

REPORT BY EB5 TOUR GUIDE RENE MATTHYS

PICTURES BY TOUR CUSTOMER HERMAN PAELINCK

The first week of May brought high temperatures (up to 29°C) and, being a holiday week for the Polish, big crowds into the mountains. We had to improvise more than usual, because some otherwise deserted sites now were teeming with sunbathers and hikers. Luckily, EB5 has the necessary permits to drive the more remote forest roads and it was there that we concentrated our efforts to look for the shy European Bison. We were lucky on our first long walk when two animals were spotted near a forest edge.



The undoubted highlight of the tour was spending a day and night in a hide where a pack of Wolves was visiting. The afternoon was enlivened by a close Lesser Spotted Eagle and proved a nice practice for our phonescoping skills. The true spectacle began when Wolf entered the forest glade and, after an initial cautious approach, the loner started wolfing down the carrion. He lingered very close to the hide, eating for almost an hour. As dusk fell, two more Wolves appeared. We watched them strolling around in the light of the full moon, feeling totally at ease. At two o'clock in the morning we were awoken by the sound of howling Wolves.



At four o'clock in the morning, the other pack members came into the arena. We observed at least six different individuals and felt privileged to witness their intimate social behavior for over an hour. Talking about a wilderness experience!



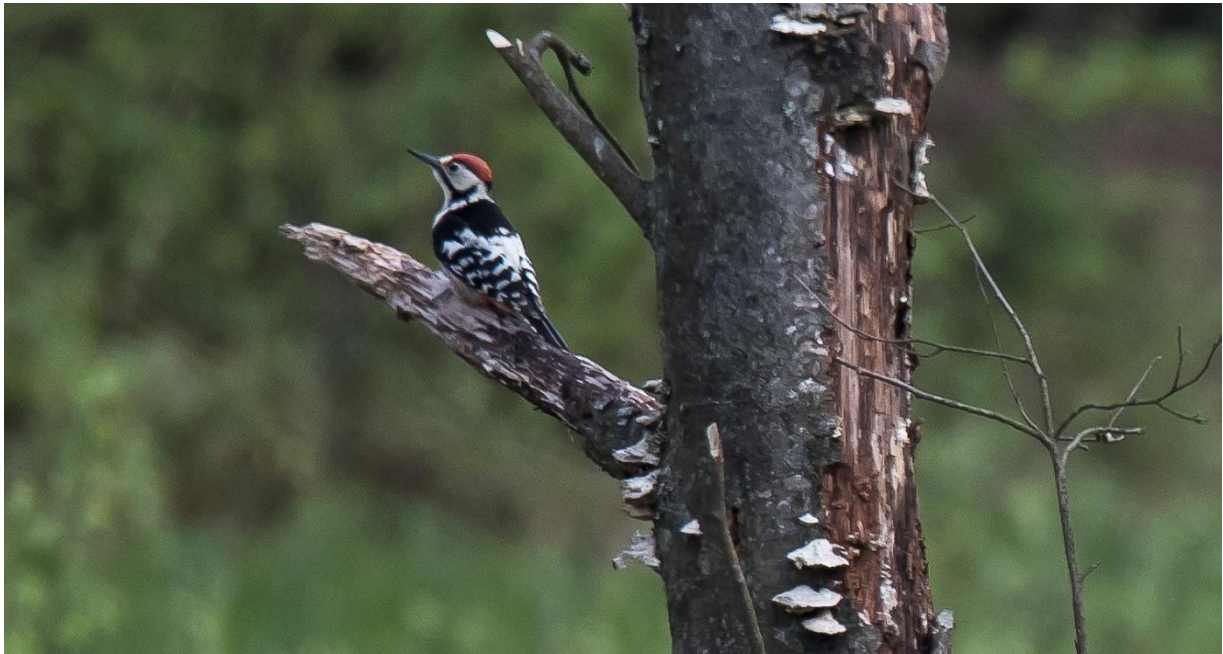
Most evenings we went spotlighting the quiet roads close to our hotel base near the Ukrainian border. We were rewarded with a magnificent Wild Cat, a perched Ural Owl, one Beech Marten and the usual suspects being Roe Deer, Red Deer and Red Foxes. Other mammal sightings were the local striking black morph of Red Squirrel and a Pine Marten. Striking too was a fishing Otter in a Beaver pool during broad daylight.



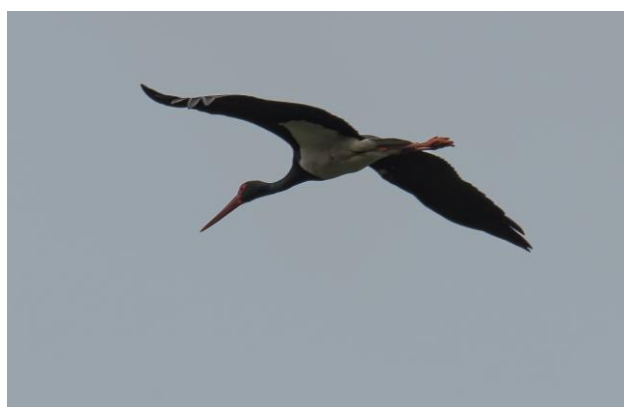
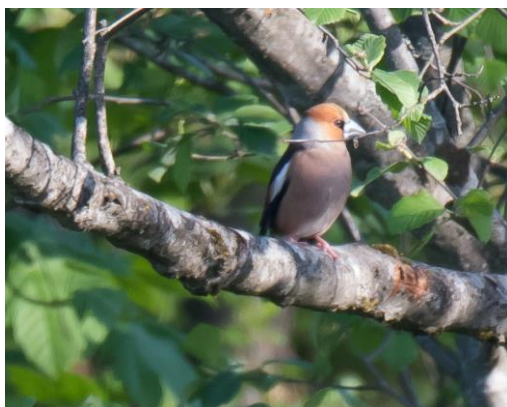
So typical to find this target, over the years, always in or nearby Beaver Pools. For sure beavers are natural architects by upgrading habitat bringing nature to a higher level. Early morning outings in the surroundings of the hotel proved to be productive too as we found tracks of European Bison and Wolves, saw Ring Ouzel, Hawfinch, Lesser Spotted Eagle and Grey-headed Woodpecker.



We paid several visits to an occupied White-backed Woodpecker nest and had splendid views of both male and female. Corncrakes and Red-breasted Flycatchers started to arrive on their breeding grounds, singing their hearts out but proving hard to get. We managed only to see the latter.



A walk next to the mighty San river gave us a fly-by Black Stork and obliging Dippers. The meadows in Bieszczady still have prominent hedgerows, favourite haunts of Red-backed Shrikes and Whinchats.





The warm weather brought out loads of butterflies and during our long hikes we encountered Camberwell Beauty, Common Yellow Swallowtail, Speckled Yellow and Silver Y. Sunny days also meant reptiles such as Grass Snake and gorgeous males Sand Lizard became active.



Our day hike in the National Park will long be remembered for the magnificent vistas and the strenuous climb of Mount Tarnica, the highest peak in the Bieszczady area.



So, Bieszczady lived up to our expectations once again. An overall wilderness experience in a complete ecosystem with top predators the main targets and an supporting cast of exciting mammals and birds.



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