

Scotland – Alladale in Spring

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline Itinerary

- Day 1** Arrive Alladale Lodge
-
- Days 2 - 6** Explore Alladale Reserve with day trips to Loch Fleet & Handa Island
-
- Day 7** Depart Inverness
-

Departs

May and June

Focus

Birds, Mammals, and General Natural History

Grading

A/B. Mostly easy walks, some steeper.

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code GBR245) or brochure

Highlights

- Learn about the re-wilding and conservation projects of this wonderful reserve
- Black Grouse and Ptarmigan possible
- Red Squirrel around the lodge
- Visit a Scottish Wildcat breeding enclosure
- Watch for leaping Atlantic Salmon
- Loch Fleet day visit for Otter, Common Seal, Osprey and a wide variety of wading birds
- Day trip to the spectacular Handa Island. Seabirds including Puffins, Great & Arctic Skuas
- Led by expert Alladale rangers.
- Luxury accommodation, private chef and expert leaders including Alladale rangers



Scottish Wildcat, Alladale, Puffin (and Great Skua)



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Introduction

Alladale Wilderness Reserve is a 23,000-acre utopia located just an hour's drive north of Inverness in the Scottish Highlands, packed with dramatic glens, vibrant hills, glistening rivers, numerous hill lochs and superb native wildlife. On this exciting new holiday we'll explore this special reserve with a focus on finding the wonderful wildlife that lives here while learning about the management of this untamed and truly remote wilderness and the ongoing re-wilding work that is taking place.

It is well documented that over the millennia, the forests which the Romans once called 'The Great Wood of Caledon' have been cleared and the landscape largely sanitised. With all the native large carnivores destroyed, which included Wolf, Lynx and Brown Bear, the forests became overrun with deer and huge areas of native Caledonian Forest was cleared for timber plantations. In 2003, Paul Lister was able to buy the Alladale Estate, deep in the Highlands, with the goal of creating a wilderness reserve and returning this area to its former glory. Since then, almost 1 million trees have been planted, damaged peatlands have been restored, Red Squirrel have returned and can be seen around the lodge and Pine Martens are returning although sightings are still sporadic. Golden Eagle breed within the reserve and Ptarmigan can be found in good numbers on the higher peaks with Dotterel also breeding here. Red and Black Grouse also found here. In the streams and rivers Atlantic Salmon can be found and there is a unique Scottish Wildcat breeding programme taking place here with two kittens born in 2020.

We will be based at the wonderful Alladale Lodge which really is the ultimate luxury private getaway. This Victorian manor is set against rugged hills and the country's most northerly ancient Caledonian pine forest. Our Naturetrek group will take sole occupancy of the lodge and a talented chef will prepare our high quality meals from local, organic produce. We will spend 6 nights at the lodge, giving us time to fully explore the reserve, while also taking a day trip to nearby Loch Fleet where we hope to encounter Otter, Osprey, Common Seals and an array of waders and the very special Handa Island with its incredible seabird colonies including Puffins, Guillemots, Razorbills, Great and Arctic Skuas!

This holiday will provide a host of unique experiences and a great range of special wildlife as we immerse ourselves in true wilderness, well off the beaten path. With very comfortable accommodation and high level cuisine, we will enjoy an element of luxury throughout our visit. Conservation is at the heart of everything at Alladale and our stay will contribute directly to the work of "The European Nature Trust" which works in partnership with Alladale to support wildlife and conservation projects across Europe.



Itinerary

NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Day 1

Arrive Alladale

Our holiday will begin in Inverness (details of the meeting points can be found below) and following a scenic drive of around one hour we will arrive at the wonderful Alladale Wilderness Reserve. On arrival at the lodge, we shall be met with tea, coffee and cake before settling into our rooms. There will then be time then to stretch our legs in the Scottish wilderness for those who wish. We will be truly immersed in nature at the lodge and we shouldn't need to venture far before revealing Red Squirrels, Red Deer or possibly even a Golden Eagle drifting overhead. We will enjoy the first of our delicious meals this evening, with our dedicated chef providing excellent fare using the finest local produce. At some point during the tour, a presentation will be given about Alladale and the fantastic ongoing work here.

Days 2

Introduction to Alladale and full reserve safari

After a hearty Scottish breakfast, we'll enjoy an introduction and presentation about Alladale before embarking on a 4x4 vehicle safari of the reserve which will set the scene for an exciting week ahead, and we'll hope to find plenty of wildlife as we go. We will learn about the work being done here to restore to its former glory of many hundreds of years ago. Some wonderful progress has been made with areas flourishing and full of life in this fully protected area. As we tour the reserve we will stop to watch for wildlife and might hope to see a Golden Eagle or White-tailed Eagle drifting overhead, or perhaps a Merlin powering across the moorland. A breeding pair of Golden Eagles on

the Alladale reserve will offer us a high chance to enjoy this spectacular species and White-tailed Eagle are regularly seen moving over the area and are becoming more regular. Red Grouse are often seen on the moorland and herds of Red Deer may be seen as well as Mountain Hare. We will stop at river courses with a high chance to see leaping Atlantic Salmon with other breeding birds including Ring Ouzel, Cuckoo and even Redwing. We shall visit an area of ancient Caledonian Forest with this area being a great example of what all of Alladale might look like in 100 years' time! During the tour, the Alladale rangers will explain everything there is to know about their rewilding efforts. Lunch will be enjoyed out in the field at one of the endless scenic spots and after a full day of exploring we shall return in the late afternoon to relax and enjoy some time at the lodge.

Days 3/6

Over the next four full days we will explore different areas around the reserve enjoying some wonderful walks in true remote wilderness, and we'll of course seek to find a whole range of special wildlife which calls Alladale home. Below is the range of activities that we will enjoy and the programme will be kept flexible to react to the weather and ensure we give ourselves the best chance to find the wildlife.

Black Grouse, Ptarmigan and Dotterel.

Black Grouse, Ptarmigan and Dotterel all breed and can be found at Alladale. For Black Grouse, the very early morning is a key time to maximize our chances of success, and those who wish, might like to rise early and head out on the hill just behind Alladale Lodge in search of these special birds. It is a walk uphill through heather and peat to the area where we hope to find them for around 30 minutes. We must arrive in



Black Grouse

the area that the Black Grouse use for the lekking very close to first light. The peak lekking period will have passed by the time of our visit but the birds will still be around and will continue to display.

On the higher slopes we will hope to find Ptarmigan and Alladale has a healthy population. Again, we shall drive as high as we can and then take a walk. We stand a high chance of seeing them with counts of over 75 birds being recorded here. The time and effort it takes to find them can vary a lot and a degree of fitness is needed to succeed. We shall take an all-terrain vehicle to essentially drive up the mountainside, it will be bumpy and an adventure but the views at the top are spectacular. Some walking over rocky ground may be required to locate Ptarmigan but even just stepping out and scanning the area around you can produce sightings of this special bird.



Ptarmigan

Just two confirmed pairs of Dotterel have bred at Alladale in recent seasons and they are difficult to find on the higher peaks. While the possibility is there, it must be regarded as a real bonus to see this species.

Glencalvie Falls and Leaping Salmon

Glencalvie Falls on the Carron River is a wonderful place to observe leaping Atlantic Salmon. Once a very common and abundant visitor to this river system, salmon numbers have dropped significantly over the years, not just in the River Carron but across the UK. Industrial salmon farms have a dramatic impact on wild salmon populations and for this reason no salmon fishing is allowed in Alladale's rivers as the reserve offers extremely important spawning grounds for the species. Their jumps and leaps up waterfalls on their mission upstream to spawn is a wonderful, wild sight and we stand a very high chance of witnessing this during our stay.

Scottish Wildcats

Surely Alladale's most exciting species! Alladale has several enclosures which are home to two breeding pairs of the critically endangered Scottish Wildcat. Supervised by the Royal Zoological Society Scotland, the national captive breeding programme of this beautiful animal aims to save the species and eventually release animals back into the wild. The cats at Alladale have successfully produced litters every year since 2018, and the kittens have been relocated to other breeding facilities where they now play their part in bringing this animal back from the brink of extinction in Scotland. In 2020 Alladale was delighted at the birth of two more Kittens! We will visit the breeding centre in small groups with a ranger to avoid disturbing the animals and we will have the extremely privileged chance to see this special species.

Pine Marten

Slowly but surely, Pine Marten are returning to this remote part of the Highlands. Alladale has started an extensive camera trap monitoring programme to track the animal's movement across its glens. We will hope to catch a glimpse of Pine Marten in the area directly around Alladale Lodge but currently they are not easy to see here and a sighting would be seen as a real bonus rather than expected.

Red Squirrels

Directly around Alladale Lodge, Red Squirrels can be seen foraging throughout the day. There are numerous feeders, which will allow us to enjoy these beautiful and animated animals often at close quarters. We will also visit an area just offsite which holds a very healthy population.

Raptor Watching

Golden Eagles and White Tailed Sea Eagles can be seen deep in the reserve on an almost daily basis. Sometimes from afar, sometimes surprisingly close by. Their size and beauty is always

impressive, as is their sheer ability to dominate the skies. Merlin are found in smaller numbers and there is also a chance to see Hen Harrier and Short-eared Owl, but these species are more unusual. Roy Dennis has been involved in many of Alladale's rewilding projects, and he may be around to join the group during the week.

A Day Trip to Handa Island

On one of our days we'll drive for approximately 2-hours to Tarbet to take a short passenger ferry toward the towering cliffs of Handa Island.

The island itself supports a spectacular assemblage of up to 200,000 seabirds including internationally important numbers of Guillemot, Great Skua and Razorbill.



Handa Island

Arctic Skuas also breed on Handa with around 20 pairs, and we will hope for close views of this very special species. Our visit will also be well-timed to coincide with the nesting of the 250 pairs of Puffins which breed in the area and we will hope for some wonderful sightings of these endearing birds and we will also hope to be lucky with mammal sightings which might include Otter, Bottlenose Dolphin, Risso's Dolphin or Grey Seal.



Razorbill

This will be a full day out and we will spend 3-4 hours on the island taking a picnic lunch with us. The crossing is short, being around 12 minutes to reach the island and while the walking is a little steep in places, it is all on well-trodden paths and boardwalks and we will step off onto a pontoon on arrival so there is no wet landing. We will not be in any rush and will take a very leisurely walk around the island in search of its very special inhabitants. The

sight, smell and noise of a bustling seabird colony is always a magical experience. The crossing to Handa is weather dependent but over the week we stand a very good chance of making landfall and will pick the best day.

A Day Trip to Loch Fleet

On one day during the week we shall leave Alladale and travel for around one hour to Loch Fleet for a full day. There is a real mix of habitats to explore at Loch Fleet which is an example of a large tidal basin. Mudflats, Sand Dunes, Pinewoods and Coastal Heath can all be found. The pinewoods



Puffins

species we may encounter.

support Crested Tits and Scottish Crossbills (Britain's only endemic bird species) though they are hard to find. In the bay we will be looking for Otters which are regularly seen here along with Common Seals. Ospreys breed nearby and can often be seen fishing here and are another possible highlight for the day. We will take a lunch with us for this full day out which should allow us to maximise our day and the number of

Skiach Caledonian Forest

Located high up in Glen Alladale, Skiach Forest is the most northerly remnant of the once great forest of Caledon which covered Scotland after the last ice age. The trees in this forest are direct descendants of the first Scots Pine trees to take root after the Late Glacial period some 9000 years ago. The area around this small forest has been reforested with tens of thousands of local Scots Pine saplings in the hopes of bringing back the forest and all its natural abundance over the course of hundreds of years.

Tour of the Aquaponics Gardens

The team at Alladale built the largest so called Aquaponics vegetable growth system north of London. It won the award for Sustainable Development in November 2020 as part of the annual Scottish Green Energy Awards, as the gardens are powered by Alladale's own hydro electricity generator. We will get to see the greenhouses, fish tanks, and planters filled with highly nutritious vegetables first hand and of course enjoy the vegetables as part of the menu at Alladale.

Day 7

Travel to Inverness

Today we will have to leave our wonderful base at Alladale and will make the journey back to Inverness after breakfast.

Tour Grading & Focus

The tour is suitable for all ages and for all degrees of fitness, though it will involve early optional starts on some days, and some optional late finishes. Some of the walking will be on boggy, uneven and rocky ground and some degree of fitness and walking ability will be required to carry out all the activities.

Some of the main objectives will be to provide participants with observations of the above-mentioned birds and mammals whilst learning about the reserve and taking in the beauty of this remote wilderness. It must be stated that mammals are hard to find and success cannot be guaranteed but with the superb knowledge of the Alladale rangers every effort will be made. Reaching the high tops to see Ptarmigan is a wonderful experience but a great effort. Walking on the high tops can be over rocky ground and walking poles are available at the lodge.



Arctic Skua

Weather, Clothing & Equipment

The weather can be very pleasant but wind and rain are of course always possible. Please bring waterproof clothing to make the most of the week. Binoculars are required for the tour and a telescope will be very useful if you have one.

Accommodation

We will be staying at the fantastic Alladale Lodge during our stay with excellent en-suite rooms and a private in-house chef. There are 7 rooms available in the categories basic, classic, deluxe and executive. More information on the rooms is below and for the supplement for the upgrade rooms, please contact the office or tom@naturetrek.co.uk. All rooms are very well appointed. Wifi is very good at the lodge but phone signal is poor/non-existent. Signal is lost not long after passing the town of Ardgay. There are landlines in the bedrooms if required.

Rooms:

1 Basic room: Located on the ground floor, - Named PINE

2 Classic rooms: Located on the first floor at the rear of the lodge with a view over the surrounding area - Named HOLLY & ALDER

2 Deluxe rooms: Located on the first floor with mountain views – Named ASPEN & BIRCH

2 Executive rooms: Located on the first floor, superb surrounding mountain views, seating areas and the largest rooms -Named WILLOW & ROWAN



What's Included

The tour price includes all meals starting with dinner on Day 1 and ending with breakfast on Day 7. We will enjoy the services of a private chef who will provide us with delicious home-cooked buffet style dinners and excellent lunches. Some lunches will be packed lunches taken out into the field, while others will be taken at the lodge. The tour will be led by Alladale rangers and staff.

Extending Your Holiday

Whilst there are no set extensions for this tour, some clients enjoy continuing on to other parts of Scotland. Please do let us know at the time of booking if this may be of interest to you.

Travel Arrangements

Transfers are available from Inverness airport & Inverness train station and also Ardgay train station (closest to Alladale). We would intend to pick you up at 2pm from the airport and 2.30 from Inverness train station before continuing to Ardgay train station for around 3.30-4pm and on to Alladale. Alladale is around 1.5 hours from Inverness and 30 minutes from Ardgay. You are of course able to meet the group at Alladale if you prefer.

On the final day (day 7) we plan to return people to the airport no later than 12pm before continuing to the train station by around 12.30pm. We will pass Ardgay train station at around 11am. Please allow time for unexpected delays when planning onward journeys. It may be possible to get to Inverness earlier on the final day and please enquire if this is required.

Train

Trains to Inverness can be researched and booked at www.thetrainline.com and at www.nationalrail.co.uk.

Flights

Flights to Inverness International airport can be booked with the following airlines:

British Airways	Fly from London Heathrow www.britishairways.com
EasyJet	Fly from London Gatwick, Luton www.easyjet.com

Once you have made your travel arrangements, please could you contact Matt Eade by email matt@naturetrek.co.uk or telephone 01962 733051 to let him know from where you wish to be picked up. Please do not hesitate to contact the office should you have any questions regarding travel arrangements to join and leave the tour.

How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests, at the time of booking.

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Alladale View