

Finland – Wildlife in Summer

8 - 16 June 2026

Report by Paul McDougall

Tour participants Paul McDougall (photographic Guide) with 6 Touch the Wild clients

Summary

Finland in Summer is an incredible and surreal experience. It doesn't get dark. You can take images all through the night if you want to and it is a strange feeling dozing off in a hide and waking up in the early hours of the morning and still seeing the sun. The light also tends to be great at this time of year and that is why the beginning of June is my favourite time to visit and run tours.

It is usually a great time to get the first young bear cubs, last year's cubs and even the possibility of mating bears. It is also not so busy and therefore you can have the flexibility of being able to change the hides around and overall, it is just a nicer experience.

I use 2 different locations for my Wildlife in Summer Tour – Martinselkonen and Boreal. Martinselkonen is also available as a standalone trip for 5 days and for some years I have clients that just do this and return home, and the rest of the group then transfer to Boreal.

Martinselkonen

Bear-watching trips have been made at the Martinselkonen Wilderness Centre since 1995. With almost 30 years of experience, Martinselkonen has become a bear-proof place where you can follow the king of the forest safely under the guidance of expert guides.

The bear season begins in the spring when the bears wake up from hibernation in April and continues until mid-August, when the nights begin to darken. At the beginning of the season, you can see mainly adult bears at the Martinselkonen bear hide, and they can usually be photographed on a white snow background. The number of bears increases in May when the snow melts and the smaller bears are also able to move around better. June is a favourite time for photographers, as there is plenty of light all night long and there are plenty of bears to photograph. With good luck, you may also get to see a mother bear with her cubs. Over the years, there have been several litters and nowadays they are guests almost every summer. From the hides, it is also possible to see white-tailed eagles, goshawks, and sometimes also wolves and wolverines.

For spectators, there are comfortable large bear stalls with chairs and photo openings for everyone, as well as bunk beds for sleeping and a dry toilet. For photographers, there are smaller, more modest photo booths that provide better shooting conditions. Photo booths can be found in a variety of terrains, forest, swamp and lake.

The all-night bear watching and photography trips start in the afternoon at 4pm and then return to the Wilderness Centre the next morning.

Boreal Wildlife Centre

Boreal Wildlife Centre is a Kuhmo-based company that produces first-class animal observation and photography products.

The viewing and filming locations are in Viikkimo, Kuhmo. Large carnivores have been photographed in the area for over 30 years, and it is possible to see and photograph wolverines, bears, wolves, capercaillies, moose, beavers and wild forest reindeer. Wolverines and bears in particular are abundant in the area.

Boreal follows the same process and timings as Martinselkonen.



Day 1 Monday 8th June

All 6 clients this year flew from Edinburgh. As everyone was travelling from different locations we all checked in separately and met once through security as a group. The check in took longer than last year and after last year arriving an hour before the check in open, this time on arrival at the airport it was already open. Only 2 check in desks were open so there was a delay. But everyone made it through ok and we sat and had a coffee and breakfast and discussed the trip.

We had a good and uneventful flight to Helsinki; we then found somewhere to sit in an outside area, and it was nice to sit and talk in the sun and it is always good when people travel out together and have time to get to know each other. Some people had lunch in the bar that we were sat in and others went to Burger King. Everything is expensive in Helsinki Airport but despite this we enjoyed the time together and it went quickly. We then went to board our flight to Kajaani. The flight was relatively on time (it is always late) and we arrived in Kajaani at around 7:30pm. We collected our luggage and then met up with our driver. We transferred to the lodge and arrived at around 9:30pm. After a snack of sandwiches and biscuits we went to our rooms tired from the day of travelling.



Day 2 Tuesday 9th June

Breakfast was at 8am and we all ate breakfast together. After breakfast most of the group went out and braved the mosquitoes and photographed the squirrels on the feeders. This always provides plenty of enjoyment and passes the time. I went through camera settings and operation with everyone separately throughout the morning to ensure that they were all ready for the evening. The first day always seems to go slowly and you can always feel the groups excitement building as the day goes on. We had our main meal at 3pm and then got ready to leave for the hides. Our first night was in the main hide. I always schedule this for the first night so that I can help with camera settings and explain some different techniques that can be used throughout the week. I always focus on people coming home with a full portfolio of the bears and trying different techniques is a big part of that. We left for the hides at 4pm. We arrived at the parking point where we would then walk to the hide. The walk is approximately 1 km and took us around 15 minutes walking slowly. On the way to the hide we saw fresh bear prints. As we approached the main hide the bears had already arrived and the sighting everyone wanted was already there – a mother bear and young cubs. Some of the group got set up quickly and got some images. I was helping with cameras and securing the lenses to the gimbals so didn't take any images. For the next couple of hours, we had a steady stream of bears, all individual females. Including one very small adult female known as "mini" she is small for her age, and I photographed her 3 years ago as a cub and she was very small then. She is such a lovely looking bear and proved to be a favourite with the group. There was then a lull of bear activity for some time. With an occasional bear coming in. We did have some nice views of when the bears stood up and scratched the trees. They also spent some time rubbing their backs on the trees maybe to relieve their mosquito bites. It was a cloudy evening, and the light started to fade at around 8pm which is just when the mum and cubs came back. Despite the light being lower with the changing of a few camera settings everyone managed to get some images of the mother and the cubs and the cubs playing. They were fascinated by a hole underneath the tree and spent a lot of time going in and out of the hole which provided lots of enjoyment for everyone. There was then a large gap where the bears went away from the hide and for a couple of hours, we didn't have anything. An ideal time to eat our sandwiches and have coffee tea and hot chocolate. Some of the group decided to sleep for a bit but we always had someone looking out for bears. We had a few individual bears come in and then at around 10:30pm we had a mother with 2 yearling cubs come in. They were very shy, but we all got some nice images of these even though the light was poor at this time. By 11pm we had several bears in front of the hide including the mother with the 3 young cubs. This time the cubs were busy climbing the trees and playing around. It was very difficult to get images of them as the shutter speeds were quite low due to the fading light, but everyone managed to get something. it was

quiet again and some of the group went to sleep. I decided to try to get a few hours' sleep at around midnight as it was getting very dark. I woke a couple of times and looked out of the hide but there was nothing. At 3am I was woken up by one of the group. We then woke everyone up. There was a different female with cubs in front of the hide, and the light was a bit better. A couple of my guests couldn't sleep so had got up earlier and were watching out for bears and had seen this one come in. We then had this female and cubs for around an hour before they disappeared off into the forest. After this some of the group went back to sleep but most of us stayed up. The rest of the time in the hide was uneventful. But what a first night 3 different females with cubs, tree-climbing, playing, scratching, close up portraits. Everything that you could have wanted all in one night!! We started to pack up at 6am and exited the hide at around 6:30am. We walked back to the vehicles and got back to the lodge for breakfast.













Day 3 Wednesday 10th June

We again had a lovely breakfast and unlike the previous day when everyone was full of energy, everyone spent time catching up on sleep or processing their images. Tonight we were in the photography hides. These provide better backdrops and angles of view and if the weather is right some stunning light. 4 of the group and I were in the swamp hide and 2 of the others were in the forest hide. On my trips I always book the photo hides for single occupancy. The hides are small and can be uncomfortable if sharing with people you don't know. Once you get used to the set up in the photo hides, they are incredibly comfortable and peaceful. We followed the same plan as the previous day and after a delicious meal we left for the hides. We dropped the 2 guests off in the forest hides first and then some other guests at the main hide before we continued to the swamp. We were in the hides by 5pm and everyone settled into their own hide. There is no phone network in these hides so unlike in the main hide you have to keep watching out to look for bears. We had a lovely white-tailed eagle in front of the hide early on. Our first bear came at

6pm in lovely light followed by “mini” at 6:30pm. The swamp hide as the landscape is open gives you brilliant opportunities to get the full body bear images with nice backgrounds, it is also good for water splashes when they walk through the cotton grass. We then had a heavy rainstorm, and it then went very quiet with nothing until 10pm. This was when the 2nd mother and cubs from last night appeared. The mother walked into the swamp and sat in front of the hides to eat. The cubs eventually came running out of the forest and briefly joined her. After a while they were more interested in playing in the trees and disappeared. Eventually the mother left as well. The next couple of hours were quiet. At around midnight the light had dropped a lot so I decided to sleep for a few hours. A decision I would later regret! I woke at 4am and the light was stunning the swamp was gold and shrouded in mist – if only there would be a bear in this light – It would be amazing. Unfortunately, there was nothing. I did get a brief glimpse of a bear in the distance, but it didn’t stay around. We were collected from the hide at around 6:30am and as I exited the hide, I looked at everyone’s faces, everyone was smiling – why? Don’t get me wrong it is always amazing to see bears and for all of the group it is their first experience, but I thought it had been a relatively quiet evening. It soon became evident that my decision to sleep was not a good one, the mother with cubs came in at 1am and then after that the other mother with cubs came in and walked through the golden grass with the mist in the background!! – WOW that is a dream sighting and opportunity and I had slept, but most of my guests got some amazing images and that is what counted. We then headed to pick up the rest of the group from the forest hide. It was soon clear by their smiles as they emerged from the hides that they had also had a brilliant evening. They said that overall, it had been quiet but at 6am in the morning the mother and cubs came in to the hide in the most incredible golden light and the cubs played in front of the hide. Another incredible moment. They had shot some unbelievable images using some of the techniques that we discussed and practiced on the previous day. When you are leading groups you have to accept that sometimes you don’t always get the shots, to be honest it is usually due to me helping others with their photography or going through different settings and techniques (not through sleeping) but I could not have been more proud of all of them for the enthusiasm that they showed and the images that they achieved, and surely that is what it is all about when you are doing this job.

I will however be attempting to stay awake all night the next night!!









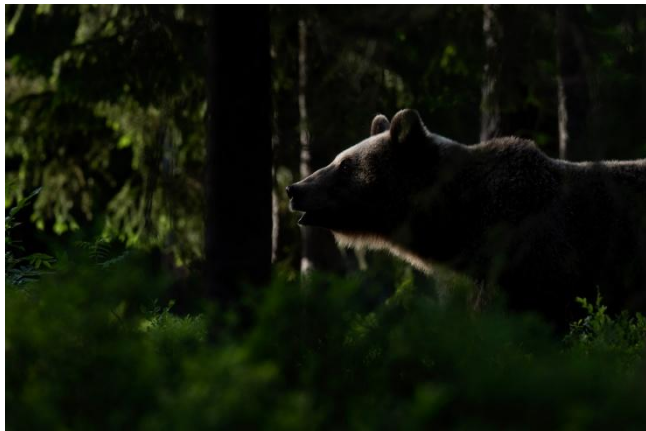
Day 4 Thursday 11th June

We again had a lovely breakfast, and everyone spent time catching up on sleep or processing their images. Tonight we were again in the photography hides. Tonight 4 of my guests and me were in the Forest Hides and the other 2 were in the swamp. We had our meal at 3 as usual and then left for the hides at 4pm. Our walk to the hides proved hot as the sun was out and the forest was bathed in sunlight. It was sure to be a fantastic evening if it stayed like this. We were allocated our hides with me being given one of the older hides a little away from the others. I knew that where I was, I would probably be limited to what I would get but everyone else had a great position. I asked them to put the food for the bears closer to the hide so I could get some low angle close up shots which they did. I didn't have to wait long for the first bear to come. It walked in from the right of the hide and stood right in front of me – less than 2 metres away. It then sat down and I got some lovely images with the forest behind. I was hoping that it would sit and face the hide and eat but unfortunately it did not co-operate and sat with its back to me. It

was still amazing being this close to a wild bear! The light was still amazing with the sun penetrating parts of the trees on to the forest floor. The next bears to arrive were the mum and 3 cubs. To my surprise they stayed right outside my hide and played around in the trees and on the grass, most of the time they were obstructed by branches and logs, but I did get a few images including one where one of the small cubs approached the hide and posed a few metres away from me.

Over the next few hours we were treated to lots of visits from the bears and gradually as the food was eaten from outside my hide, they moved further down enabling everyone to get some lovely images. At around 8pm the mother and cubs came back, she sat and ate whilst the 3 cubs played in front of the hides, from where I was the view wasn't the best. I did manage a few of the cubs fighting but I could not wait to see the images that my guests were getting. The cubs provided so much entertainment and really treated everyone to some lovely views.

At around 9pm it started to rain and the light really started to drop. The bears kept coming in and we were able to still capture some nice images. At around midnight I decided to try and get some sleep. It was too dark to take images, and I had already got loads in some amazing light. This time I set my alarm for 2am and then at 45-minute intervals so that I would hopefully not miss anything. I woke up just before 2am as there was scratching on the side of the hide, The hide then started to shake a little, I looked out of the side window and there was one of the big female bears rubbing against the hide. She peered through the opening in the hide and for a split second we were face to face. She then grunted and moved away. It was still dark out, so I went back to sleep and woke at the next alarm. Every alarm I checked the light and although at times there were a few bears around. It was still too dark to shoot and was also raining. At one point the sky was a bright pink colour, but it still didn't provide enough light to shoot. At 7:15am we were met and exited the hides. All my guests were so happy and as I thought got some brilliant images of the cubs playing. We caught up with the 2 that were in the swamp hides, and they had unfortunately had a quiet night with very few visits from the bears. We returned to the lodge for breakfast.



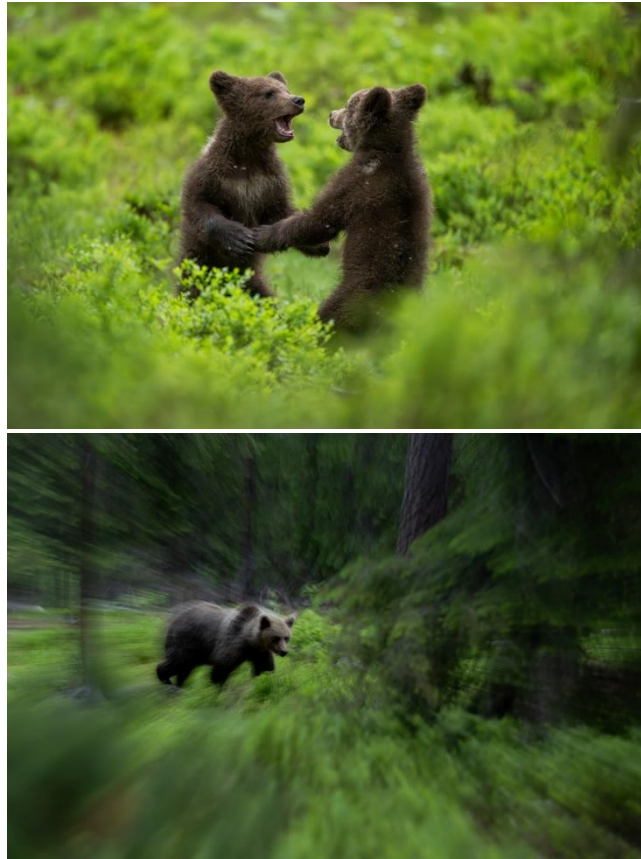












Day 5 Friday 12th June

This morning after breakfast 3 of the group were doing the 5 days Just Bears Trip. They were transferred to the airport just after breakfast. At 11 the remaining 3 guests and myself said a fond farewell to Riina and the team at Martinselkonen and left for Boreal Wildlife Centre.

We arrived at Boreal at 1:45pm. I caught up with Tommi and the team and sorted out the hides. Tonight we would be in the swamp hide and as there were 4 of us and it was quiet there, they gave us the large main hide. We had our dinner at 2 and were ready to leave for 3. We entered the main hide it was amazing as we were only a small group. We spread out and made the most of the space.

Almost from the beginning of our hide session, we were treated to some brilliant views of the White-Tailed Eagles flying around and being mobbed by gulls. This was a great start. At 5:15pm we had a visit from a loan bear. It is unusual in Boreal to get them visiting this early and it is usually much later. The light was beautiful and the bear stayed for quite some time walking around in front of the hides. For the next couple of hours, it was quite quiet with the occasional view of an eagle but nothing much. Due to us all being in one hide we had decided to always have someone watching out whilst the others would rest. So, some of us rested whilst one person stayed watching at the windows. At just before 9pm I took over and at around 9:30pm I saw a movement from the side of the hide. It was a wolverine; I alerted everyone else and they all moved slowly towards the front of the hide. Unfortunately, nobody else photographed it and it disappeared. I was confident that it would come back as in my experience they sometimes do this and come in to the hide and then circle the area and come back. Everyone sat and watched ready. At just after 10pm the wolverine did come back and stayed for an hour repeatedly visiting different areas for food. It was amazing to see with everyone able to capture images of it

walking, running, sitting and eating. It was quite unusual to have it for so long and everyone made the most of it. I continued to keep watch and at around midnight a young male bear arrived. It was very wary and kept looking around. I woke everyone up again and we watched as first a huge male bear arrived, this is what the younger male was wary for and no wonder the bear was huge, It was being followed by a much smaller female bear. So, we now had 3 bears. We watched the bears for a while, and it was a beautiful clear night so we were still able to get some images of them. I then took my time to rest. At around 2:30am I was woken up as the wolverine had come back again, it stayed for a while again eating and moving around the area. At 4am we had a visit from the young male bear again. Overall, it had been a very action packed first night at Boreal. Boreal is one of the best places in Finland to get wolf and wolverine along with the bears but to get the wolverine on the first night was brilliant. We were picked up at around 8am and returned to the lodge.





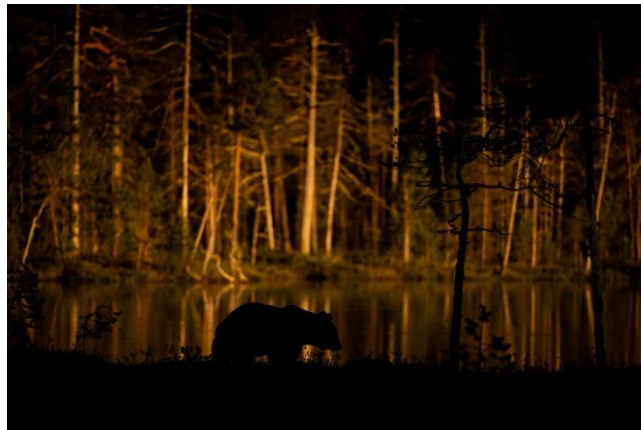












Day 6 Saturday 13th June

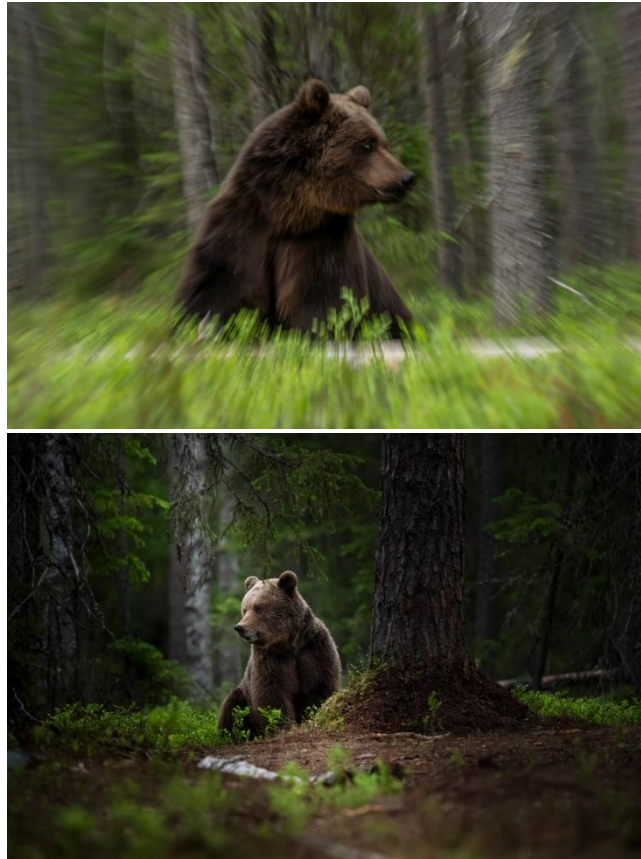
After a lovely filling breakfast everyone decided to rest. 4 consecutive days in the hides starts to catch up with you and it is important to rest when you can. So, we all slept for a few hours. I then did some work and caught up on emails. We all met for dinner at 2pm and left for the hides at 3pm. Tonight we were in the forest hide. The previous evening the clients that were in the Forest Hide had seen wolverine and had bears squabbling and fighting in front of the hides, so we had high hopes. Tonight my 3 guests all shared a large 4 person hide, this gave them lots of room and places to shoot from and I went in the small one person hide next door. The light when we entered the hides was perfect with the sun penetrating the tree canopy, the trick with this hide is to wait for the bear to walk into the pools of light. We had our first bear visit at 6pm It was the smaller male bear. It hung around for a while but seemed to be very jumpy often getting startled by the gulls. After around half hour it disappeared, everyone managed to achieve the images of the bears in the light which is one of the nicest images that you can get. The light then faded

quickly, and it started to rain. We had a few more visits from the same bear. One of the visits the bear came very close to the hide, and it made for some nice low angle shots. At midnight I decided to get some sleep as the light had gone completely. I set my alarm for 2am. I woke and there was another bear outside the hide. But the light was still poor, so I went back to sleep. I woke again at 3 and there was nothing there I then slept until 6am. At 3:30am when I was sleeping there had been 3 bears that visited the hides and so my guests were able to get some images of the bears interacting although the light was still low. Again, it was really pleasing that they got some different images. We returned to the lodge for breakfast.





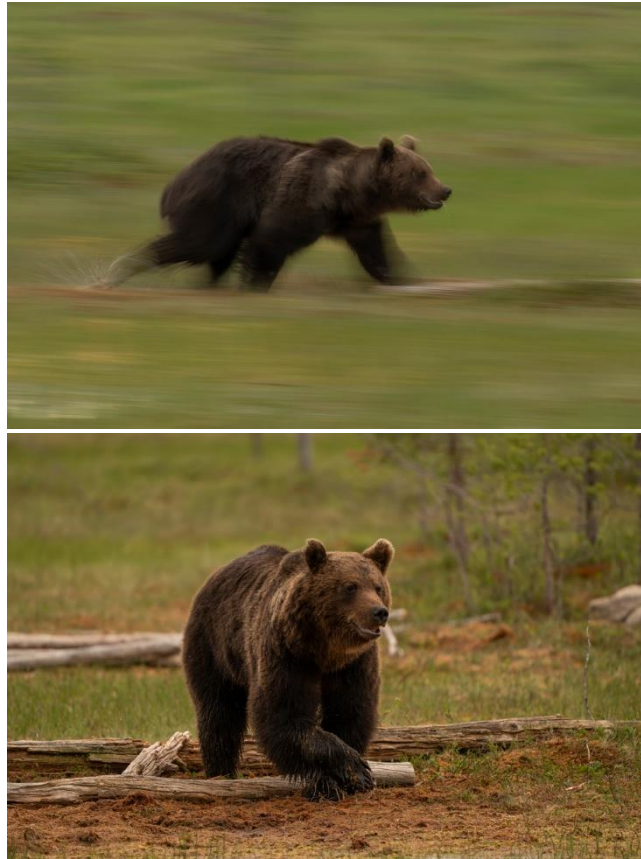




Day 7 Sunday 15th June

After breakfast we all decided that we were going to rest for a while. I spent some time catching up on admin and processing some images. After another lovely meal we were all ready to go to the hides. The group decided that they wanted to do the swamp hide again so that was our chosen hide for the evening. The forecast was for cloud and rain which would have made the forest hide hard and the lake hide had not been that productive for anyone that had been in it on previous nights. We entered the hide at around 3:30pm. We settled in to watch and wait. Again we were treated to some lovely views of the White-Tailed Eagles with both the male and female and juvenile. It was generally quite quiet after that with the rain coming down and the clouds being quite thick. At around 8pm we had a visit from the younger male bear. He was very alert and constantly looking around, but he stayed for a while, and we were able to get some nice images. It then started to get very dark, and it was very quiet. I stayed up to keep a look out whilst everyone else slept. At midnight I saw the young male bear come around the side of the lake, so I woke everyone up. It was too dark to take any images but as it was our last night it was still nice to watch the bear. Around 30 minutes later the bigger male and the female bear appeared so we sat and watched them all for a while. I then took my turn to rest whilst one of my guests stayed up to watch. At 3am the young male came back to visit. I then took the last shift from 4am until we left the hide. Everyone was very tired with this being the 6th night in the hides. There was nothing of note then until we left the hide at around 8am. It wasn't really the last night of the trip that we had hoped for, but after 5 absolutely outstanding nights in the hide with so many great images taken, sometimes, having a less spectacular night puts everything in to perspective and makes you realise just how lucky you have been and how fortunate we were to have captured the images that we have.





Day 8 Monday 16th June

This was the day of departure from Boreal. We were very kindly allowed to keep our rooms until 3pm when we would be leaving. So we slept after breakfast. We had lunch at 2pm and then left for Kajaani airport at 3pm. We were transferred in a large spacious taxi to the airport which was incredibly comfortable. We arrived at the airport at around 5:15pm. Kajaani airport is very small and there isn't much to do there, so we sat and talked and shared memories of the trip. We checked in at 5:45pm. We were able to check our luggage in all the way through to Edinburgh. We boarded our flight at 7pm and it took off on time and was a very quiet flight. We arrived in Helsinki at 8:30pm and were at the hotel by 9pm. We checked in and had dinner. We then found a bar close to the hotel to watch the world cup game between Belgium and Egypt. It was a nice way to pass an evening and end the trip. We all then returned to the hotel and had a well-deserved sleep.

Summary

This years trip produced some incredible sightings and some amazing photographic opportunities. It was impressive to see how everyone used the different techniques that we went through on the first couple of days to create some truly different and impactful images. It is always nice when you have a group that want to learn and want to try different things and this group was definitely one of those. The group really gelled together, and new friendships have been made.

The memories of the bear cubs at Martinselkonen and the amazing Mini will remain with everyone for a long time. At Boreal the incredible Wolverine sighting and the huge male bear were stand out moments,

Everyone achieved a superb portfolio of images on this trip and the focus of this trip is very much to go home with a full portfolio of bear images and to show the environment that the bear lives in and various different behaviours. It is also about using different techniques and stepping outside comfort zones to create something that is truly unique.

I select the locations and the hides carefully and work closely with the owners to ensure that we get the maximum opportunities to achieve this objective.

Year after year on this trip we get the most incredible opportunities to photograph the bears and spend time with them. It is a subject I have been photographing in Finland since 2014, and I can never get tired of photographing this amazing animal.

The 2027 Trip is filling up quickly and I also have people booked for 2028 so if this is something that you think you might enjoy then get in touch.

Our gr



eat 2026 Group.

Back (L-R) Stacy, Me, Caitlyn, John, Marko (Guide)

Front (L-R) Isobel, Esmerelda, Linda



