

Wise Birding Holidays

Bird and mammal watching tours



FINLAND:

Wolverines, Bears & Saimaa Ringed Seals

Monday 16th - Friday 20th May 2022

4 Wise Birding Clients

Leader: John Wright

HIGHLIGHTS OF TRIP

Wolverine: Three different individuals seen over two nights.

Brown Bear: A female with three yearling cubs.

Saimaa Ringed Seal: Eight Seals seen on our boat trip.

Capercaillie: A fantastic male on the road in front of our van.

Hazel Grouse: Another fine male on the road for all to see.



**This wonderful Wolverine was the highlight of the tour
Photo by tour participant Steve White**

Tour Summary

This short break was specifically designed to see Wolverine, Saimaa Ringed Seal and European Brown Bear by spending two nights in purpose built hides, plus a boat trip on Lake Saimaa for the seals. Mid May into early June is the best time to see the seals as that is when they haul out onto small islands to moult.

The weather was rather cloudy with a few short rain showers and was a tad chilly at times. That was until the last two days when the sun shone and it was warm with beautiful blue skies. After what was described by locals as a cold late spring it did then feel as if spring had finally arrived.

Flights from Heathrow to Helsinki and connections to Kuopio airport are regular and from Kuopio it was an easy drive to our hotel at Lieksa.

We saw a total of 7 mammals and 76 species of bird on this tour.

DAY	DATE	ITINERARY
1	Mon 16th May	Arrival Kuopio and drive to Lieksa. Overnight Lieksa
2	Tues 17th May	Morning at Patvinsuo NP and afternoon / evening Wolverines. Overnight Wolverine Hide
3	Weds 18th May	Breakfast at Lieksa Hotel followed by much needed sleep! After lunch travel to Wolverine hides for fa 2nd night. Overnight Wolverine Hide
4	Thur 19th May	Final morning at Keljanpuro before travelling to Lake Saimaa. Afternoon boat trip for Ringed Seals. Overnight Lake Saimaa
5	Fri 20th May	Travel to Kuopio for return flight home.

Monday 16th May: Arrive Kuopio

After a quick connecting flight from Helsinki to Kuopio we arrived in the small and friendly airport of Kuopio. Picked up our luggage, collected our VW People Carrier and set off for Lieksa, just under 2.5 hours drive away. During the drive to Lieksa we saw Brown and Mountain Hares, Greylag Geese, Whooper Swans, Common Cranes, plenty of Fieldfares and Ian spotted a male Black Grouse, all in roadside fields.

We arrived at our hotel at 20:15. After our rooms were allocated and we had sorted ourselves out we walked the short distance to a local pizza restaurant. We turned in after our meal as everyone was tired and the evening was dull, damp, cloudy and rather chilly so no one really fancied a wildlife walk.

Tues 17th May: Liesksa, Patvinsuo National Park & Keljanpuro Wildlife Lodge

We met for breakfast at the civilised time of 07.00hrs. Ian had already been out for a pre-breakfast walk and seen Red Squirrel, Pied Flycatcher and a Common Redstart. So, after breakfast we took a short walk following roughly the same route as Ian had taken previously through the local park, by the river and nearby stands of trees and bushes. No further sign of the Red Squirrel or Redstart but did see a couple of Common Terns, single Arctic Tern, Pied Flycatchers, Fieldfares, Lesser Whitethroat and heard a number of Willow Warblers and Chiffchaffs.

After our walk we drove to the nearby Patvinsuo National Park. On the way a female Black Grouse flew up from the side of the dirt track we were driving down. This was trumped by a male Hazel Grouse sitting in the middle of the track ahead of us! It was a bit distant but just pecked about on the dirt track for at least five minutes – excellent! We drove on a short distance and parked up by a sign-posted forest trail. Walking the trail, we found some of the expected bird species of these northern forests. Redpolls, Siskins and Crossbills, though no sight or sound of the more interesting species like Red-breasted Flycatcher or Greenish Warbler. Maybe the late spring put paid to our chances for those species. Moving on and parking near a lake we had a Common Sandpiper, Tree Pipits, heard a Cuckoo and had decent views of a Brambling. It was then time to head back to the hotel for lunch.

After lunch, as we were climbing into the van, an Osprey flew over the hotel. We then made the 30 minute drive to Keljanpuro Wildlife Lodge often just referred to as 'Eero's place' after Eero the owner. This is where the hides are and where we would spend the night. The bird feeders by the lodge had a Red Squirrel feeding on spilt seeds before scuttling off to the nearby trees, plus a pair of Bullfinch, Siskins and a Great Spotted Woodpecker. After a welcome briefing from Sini, we collected our snacks and drinks and took the short walk to the forest hides. Ian and Beth in one hide, myself alone in one and John Bruce and Steve together in another. The area in front of the hides was baited and by 16:15 we were settled in and quiet as the start of the long vigil began. As we waited Ravens, 'Baltic' Lesser Black-backed Gulls, Common Gulls and a male Common Redstart kept us entertained in front of the hides as time ticked by. Everyone was keeping everything crossed for a Wolverine to show.

At 20:40 a large male Wolverine appeared in front of the hides – fantastic! It then continued to appear on and off for over 1.5 hours. Sometimes it was in front of the hides for nearly 10 minutes at a time snuffling about on the ground or climbing up low tree trunks, munching on small items of food or grabbing larger pieces and going off into the woods to cache the food. Nearly always on the move, hardly ever still it was a hyper-active fur ball of energy in its constant search for more of the hidden food. Without doubt living up to its nickname of Glutton. Its final appearance was at 22:15 when it went off into the forest with that distinctive Wolverine lope. At 22:30 a second, slightly smaller, Wolverine made an appearance but unfortunately all it did was lope past the front of all the hides and away into the forest. It then went very quiet and with no animal activity and it was hard not to nod off occasionally. However, it is always wise to sleep with one eye open! Although it never gets totally dark in Finland at this time of year there are a few hours from around 01:00 when it's gloomy and the visibility isn't good. It was during this 'gloom time' at 02:30 when a female Bear arrived on the scene with three yearling cubs in tow. They were rather skittish as they fed around an old pig carcass and were often half obscured behind bushes and trees. They only stayed for about 10 minutes before literally running off into the forest. It's always a treat to see Brown Bears so it was a shame they weren't the best of views. There was no further mammal activity up to the time we exited the hides at 08:00.

Wednesday 18th May Keljanpuro Lodge – Liesksa – Keljanpuro Lodge hide

Driving back to our hotel for breakfast and to catch up on some sleep we saw Goldeneye, Common Merganser, Greenshank, brief views of a female Black Grouse and a Red Squirrel by the side of the road in Liesksa.

After lunch we went back to Eero's place for another all night hide session. This time we were all in one big hide by the side of Uuronlampi Lake, a short drive from the lodge. We were settled, ready and waiting by 15:40. Amazingly we only had to wait 20 minutes when a Wolverine appeared on the scene.

From its size and slight build, we guessed it was probably a female. It came very close to the hide sniffing out food items to eat and occasionally going off to cache some of it. The views were incredibly close! It was around, off and on, for 40 minutes. Unfortunately, after this brilliant start to our hide session we saw no more Wolverines. Surprisingly, no other mammals were seen before we left the hide at 08:00 the next morning. Avian interest from the hide included Common Gulls, 'Baltic' Lesser Black-backed Gulls, Herring Gulls of the Fenno-Scandia variation '*omissus*' with yellowish legs, a super Goshawk doing the occasional fly around, Teal, Wigeon, Common Sandpipers, a very noisy pair of Greenshank and a Common Redstart.



Keljanpuro Lodge by John Wright

Thursday 19th May: Keljanpuro Wildlife Lodge to Lake Saimaa

Following our night in the hide, we had a simple but very tasty breakfast at the lodge. It was a beautiful sunny morning as we set off from the lodge on the three hour drive to Lake Saimaa National Park. On the drive we saw Common Cranes, Whooper Swans, a flock of around 100 Barnacle Geese, Common Terns and a Cuckoo.

We arrived just after 13:00 at our apartments by Lake Saimaa. In the nearby trees a Wryneck and a Wood Warbler were singing, and an Osprey flew over. We chilled out, slept or just mooched about the area for the rest of the afternoon. A short walk from our apartments ensured great views of the Wood Warbler and Wryneck.

We set off on our private boat trip on the lake at 16:00 in search for the seals. It was a beautiful sunny, calm and warm afternoon and so good to be out on the lake you couldn't ask for better. Our boatman told us this was the best day they have had this spring and added that a week ago there was ice in the sheltered bays of the lake! After only 15 minutes out on the lake we saw our first Saimaa Ringed Seal. It was in the water, the engine was cut, and we watched it watching us. After a minute it

ducked under, and we never saw it again. Moving on past the numerous islands dotted around lake we ended up seeing another seven seals, this time, all of them were sunbathing on the islands. Keeping dry out of the water on warm sunny days helps the seals moult their old winter coat. Although the seals were of course the stars of the show it was also the supporting cast that helped make the day so good.

We came across two pairs of summer plumaged Black-throated Loons/Divers and three Osprey nests with the adult birds in attendance. The seals, birds, scenery and gorgeous weather all helped make this boat trip memorable for everyone.

We ended the boat trip at 19:00 and went straight for our evening meal and a couple of celebratory beers.

After dinner everyone turned in feeling rather tired, but I went for a short walk along the road for an hour from around 21:00. I saw a Mountain Hare, a flyover small flock of Golden Plover, a Green Sandpiper and a pair of Woodcock in breeding display flights over the forest clearings.

Friday 20th May: Lake Saimaa – Kuopio Airport

Another sunny and warm day, sadly our final day in Finland.

The Wryneck and Wood Warbler were still singing as well as Willow Warblers. A drive from 07:00 for an hour around the area produced a couple of Whooper Swans and Canada Geese, two pairs of Whinchat and a few Lapwings. At around 09:30 we left our excellent accommodation and headed for Kuopio Airport. We had driven for 25 minutes and hadn't really seen anything of note when on the road right in front of the van stood a male Capercaillie. Luckily, I braked in time! It showed no fear or alarm and after clocking the van for a bit it slowly sauntered off into the trees. A fabulous sighting of this impressive grouse and of course all cameras were packed away!

We arrived at Kuopio Airport in plenty of time for our flight back to London, via Helsinki. The end of an enjoyable and successful trip with all target species seen well.



Lake Saimaa by Chris Townend



**Wolverine at the Lake hide
by tour participant Steve White**





Wolverine Hides by John Wright





Wolverine by John Wright





**Wolverine in the snow at the forest hide
Saimaa Ringed Seal on Lake Saimaa
both by tour participant Steve White**



The following **mammal checklist** mostly follows [the IUCN framework](#) (Red List) but also the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF) www.gbif.org & Handbook of The Mammals of the World.

The **bird checklist** follows the nomenclature and classification from Gill F, D Donsker & P Rasmussen (Eds). 2022. **IOC World Bird List** (v12.1).

The IOC World Bird List complements three other primary world bird lists that differ slightly in their primary goals and taxonomic philosophy, i.e. [The Clements Checklist of the Birds of the World](#), [The Howard & Moore Complete Checklist of the Birds of the World](#), 4th Edition, and [HBW Alive/Bird Life International](#).

Total number of mammals recorded: 7 species

Brown Bear

Ursus arctos

A nervous mother and 3 yearling cubs fed for 10 minutes at 02.30hrs on the 18th May.

Saimaa Ringed Seal

Pusa hispida saimensis

Eight individuals seen very well during the boat trip on Lake Saimaa on the the 19th May. All except one animal were seen out of the water basking on the rocky islets.

Wolverine

Gulo gulo

The clear highlight of the tour with sightings of three different animals.

Two animals from the forest hides between 8.40pm and 10.30pm on the 17th and an animal at the lake hide at 4pm on the 18th.

European Hare

Lepus europaeus

Recorded on the first two days.

Mountain Hare

Lepus timid

Recorded on three days.

Eurasian Red Squirrel

Sciurus vulgaris

Recorded on two days with the best views at Keljanpuro Lodge.

Yellow-necked Mouse

Apodemus flavicollis

Steve saw an animal from the forest hide the 17th.



Total number of birds recorded: 76 species

Canada Goose

Branta canadensis

Small numbers recorded on the 19th and 20th.

Barnacle Goose

Branta leucopsis

A flock of at least 100 birds whilst travelling on the 19th.

Greylag Goose

Anser anser

Small numbers whilst travelling to Lieksa on the 16th.

Whooper Swan

Cygnus cygnus

Flocks of birds whilst travelling on the first and last days.

Eurasian Wigeon

Mareca penelope

Recorded on four days.

Mallard

Anas platyrhynchos

Recorded on four days.

Eurasian Teal

Anas crecca

Recorded on three days.

Common Goldeneye

Bucephala clangula

Recorded on two days.

Common Merganser

Mergus merganser

Recorded on four days.

Hazel Grouse

Tetrastes bonasia

Great views of a fine male sat in the road in Patvinsuo National Park.

Western Capercaillie

Tetrao urogallus

A splendid male bird sat in the road for all to see on the final day.

Black Grouse

Lyrurus tetrix

Recorded on three days with good views of male and female birds.

Common Cuckoo

Cuculus canorus

Heard only on the 17th and then seen don the 19th.

Common Wood Pigeon

Columba palumbus

Recorded daily.

Common Crane

Grus grus

Small flocks recorded on the 16th and the 19th.

Great Crested Grebe

Podiceps cristatus

Recorded on the final day only.

Northern Lapwing

Vanellus vanellus

Recorded on the first and last days.

European Golden Plover

Pluvialis apricaria

Recorded on the 19th only.

Eurasian Woodcock

Scolopax rusticola

Recorded on the 17th and the 19th.

Common Snipe

Recorded on the final day only.

Common Sandpiper

Recorded on the 19th only.

Green Sandpiper

Recorded on the 19th only.

Common Greenshank

Recorded on the 18th and 19th including birds from the Wolverine hides.

Black-headed Gull

Recorded daily.

Common Gull

Recorded daily.

European Herring Gull

Recorded on three days including the “yellow-legged” *omissus* subsp.

Lesser Black-backed Gull

Recorded on three days.

Common Tern

Recorded on four days in suitable habitat.

Arctic Tern

A single bird recorded on the 17th only.

Black-throated Loon / Diver

Two beautiful summer plumaged pairs on the 19th.

Western Osprey

Recorded on two days. At least three nests on Lake Saimaa with adults present.

Eurasian Sparrowhawk

Recorded on one day only.

Northern Goshawk

Recorded on two days.

Common Buzzard

Recorded on two days.

Boreal Owl

Heard only from one of the Wolverine hides on the evening of the 17th.

Eurasian Wryneck

Seen well at Lake Saimaa on two days.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker

Heard only on the 17th.

Great Spotted Woodpecker

Recorded on three days.

Gallinago gallinago

Actitis hypoleucos

Tringa ochropus

Tringa nebularia

Chroicocephalus ridibundus

Larus canus

Larus argentatus

Larus fuscus

Sterna hirundo

Sterna paradisaea

Gavia arctica

Pandion haliaetus

Accipiter nisus

Accipiter gentilis

Buteo buteo

Aegolius funereus

Jynx torquilla

Dryobates minor

Dendrocopos major

Common Kestrel

Recorded on the 16th only.

Eurasian Jay

Recorded on the 19th only.

Eurasian Magpie

Recorded daily.

Western Jackdaw

Recorded on four days.

Hooded Crow

Recorded on four days.

Northern Raven

Recorded on three days.

Eurasian Blue Tit

Recorded on the 17th only.

Great Tit

Recorded on two days.

Woodlark

Recorded on the 18th and 19th.

Eurasian Skylark

Recorded on the last day only.

Barn Swallow

Recorded daily.

Wood Warbler

A singing male at Lake Saimaa on the last two days.

Willow Warbler

Recorded on four days.

Common Chiffchaff

Recorded on the 17th only.

Lesser Whitethroat

Recorded on the 17th only.

Goldcrest

Heard only on the 17th.

Eurasian Wren

Recorded on the 17th only.

Mistle Thrush

Recorded on the 17th only.

Redwing

Recorded on three days.

Falco tinnunculus

Garrulus glandarius

Pica pica

Coloeus monedula

Corvus cornix

Corvus corax

Cyanistes caeruleus

Parus major

Lullula arborea

Alauda arvensis

Hirundo rustica

Phylloscopus sibilatrix

Phylloscopus trochilus

Phylloscopus collybita

Curruca curruca

Regulus regulus

Troglodytes troglodytes

Turdus viscivorus

Turdus iliacus

Common Blackbird

Recorded on three days.

Fieldfare

Recorded daily.

European Robin

Recorded on the final day only.

European Pied Flycatcher

Recorded on four days.

Common Redstart

Recorded on three days.

Whinchat

Recorded on the final day only.

Northern Wheatear

Recorded on the 18th only.

House Sparrow

Recorded on the final two days.

White Wagtail

Recorded daily.

Tree Pipit

Recorded on two days.

Common Chaffinch

Recorded on four days.

Brambling

Recorded on the 17th only.

Eurasian Bullfinch

Recorded on the 18th only.

European Greenfinch

Recorded on the final day only.

Common Redpoll

Recorded on two days.

Red Crossbill

Recorded on three days.

Eurasian Siskin

Recorded on three days.

Yellowhammer

Recorded on the final day only.

Common Reed Bunting

Recorded on the 18th only.

Turdus merula***Turdus pilaris******Erithacus rubecula******Ficedula hypoleuca******Phoenicurus phoenicurus******Saxicola rubetra******Oenanthe oenanthe******Passer domesticus******Motacilla alba******Anthus trivialis******Fringilla coelebs******Fringilla montifringilla******Pyrrhula pyrrhula******Chloris chloris******Acanthis flammea******Loxia curvirostra******Spinus spinus******Emberiza citrinella******Emberiza schoeniclus***

Wise Birding Holidays Ltd

3, Moormead, Budleigh Salterton, DEVON, EX9 6QA

Website: www.wisebirding.co.uk
Facebook: www.facebook.com/wisebirdingholidays
Email: chris@wisebirding.co.uk
Telephone: **07973 483227**



Conservation Donation – Following this tour to Finland £125 was transferred to the Wise Birding Holiday's central conservation fund.

For the last three years Wise Birding Holidays has been supporting a number of small conservation projects. However, we now believe that to try and make a bigger difference to conservation it seems best to pool the donations from most of our tours into one central fund. Once a target amount has been reached this money will be used to support one single project in the hope of achieving more for species conservation. Currently this amounts to over £8,000. Some tours will continue to donate money to help some of the smaller projects that we feel will still benefit from smaller donations. Please visit www.wisebirding.co.uk to find out more about the projects we support.

Wise Birding Holidays

Bird and mammal watching tours

