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Trip report: Estonia tours 2025

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Just as we thought that last year's lynx season couldn't get any better, we were wrong. Like last year, the season was exciting, action packed and full of lynx sightings. We learned more about Europe's most secretive wild cat and we observed more behavior than ever before. In total we had 16 lynx sightings during 18 nights out looking for them! While large males always stole the show during previous years, this year everything was different. The large males were present and provided some great sightings and photographic opportunities, but it was the females with cubs that stole the show. We observed 8 different individuals during this season, consisting of two adult females accompanied by a sub adult cub, one adult female without cubs and 3 adult males.



The season always starts by preparing ourself and the area. We do this by snow tracking, placing camera traps and gathering information from the locals. Additionally, our local lynx tracker has been following the cats through most of the winter. This year, there was hardly any snow which meant that we had very little knowledge of the lynxes' movements before the season started. Since none of the cats that we track are collared, snow tracking and camera traps are the best monitoring tools for such a shy species. Before the season started, we found a female and cub (all lynx cubs are now close to adult size and around 10 months old) and we didn't know then that she would be the star of the season.

The first week we got an international group of clients, we got guys from Spain, the UK, the USA, Belgium and a lady from Germany. The group got along incredibly well and the atmosphere during this tour was great from start to finish. During the second evening of driving around with this group, we got a tip off about a lynx that had been seen. We managed to find the animal but it was rather shy and after more than an hour of waiting it finally approached the road. All the participants got a good (albeit brief) look of the animal before it vanished in the forest again. With this official first sighting of the season done; we were off to a good start. What followed during that same night and the next was incredible. Rather quickly after the first sighting, a second (smaller female) lynx was found by us with the thermal camera. She was hunting hares in a field and albeit rather shy, everyone got really good views of her out in the open. The next day just after midnight, we found an adult female lynx with her cub next to a small creek. While the mom jumped across, everyone got great views of the cub following her! What followed was a long-distance sighting of the pair for about half an hour.

The week progressed and the group did some lynx tracking, watched birds and other mammals and had another brief sighting of a lynx a few days later. The Grand finale came on the second last day when we located a large male lynx at the edge of a forest. The male was calling and looking for a mate and seemed to lose his shyness in the process. We all got out of the van and had amazing views of the large male from less than 10m on foot! A night none of the participants will easily forget.



The first succesful group

The second group started on a high, when we got a call about a male lynx sitting on a log at dusk. We raced out to the location but unfortunately the lynx got mobile just as we arrived and only some of the participants got a glimpse of it. The new group were all Americans and were especially interested in daytime photography of lynxes. Not an easy mission and as we started the week, we gave them slim chances on daytime shots. This changed however when we noticed that the mating season started to intensify. On the second night of the second group, we got an amazing sighting just after dark of a relaxed female lynx that was hunting in a meadow near the forest edge. We spent a good 30 minutes with her before leaving her to hunt. Later that night we had a distant visual of her again and everyone got good photos of her.



With the pressure to just see or photograph a Eurasian lynx out of the way, this group asked us to focus more on daytime sightings. Always up for a new challenge, we accepted and started driving earlier in the afternoon than usual. A day or two after the first sighting a call came in during lunch time. A lynx had been seen in the middle of the day while crossing a forest road. We abandoned our lunch and raced to the scene, only to find that the lynx had vanished in the forest. The group waited near a clear cut while I tracked the lynx but it doubled back on its tracks and no one got more than a brief glimpse of it. We finished our lunch and tried again in the afternoon, the tracks went north and we managed to relocate the lynx on the road but unfortunately it moved off as soon as the group arrived. Again, a brief glimpse was the most that anyone got....

With only a few days left we changed the area of the search and went to a place where a female lynx with a cub had previously been seen. Just when the light started to fade, one of the clients shouted 'cat', and there was our female. A beautiful daytime sighting followed during which the female and cub were observed and photographed at close range for about 20 minutes. The female was clearly hunting and we decided to look for her again the next day in the same area. Sure enough, she was spotted hunting roe deer in a field close by just before dusk. The roe deer got spooked by a completely white mountain hare (and were probably already nervous because of the two lynxes in the area) and the female focussed her hunting efforts on the hare. An intense 2-hour stalk across an open field followed and just when we thought that the female would try to catch the hare, something incredible happened. Loud calls echoed from the forest and a large cat shape appeared in the forest edge. This was a male lynx calling for a mate! The female immediately abandoned her hour-long hunting effort and rushed over to meet the male while her cub followed enthusiastically. What followed is testament to the social nature of these cats and shows us how little we know about the species. It looked like a family reunion including



head rubs, calls and social interaction (not mating) between the male, the adult female and the cub. These three lynxes definitely knew each other and seemed pleased to meet up again. They all lay down next to each other and we got some great views of this unusual lynx 'family'. The next evening, we ended the second trip of the season with close up views of a male lynx in the dark that allowed us to approach him on foot within 15m.



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Tailor made group of photographers

The 3th trip of this year was one with Belgium and Dutch clients. Since we had been following the whereabouts of the female with cub, we headed out early on our first evening in an attempt to find her. We were driving for about 15 minutes when one of the participants shouted 'lynx'. The female we had followed during the week before sat 20m from the road with her cub. As soon as we stopped the van, the cub hid under a large spruce but the female allowed us nice views of her at the forest edge. To give them some space and to encourage them to come out we decided to briefly drive away and turn the van around for better viewing opportunities. While we turned the lynxes came out on the road, crossed an open meadow and watched us from the forest edge once again. Everyone saw their first lynxes in daylight!



We made a loose prediction as to where the female and her cub would re emerge and drove towards a small meadow in the forest. We walked to the edge of the forest and after 20 minutes of waiting the two lynxes came out of cover and gave us great views for half an hour. That same evening, we got treated by a show of Northern lights! Truly a magic start of the third trip.

What happened then was slightly frustrating, but it happens every year. A cold spell came in and clear cold nights caused mammal activity to seize. We didn't see any lynxes for the next 3 days and just had to be patient for a change in weather. As soon as the weather changed, we prepared ourselves for a long night and picked up on male lynx tracks. We have monitored this specific lynx (grey 11) for the last 4 years now and sort of know its habits. After a few loops in a forested area, we found him marking and spraying his territory. He was also calling for a female and loud calls echoed through the night, which made the experience more exciting. In the end we followed this lynx for a few kilometres while watching him with thermal cameras and occasionally with the spotlight. The next night we had a short and distant observation of a shy lynx in a different area and the last night of this third trip we ended in style with a beautiful sighting of



the male that we saw earlier that week. He marked and called while patrolling through his territory! A great way to end the final tour of the Estonian lynx season.



Expectations exceeded

During all of the trips and impressive host of mammals were seen including moose, beavers, pine martens, foxes, roe deer's, raccoon dogs, a polecat, otter, a golden jackal and many badgers. Commonly and rarely seen birds were ural owls, pigmy owls, nutcrackers, black grouses, capercaillies, white tailed eagles and hazel grouses.



This leaves us wondering about how next year will be, we already look forward to observe more behaviour and get more amazing sightings of Europe largest wild cat.

To end our trip report, we wish to share some insight into the project we are setting up with our partner [Habitats Foundation](#). Estonia is considering to reopen the hunting season on Eurasian lynx (hunting has been banned since 2016), the season nearly re-opened last year but a lack of science-based data prevented this. A quota of 50 adult lynxes was already allocated and this will pose a serious threat for the long-term conservation of the species within the country. Regulated hunting won't extirpate lynxes from Estonia but it will surely change their behaviour, cause social chaos within the population and will cause a population decline. There is no science-based reason to hunt Eurasian lynx, they are an apex predator and have self-regulating populations depending on available resources. They are an important link in the ecosystem and we are only just now beginning to understand their complex social dynamics. Hunting lynxes would be bad for eco-tourism and for the ecosystem and we hope to contribute to convince the Estonian government to take the lynx of the huntable species list. With this trip you don't only get the chance to see and photograph Eurasian lynxes in the wild, you also contribute to eco-tourism in the area.



And next year?









