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Tour Report
Boreal Predators Photography in Summer
14 – 19 July 2026

Brown bear



Grey wolf



Grey wolves



Brown bear



Compiled by Bret Charman

Tuesday 14 July 2026

Day 1:
Fly London to Helsinki; fly Helsinki to Kajaani; transfer to Kuikka

The group flight from London Heathrow to Helsinki was delayed slightly, but we made up much of the time in the air and landed in Helsinki just behind schedule. We had a couple of hours to navigate through Helsinki Airport, passing quickly through passport control, before crossing the airport to the gate for our domestic flight to Kajaani.

Our flight to Kajaani left on time, and we enjoyed a smooth flight north. Upon our arrival, I met with our local agents, who had driven the minibus to the airport so I could drive east to Kuikka. Our luggage was soon with us, and we loaded up the van before driving through Kajaani, where we made a stop at a supermarket. As we would be arriving late in Kuikka, it meant that we could grab some food and drinks for dinner, while people could also grab some snacks if they needed anything for the coming nights in the hides.

Making good time, we arrived at Kuikka just after 10 pm, where we unloaded the luggage and got everyone settled into the accommodation. We had a relaxing day the next day, so once everyone was settled, we said goodnight and caught up on some rest before our overnight hide sessions over the coming days.

Wednesday 15 July 2026

Day 2:
Kuikka

We awoke to a fine day at Kuikka, with the sun shining and a very pleasant temperature, particularly after escaping another heatwave in the UK. The group met in the dining room for breakfast at 9 am, where there was quite a crowd. There were another couple of groups there, and so it was a little busy to start with. However, one group finished up as we settled down to our first meal together.

After breakfast, I went through what to expect from our time in the hides, while also showing some images from trips in previous years, giving everyone some ideas on composition, settings and opportunities. There were a few hours of downtime during the middle of the day before our afternoon meal at 4 pm. It gave those members of the group that were interested some time to watch and photograph the woodland birds visiting the feeders out the front of the lodge.

We enjoyed a hearty Finnish meal together, before making our sandwiches and preparing hot drinks in the thermoses provided. Knowing you're heading into the hides for up to 14 hours, it's important that everyone packs enough food and drink for the evening ahead. I had planned for us to head to Paradise this evening, a large open area which offers the chance to see all three of our target species, hoping to give everyone the best start possible to our time in these remote boreal forests.

At 5 pm, with everyone's camera gear and supplies loaded into the van, we set off along the gravel roads, passing by lakes and meadows, as well as a sea of trees. Upon our arrival at Paradise, unloading ourselves and our gear from the vehicle, there was already a large bear on the far side of the clearing. It must have heard the engine noise and was watching to see what opportunities might present themselves. The group settled into their positions, getting their tripod heads set up and the cameras placed through the canvas covers. The bear had now disappeared, likely pushed off by everyone filing into the hides. However, before we could even finish setting ourselves up, a wolf had appeared on the tree line. Within seconds, it was on the move, heading to the right and getting much closer to the hides. The next 45 minutes flew by; not only did we have the wolf, but we also had the large bear come out in front of the hides too.

It was incredible to see these two large predators as they moved around in front of the hides. The group were delighted. What a remarkable start.



It was incredible how close the young female wolf came to the hides, and to the bear too.



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While the group were busy focussing their efforts on the spectacle going on right in front of them, I kept an eye out to see what else might be coming into view. It was then that I spotted the alpha pair of wolves, coming out of the forest and into the clearing. The young female wolf also spotted their approach and went over to them. Being completely submissive, she greeted the dominant wolves, while the bear made a hasty exit.

All the while, the light was constantly changing, and it meant that we were able to capture a spectacular array of imagery. In fact, it was among the most productive sessions I have ever experienced in these hides (and that is saying something). It was now that the younger wolf disappeared into the forest, following the male, while the alpha female patrolled right in front of the hides, searching for any food she could find.



After about an hour in the hides, it seemed as if all was quiet. The three wolves were out of sight, and except for a brief glimpse of a bear, there was no sign of them either. Maybe we had already enjoyed the peak of the activity. Not that we could complain. Everyone was already awash with stunning images of these truly

stunning mammals. It never ceases to amaze me, even after ten years visiting this remarkable place, how close you can get to some of Europe's most elusive wildlife. It was a much quieter period until just before 7 pm; there was already a bear sitting at the edge of the trees when the wolves reappeared. They ran in and chased the ravens off the carcass, but were soon out of sight once again. It was after this that the bear came in to feed from the carcass, tearing chunks of meat off. The whole time he fed, he was completely on his own. He was able to feed in peace, without the constant grief the wolves could have presented had they decided to cause a scene. Having seemingly had his fill, the large male bear started to wander off towards the trees. It was now that the alpha male and the young female came charging in once again, scaring the ravens off the carcass.





They fed for a little while before a different, younger male bear made an appearance and headed straight for the carcass. The two wolves tried, in vain, to drive the bear off, but he was surprisingly resilient and didn't give in to their harrying. Instead, they settled down nearby and watched him as he gorged himself. Just before 8 pm, though, the alpha female turned up once more. With three wolves, this was sure to change the balance. However, to my astonishment, and probably the wolves', the bear stood his ground and did not take one step back. They simply sat down, before eventually building up the courage to drive him off.



The wolves would periodically drive off the ravens when there were too many for their liking, while the alpha male continued to antagonise the bear, providing us with some fantastic skirmishes. For the next two hours of good light, we had nearly continuous action, with bears and wolves coming back in front of the hides, chasing each other, and providing us with near-endless photographic opportunities. You could tell you had been spoilt when the group stop photographing and just absorbing everything that is going on in front of them. What an exceptional evening we had been treated to!





We really couldn't have had better opportunities afforded to us, while the variety was also what made it all so special. There was constant action with battles between wolves and bears, close-up portrait opportunities and animals in the environment. It really was as close to a perfect evening as you could have. What's more, throughout we enjoyed soft, good-quality light.



The light changes throughout the evening, from those rich, warmer tones to the soft bluish tones once the sun had set behind the trees. All in all, the group had been blessed, and they reaped their rewards.

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For me, though, the more I photograph here, the more I love the simple elegance of a wolf in this magical, ethereal landscape. There's something so powerful about seeing a wolf in the wild, and nowhere else in the world has so far come close to this unique experience.



By 10.30 pm, the light was fading, but that didn't mean the activity dwindled. Although the lack of light made the photography challenging, we had almost continuous activity until 11 pm, with sporadic activity until around 2 am. Perhaps now, finally, I could get a little rest, but that idea was rudely interrupted when a wolverine decided to make an appearance in the mist.

The temperature had plummeted, and a mist had formed across Paradise. The wolverine knew it was like a ghost in the forest, using the mist to its advantage. Like a ghost, it disappeared almost as soon as it had bounded into view. Luckily for us, the wolverine came back (without much regularity) on and off until just before 4 am and we were able to capture some distant images of this energetic, huge mustelid.

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We left the hides at around 7.30 am, driving the 15 minutes back to camp. After a night I think many of us will remember for years to come, we were able to enjoy a little downtime before breakfast.

Thursday 16 July 2026

Day 3:
Kuikka

We met up for breakfast at 9 am in the dining room, enjoying a hot meal in the warmth of the lodge. It had been a surprisingly cold night. Once everyone had their fill, after what was a largely sleepless night, we headed to our rooms to catch up on some much-needed sleep. We met up again in the dining room just before 4 pm, having had time to freshen up after some sleep. The next few days would continue to follow the same routine. We enjoyed another hearty dinner, made our sandwiches and prepared our hot drinks, before loading everything into the van. At 5 pm, we set off once again, but this time we would be spending the night at the lake.

The hides here were much smaller, so we spread the group out across four hides on one side of the lake. It was a beautiful evening, with no wind forecast later on. This would hopefully mean that we would be rewarded with striking reflections of the wildlife on the water's edge. Everybody was set up and in position before 5.30 pm, but the wildlife was noticeably absent for the first couple of hours. After the chaos and excitement of last night, this was actually quite welcome, and it gave everyone time to settle in.

At just after 8 pm, a large male bear appeared on the far side of the lake, soon followed by a much smaller bear. However, the smaller bear soon disappeared, and it was the large male who put on quite the show for everyone.



The reflections were absolutely amazing, and the bear was the perfect subject. He searched high and low for any food, quite literally, as he stood up on his hind legs, went for a swim and so much more. We could

not have asked for a more cooperative individual, and everyone was rewarded with some magical moments.





With the light constantly changing, and with the bear always on the move, the photographic opportunities were nearly limitless. Once again, the only limitations were the lenses and the individuals' creative approach.



After about an hour, the large bear wandered off into the forest from whence it came. We then had a bit of a wait before the bear encounter. A younger individual showed up at around 9.40 pm; it was a much more nervous individual, and it didn't hang around too long. Another bear appeared not long after, but by now the light levels had started to drop. Then the big old male with the broken jaw turned up at 10.40 pm. He worked his way along the lakeshore, searching for food and occasionally posing with a near-perfect reflection. For more than ten minutes, the bear continued to provide us with photographic opportunities, before he, too, disappeared back into the forest.



The activity continued, even as the light faded away, with several different bears showing until midnight.



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It was quiet until just before 1 am, when suddenly a low dark shape appeared on the far shore. It was a wolverine! Unfortunately, the light now was low and it was incredibly challenging to capture anything of any quality. These were most definitely going to be record shots. The highlight was undoubtedly when it decided to climb several different trees. I always describe these fascinating and elusive mammals by saying that they suffer from severe ADHD. Quite simply, they don't stay still for too long. It hung around for about half an hour, putting on quite the show and approaching the hides at either end. It was still incredibly challenging for photography, but it was wonderful to see it go about its business. It was well and truly the 'blue hour'.



The stillness of the elongated 'dusk' is always a magical time. No wind, no bird song, no noises of any sort are the things that make it such an intriguing time to be in the forest. After the wolverine had finally disappeared, all was quiet at Lake for around another hour. It was then that I went out and spread the last of the salmon scraps around, just as the light was starting to improve.

I'd only been back in the hide for around a minute when there was movement on the left side. There was a young bear, walking with purpose, clearly on the trail of the fresh morsels of food offered to it. It did an incredible job of working its way from tree to tree, checking for any potential food, while also hoovering up anything on the floor. It just goes to show how good its sense of smell is.

We were treated to some fabulous moments as the bear hoovered up everything that was left. Once it was sure there was nothing left, it quickly departed, melting away into the trees in silence.



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At 7.30 am, having had hours without any sign of any of the three predators, we called it a night and headed back to Kuikka.

Friday 17 July 2026

Day 4:
Kuikka

Having had a little time to unpack our things and relax after another action-packed night in the hide, it was time for breakfast at 9 am in the dining area. So far, we had been treated to two very different but exceptional nights. Once everyone had their fill, it was time to head to our rooms and sleep. Our afternoon followed the same routine as the previous days. I parked up the minibus outside the lodge so that we could head off to the hides at 5 pm. Tonight, we would be in Forest.

With the group spread out across multiple hides, we tried to get everyone settled in as quickly as possible. It wasn't long before we had our first bear. A large male bear arrived at around 6.20 pm and we had almost constant activity for the next five hours. Much of the behaviour was the same, but it was great to capture a number of different bears (at least five individuals). The bears were all the same individuals we had already encountered, but to capture them among the dense trees of the forest was rewarding. The lighting here is always the most challenging, and after 10 pm, it is almost impossible to capture anything with a telephoto lens.



The two big males were undoubtedly the most confident, coming right up to the hides. Sometimes these individuals came to within only a couple of feet. This was absolutely incredible, and you could see every single hair, while you could hear every breath they took too. It doesn't matter how many times you come here; getting this close to a 400-kg-plus bear is incredibly special.



This is typically the best of the three locations for traditional portraits, but with the lower light levels and closer distances, it is easy here to use a shorter telephoto lens, such as a 70–200mm.





The group were busy enjoying the bears, even when the light levels really dropped to near darkness at around 11 pm. The last bear moved off around 1.20 am, and there was no activity for the rest of the morning. With that in mind, we decided it was time to head off early again and enjoy some downtime at the lodge before breakfast.

Saturday 18 July 2026

Day 5:
Kuikka

Our final full day at Kuikka, and we followed our usual routine. Breakfast was at 9 am, and it was then time to catch up with some sleep before our early dinner at 4 pm. Once everyone had made their sandwiches and prepared their hot drinks, we headed for Paradise at 5 pm. We had heard from other visitors that it had been a quiet couple of nights, and so we hoped we might be lucky once again.

Settling into two different hides, a large male bear wandered into view almost immediately. What we hadn't noticed was that the young female wolf we had seen on the first night had wandered from behind the hides and was now right in front of us.



The wolf was less than 20 yards away, providing everyone with some exceptional photography opportunities. It seemed we had struck the jackpot once again, timing our session at Paradise to perfection. With a long day's journey back home the following day, we had provisionally made a plan to leave the hides at around 11 pm tonight, and so everyone was thankful to get some action while the light was still favourable.

The forecast this evening was meant to be wet (which can make for some great photography), but everyone fired off shots with the wolf and the bear being incredibly cooperative. They both hung around right in front of the hides. We also had a white-tailed eagle flying around, alongside a black kite. It was action stations all over, with near-endless photography to enjoy of these stunning species. The opportunity to capture behaviour, environmental images and close-up portraits was near constant, with the wolf and the bear completely relaxed, both with one another, and our presence in the hides.

After about an hour of constant activity, both the bear and the wolf had wandered off, leaving us to finally catch our breath.





There was a fair bit of toing and froing in front of the hides for the next hour or so, with different wolves and bears appearing and disappearing once again. There seemed to be a lot of nerves, and none of the wildlife was settling on the carcass, but it still rewarded the group with a wealth of excellent photography opportunities. It was sometimes actually too busy, not knowing where to look and being spoilt with too much choice. Everyone inevitably missed some shots as they focussed on the other individual, but that means every member of the group comes away with their own unique images. That's what is great about these hides and the opportunities afforded to us.







All hell broke loose at around 7.30 pm when wolves and bears came flying into Paradise from the right-hand side. Wolves were chasing bears, and bears were heading to the carcass as a thunderstorm rumbled overhead. There were now three bears and two wolves in front of the hides. Madness. This was something I had never encountered before in all the years I have been visiting. You often see wolves and bears together, but not in this density. It was around this time that the rain started to fall, and it meant business.



Not long after this, the two younger bears (which seemed to be siblings) headed off into the far trees, seemingly keeping their distance from the wolves. For the next hour or so, there was nearly constant activity. Whether it was wolves or bears, we were rewarded with some absolutely spectacular photography, including portraits and stunning environmental shots. This is what draws people back to Finland. Where else in the world can you see wolves and bears, even wolverines, all together at once?

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For me, one of the most memorable moments was when two wolves stood together in the pouring rain.



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The light started to go after 9 pm; with heavy rain clouds overhead, there was almost no light left for photography. However, I just loved looking back at the moments when the young wolf came right in front of the hide. What another fabulous session!



At around 10.20 pm, the wolves and the bears had disappeared into the forest. Seemingly, the rain had got to the point where they had had enough. They moved into the trees and out of sight. It was now that I made the decision to leave. It was too dark for photography now, and with a lull in activity, it was the perfect time to head back to Kuikka and enjoy a proper night's sleep.

Sunday 19 July 2026

Day 6:
Kuikka to Kuopio; fly to Helsinki and on to UK

With a drive south to Kuopio to catch our lunchtime flight to Helsinki, we had a slightly earlier breakfast lined up for 8.30 am. We had everybody's luggage loaded into the minibus before sitting down for a final hearty breakfast in the dining room. Once everyone was ready, we climbed aboard and set off on the three-hour journey to Kuopio. Having enjoyed a smooth journey, we arrived in Kuopio at the perfect time to check in for our flight to Helsinki. There was a slight delay, but nothing to affect our transfer through Helsinki Airport. It was here that the group split, with some people staying in Helsinki, another flying on to the Netherlands, while the rest of us were on the afternoon flight back to the UK. We had around an hour and a half of transfer time, but the London flight also ended up having a slight delay. The flight back to the UK was otherwise very smooth, and except for a slight delay with our luggage, we made our way out of Heathrow quickly. It was here we all said goodbye and made our respective journeys home.

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