's always something to remember. A wolf, somewhere off to the left of the hides was howling. It made repeated, unanswered calls. The sound of a wolf howling in the remote boreal forest is absolutely incredible. The hairs on the back of your neck stand up on end and you can feel the adrenaline course through your veins. It seems to elicit a primeval feeling deep inside that is hard to match. What a remarkable experience.

Find out more about our [Boreal Predators Photography](#) trip or [contact us](#)

01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com www.wildlifeworldwide.com



At 11.50pm, a large male bear and tiny female came into view from the left hand side. The diminutive female walked right by the hides, providing some great close-up portraits, while the male stayed a little further back. The couple only stayed for around five minutes before heading off to the right and out of view.



A dusky gloom fell over the forest and the clearing that lay before us. As the temperature dropped, a mist

Find out more about our [Boreal Predators Photography](#) trip or [contact us](#)
01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com www.wildlifeworldwide.com

started to form over the long grass, building up as the sun started to rise again. Unfortunately, it was a very quiet night (unusually so) in Paradise, and the rest of the morning was eerily quiet. As these are wild animals and they roam huge distances, it is not unusual to have quieter nights, but it was a shame nonetheless.

We were packed up and ready to go by 7.45am. With everyone ready to go, we walked up to the van and I drove us the short distance back to Kuikka. Upon arrival, we had time to unload our bags and take everything back to our rooms, before we reconvened for breakfast in the dining room. After another hearty meal, it was time to head to our rooms and try to catch up on some much-needed sleep.

Day 3:

Wednesday 17 July 2024

Day at Kuikka/Overnight in hides

With most of the group able to catch up on a little sleep, we met up in the dining room once again for our afternoon meal. Today it was a little earlier, at 3pm, as the Finnish Agriculture and Forestry Minister was visiting Kuikka. I had the honour of meeting her and explaining about how I lead multiple tours each year and the economic benefit that these iconic mammals can have for this remote part of Finland. Once my adhoc political duties were completed, I met the group outside by the van and we were soon on our way to the hides once again. Tonight we were all going to be based at Lake – where we hoped to enjoy sightings of all three target species, maybe even with reflections on the water.

As we drove up to the location of the hides, a white-tailed eagle was soaring overhead, while around the hides there was also a wealth of birdlife. From the hides we enjoyed views of white wagtail, Baltic, common and black-headed gull, as well as a family of great-spotted woodpecker. Our first mammal sighting appeared at 7.45pm – a couple of bears – but they didn't hang around and disappeared back into the forest. The same two bears reappeared at 8.40pm and put on quite a show for us with the most remarkable reflections.



Find out more about our [Boreal Predators Photography](#) trip or [contact us](#)

01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com www.wildlifeworldwide.com

The bears were the same amorous couple we had seen the night before, but the female was much more interested in the food on offer than the male who was following her every move. Everyone was able to capture a wonderful portfolio of imagery in the soft evening light and the mirror-like quality of the reflections.



As well as capturing beautifully atmospheric images of the bears, we were also treated to a fair bit of interaction between the two of them. The male kept on making advances on the petite female, but she wasn't having any of it and she kept batting him off each time he made an approach. With the lower light levels, it was a little tricky to capture the faster movements, but when they slowed down we were treated to some great imagery. The two bears stayed around for 20 minutes or so, before disappearing into the surrounding trees.

At just after 9.40pm, two new bears appeared, but were incredibly nervous and didn't hang around for too long. It was a mother with a mature cub, and despite the short showing, there was time to capture some images as they walked through the area on the other side of the lake. They were likely nervous due to the presence of the male and female bear that had been in the area earlier on, as well as the fact that this wasn't overly far from where the wolves were thought to be denning.

The young bear was particularly nervous and didn't come overly close, but being able to photograph it in the lush environment made for some fabulous imagery. The pair moved around on the far side of lake, before eventually making their approach. It was short-lived. The female, who was leading the way suddenly stopped and turned, running off at speed to the 'safety' of the forest, with the cub following close at her heels. I assumed the other bears must have been coming back, but it seemed to be a false alarm. Although by now, the bears that had run off were probably already closing in on the Russian border.



Find out more about our [Boreal Predators Photography](#) trip or [contact us](#)

01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com www.wildlifeworldwide.com

All went quiet for a couple of hours, when we noticed some movement. The mother and mature cub were back at 11.30pm and a little more confident. It seemed like the darker conditions, which made photography incredibly challenging, were helping them feel more relaxed.



The sun had now dropped right below the horizon, but there was a warm pink glow filling the sky. It made for some beautiful soft light, but it certainly made things challenging, photographically speaking. After around ten minutes feeding in front of the hides, both bears made a quick exit off to one side. Both the large male and small female were back, yet again, and headed straight in front the hides, searching for some food. They wandered to and fro for quite sometime, with her repeatedly batting away his affections. It seemed like she wasn't at all interested.

They moved to the left handside, almost out of sight, and then stopped. It was very difficult to see them, but I suddenly realised that they were busy rekindling the romance that had seemingly petered out earlier in the evening. They mated for around 15 minutes, before eventually walking into the forest and out of sight.

As things had quietened down and we'd had over an hour without any action, a wolverine decided to make an appearance. By now, the light levels had fallen to a real gloom and photography was next to impossible. It moved around across the far side of lake and even went for a swim, but we weren't able to really capture the moment.

The wolverine left after only five minutes and all was quiet, even after the sun rose and the light improved. We didn't have any more visits over the course of the morning and so we decided to head back to Kuikka for breakfast. As per the day before, we had time to drop off our bags and camera gear, before meeting up in the dining room for tea, coffee and breakfast. With two full-nights now in the hides, everyone was keen to head to bed and catch up on some sleep.

Day 4:

Day at Kuikka/Overnight in hides

Thursday 18 July 2024

Having managed to enjoy some sleep, freshen up and back up photos, we met up in the dining room for our afternoon meal. The food is always simple but tasty, traditional Finnish options with salads, alongside pastries and fruit for dessert. The group were now in the swing of things and had all their sandwiches and thermos flasks at the ready before they'd even sat down to eat.

Tonight, we would be back in paradise, hoping for better luck. And so we met up outside and loaded up the van with everyone's camera gear. We were soon on our way for another night in Paradise. Upon arriving, everyone unloaded their things from the van and I then drove up to the parking area, before returning to the hides.

At just before 6pm, a white-tailed eagle flew in, scaring off all the ravens on the carcass. A second eagle soon made an appearance, but neither of them came particularly close. After a little while, one of the eagles flew off and the other dropped down into the forest below, before reappearing once again. All stayed pretty quiet until 8.40pm when the amorous bears decided to make another appearance for us. They only stayed for around 10 minutes before heading out of sight to the left of Paradise.

Find out more about our [Boreal Predators Photography](#) trip or [contact us](#)

01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com www.wildlifeworldwide.com



It remained very quiet for another couple of hours, when a red fox made an appearance. It was around 300 yards away from the hides, working its way from one side of the clearing to the other. It never came any closer and, bizarrely, this is probably a rarer sight than any of the other mammals in the area. After about ten minutes, the two mating bears reappeared. It was very, very gloomy and photography was particularly challenging, but they walked right in front of the hides. They didn't stop there though. They decided to participate in some x-rated behaviour right in front of us – it was hard to miss. Having spent around 25 minutes in front of the hides, the pair eventually moved on and wandered out of view.

At midnight, as the light levels were particularly low, the couple made yet another appearance. Although male was intent on following the female's every move, she was much more interested in eating the salmon scraps. It wasn't long before they were on their way again, disappearing out of view. They were back again for another brief moment just after 1am. Within minutes they had gone again.

Just before 2am we had an unexpected visitor as a wolverine made an appearance right in front of the hides. It didn't hang around and was soon off the way it had come from. We hoped it may yet make another appearance, but it seemed the wolverine didn't get the memo. Just to make sure everyone was awake, the bears decided to make a final, elongated appearance between 2.10am and 2.30am. This time they came incredibly close, spoiling us with incredible views, but maybe not the best images.

The best was yet to come. Just after 5am, three wolves trotted into view from the right handside (the direction in which they typically den). To start with, they came through at speed, not really allowing us to capture anything spectacular. However, they quickly returned and headed to the carcass. They picked at scraps from around the carcass, moving off with bits of meat and bones, before they started to explore the area directly in



Find out more about our [Boreal Predators Photography](#) trip or [contact us](#)

01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com www.wildlifeworldwide.com



front of the hides.

Unfortunately, the light was really poor as there was a constant drizzle and a haze in the air because of it. They stuck around for over an hour, moving around and providing the group with some challenging but rewarding photographing opportunities. The female was the first to leave, heading off to the left, before being joined by the alpha male. It wasn't long before the other male was soon on his way too.

Within a few minutes, the female came charging in toward the carcass, driving off all the ravens which were busy feeding. Meanwhile, a black kite was circling overhead in search of an easy meal. The female didn't linger and was soon on the move again, while both males were now back and stayed a little longer. They were soon on their way too and we were delighted with another action-packed night. Our final highlight was a white-tailed eagle which decided to make an appearance around 6.30am.

After such a busy night, we packed up our gear and were soon in the van, heading back to Kuikka for breakfast and another much-needed sleep.

Day 5:

Friday 19 July 2024

Day at Kuikka/Overnight in hides

With a morning resting or sleeping, we met back up in the dining area for some editing and digital darkroom workflow tips and tricks. This was followed by another delicious afternoon meal and the chance to make our sandwiches and fill our thermos flasks.

Tonight, we were heading back to Lake. The sightings here seemed to be more reliable than in forest and so I hoped it would give us the best chance to see and photograph a mix of species. It was also really overcast and heavy downpours were passing through, so it was better to be out in the open than in the darker patch of forest. We would be leaving the hides at midnight tonight as we had a long day of travel the following day.

Things started off quite slowly and it seemed like we may have not have lady luck on our side. We had to make do with watching the birds as they came and went, including black kite, raven, hooded crow and magpie, as well as Baltic, common and herring gull. There was also a family of white wagtails feeding on the lake edge, and great-spotted woodpeckers flitting from tree to tree. It was completely quiet on the mammal front until just before 10pm.

Finally, there was some movement on the ground. A wolverine worked its way across the grass-covered area on the other side of lake, slowly making its way closer. It spent around 20 minutes working its way along the other side of the lake, searching for food and even darting up a tree at one point. It then disappeared off to the right, before coming back a few minutes later. This time it went for a swim right in front of the hides – seemingly just for the fun of it. It hauled itself back out, shaking itself off before heading out of sight once again. This time it didn't return, but we'd been treated to some excellent views (despite the tricky photography opportunities).

Find out more about our [Boreal Predators Photography](#) trip or [contact us](#)

01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com www.wildlifeworldwide.com



For around 20 minutes, the forest was still, and only the sound of the rain could be heard. Then there was some movement across the lake, a young bear strolled into view and came to the lake. It was very gloomy, and photography was particularly challenging, but the bear put on quite a show for around half an hour. He eventually melted away into the forest at around 11.10pm and that was the last of our sightings in this stunning wilderness area.

We packed up our things and departed the hides around midnight, doing our best to avoid a torrential downpour. It was almost dark as we drove back through the forest to Kuikka and we all said goodnight. We would be able to get a full night's sleep before meeting up for breakfast the following morning.

Day 6:

Saturday 20 July 2024

Kuikka to Oulu; fly to Helsinki

Waking up to a brighter and warmer day, we met up for breakfast at 9am. Due to the unusual timing of the flights from Oulu, we had the morning to relax in the grounds of Kuikka, enjoying the peace and quiet of the birdlife that's always around.

The team at the lodge prepared a lunch for us at 1pm and we were all packed and ready for the the four hour drive across central Finland to Oulu. Today the drive was very straight forward (no over-sized HGVs blocking the road) and as we were making good time, we took the opportunity to stop and grab a coffee and some food for the evening.

Upon arrival at Oulu airport, we discovered that there was a delay for our flight to Helsinki and we therefore didn't arrive at our airport hotel until after midnight. With some of the group flying out early, and some flying out later, we said our goodbyes.

Find out more about our [Boreal Predators Photography](#) trip or [contact us](#)

01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com www.wildlifeworldwide.com

Day 7:**Sunday 21 July 2024****Flight back to London**

For those of us flying back to London Heathrow on the same flight, we met in the hotel restaurant for breakfast. With breakfast finished, we grabbed our hand luggage (our large bags had been checked all the way through) and made the short journey to the airport. There was no need to check in, so we proceeded straight through security and spent a couple of hours relaxing in the comfort of the airport. Our flight departed pretty much on time and we enjoyed a smooth flight back to London Heathrow.

There were no queues at immigration and we were soon waiting in the baggage reclaim hall, where it took some time for our bags to materialise. We all said our goodbyes, making our respective journeys home.

Sign up to our e-news

Sign up to our e-news to find out more about our tours, events, late availability, offers and tour reports at <https://www.wildlifeworldwide.com/subscribe>

Find out more about our [Boreal Predators Photography](#) trip or [contact us](#)

01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com www.wildlifeworldwide.com

Checklist for Boreal Predators Photography



	Common Name	Scientific Name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6
	BIRDS							
1	White-tailed eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>		✓				
2	Black-headed gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
3	Herring gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>					✓	
4	Lesser black-backed (Baltic) gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
5	Common gull	<i>Larus canus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
6	Common cuckoo	<i>Cuculus cuculus</i>		✓				
7	Common swift	<i>Apus apus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
8	Barn swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
9	House martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
10	Great spotted woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
11	White wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
12	Fieldfare	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
13	Spotted flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓
14	Pied flycatcher	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
15	Eurasian magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
16	Hooded crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
17	Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
18	Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	MAMMALS							
1	Red squirrel	<i>Sciurus vulgaris</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
2	Mountain hare	<i>Lepus timidus</i>						✓
3	Wolverine	<i>Gulo gulo</i>			✓	✓	✓	

Find out more about our [Boreal Predators Photography](#) trip or [contact us](#)
 01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com www.wildlifeworldwide.com

4	Brown bear	<i>Ursus arctos</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
5	Grey wolf	<i>Canis lupus</i>		✓		✓		

Find out more about our [Boreal Predators Photography trip](#) or [contact us](#)
01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com www.wildlifeworldwide.com