

Scotland's Mammals & Highlights of the Highlands

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Itinerary

Day 1 Travel to Glenborrodale Centre from Glasgow

Days 2 - 7 Excursions around Ardnamurchan Peninsula

Day 8 Travel to Glasgow

Departs

August & September

Focus

Mammals, Birds and General Natural History

Grading

A. Easy Day Walks

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code GBR37) or brochure

Highlights

- Travel through the breathtaking scenery in Scotland's wild west
- Look for Otters on Loch Sunart, a Special Area of Conservation for the species
- Woodland around our accommodation has a high density of Pine Martens
- Boat trip to Muck or Mull looking for cetaceans & seabirds, and to nearby Carna for other wildlife



From top; Pine Marten, Red Deer stag, Grey Seal



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Introduction

The Ardnamurchan Peninsula offers visitors a unique experience, far removed from the pressures of modern life. It has a very special atmosphere resulting from its isolated location in the far west of the Scottish highlands. Ardnamurchan offers an invigorating blend of superb wildlife, breathtaking scenery and crisp sea air. Travelling through a variety of stunning landscapes, it is impossible not to be moved by a real sense of wilderness. The pace of life here is dictated by the remoteness of the peninsula and as we adjust, we can truly appreciate the wild beauty of this unique place.

We will journey north from Glasgow through Glencoe to take the Corran ferry over Loch Linnhe to Ardnamurchan. This crossing lies on one of the ancient routes along which the highlanders drove their cattle to market in central Scotland. We then turn west and head through the pretty village of Strontian. From here, the single-track road hugs the coast for most of the 50 miles to Ardnamurchan Point, the most westerly place on the British mainland.

We will be the sole occupants of a lovely lodge on the Ardnamurchan Estate, close to Glenborrodale Castle. Previously an outdoor pursuits centre, it was completely refurbished in 2012 and in fact more recently in 2014 and offers comfortable, warm, private rooms, and as our group are the sole occupants it allows for a really great group atmosphere. The building is constructed around a paved courtyard, which is now covered by an impressive glass canopy and from here we will have easy access



Camas Nan Geall

to the best areas for wildlife. Being just a short walk from Loch Sunart we will have the opportunity for dawn Otter watches and these enigmatic creatures enjoy a healthy population here. The woodlands around our accommodation hold a high density of Pine Martens and provide cover for herds of both Red and Roe Deer. August is the best time to admire the full antlers on the biggest stags while Fallow Deer can also be seen along with commoner mammals such as Badger and Fox. Every night we will be putting out peanuts and jam on a bird table in the hope of attracting Pine Martens from the forest. We will be able to keep watch from the comfort of the living room!

With most of these species best looked for after dark, we will head out on at least one night drive around the peninsula and using a spotlight we shall hope to obtain close views of Red Deer Stags which tend to venture lower down to lower levels after dark. As well as the previously mentioned species there is even the extremely slim possibility of an encounter with the rarest, most enigmatic of all British mammals, the Scottish Wildcat. With such a small population a sighting will always be considered a huge bonus rather than a realistic target.

We will spend two days exploring the south coast of Ardnamurchan, which is home to seabirds, seals and Otters. Loch Sunart, which stretches along the south coast of Ardnamurchan, is in fact a Special Area of Conservation for Otter - the sheltered bays near Glenborrodale are good locations. As we travel west, the coastline becomes more exposed and both Common and Atlantic Grey seals can be seen, often "spy-hopping" to get a better view of their human admirers! Gannets, Manx



Boat to the Cairns of Coll

Shearwaters and Kittiwakes sometimes fly close to shore, where we can also expect to see small numbers of Black Guillemots and possibly a range of waders. Looking out from the historic lighthouse at Ardnamurchan Point offers the possibility of other seabirds such as Great Skua (known locally as Bonxie), Arctic Skua and Arctic Terns. We will also hope to see the Twite flock that often frequents this area from August onwards.

One of the highlights of the holiday will be a day at sea with an experienced local skipper. We will sail from Loch Sunart to the Isle of Muck or Mull (depending on weather conditions) we will return via the spectacular Ardnamurchan Point. We will be looking for the cetaceans that occur regularly in these waters, including Common Dolphins, Bottlenose Dolphins and Minke Whales. Basking Sharks are also possible. A boat trip across the "Sea of the Hebrides" is an experience that will live long in the memory!

We will also spend two days visiting a variety of sites in the centre and on the north coast of the peninsular, including Sanna Bay, a truly magical beach with white sands and sweeping views across to the small isles. The journey to Sanna takes us through the geologically fascinating "Land of the Rings", a landscape dominated by concentric rings of rocky ridges. This part of Ardnamurchan is home to a range of raptors including Golden and White-tailed Eagles. We will take time to seek out these iconic birds in their expansive wilderness home, where displaying Ravens and herds of Red Deer are a common sight.

The Ardnamurchan Peninsula is a magical place that retains the wild character of the ancient highlands. This holiday offers the chance to see a range of wildlife in unspoilt and unforgettable locations.

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

Meet Glasgow, travel to Ardnamurchan

Today we will meet at Paisley Gilmour Street Railway Station (a short train connection from Glasgow Central), followed by a pick-up from Glasgow International Airport. (at 14:00 and 14:15 respectively). We will then drive for about 4 hours to our accommodation. Along the journey, the tour leader will make stops to pick up any snack, drinks and extra supplies. Our route follows the length of Loch Lomond then crosses Rannoch Moor to Glencoe. After a short stop to enjoy the spectacular views at this famous location, we will continue on to the Corran Ferry, where a five-minute crossing will take us to the north shore of Loch Linnhe. We then drive west through the village of Strontian before continuing our journey onto the village of Salen, where we will turn onto the single-track road that runs along Loch Sunart to our base. We shall then have dinner at the Ardnamurchan Natural History Centre just around the corner from our base. There may be time to look for otters in Glenborrodale Bay after dinner.

Our accommodation offers comfortable en-suite private rooms. We will have sole occupancy as we relax and appreciate the serenity of the forest. With luck, Pine Marten will visit the table on the patio which we will stock with peanuts (a Pine Marten favourite). The animals are not put off by the outside light so great views and photographs can be obtained with luck and patience. All this can be enjoyed from the comfort of the living room with a hot drink or maybe a glass of wine; we offer the chance to stop en route to the lodge to purchase drinks should guests wish.

Day 2

Southern Peninsula

As we are based so close to Loch Sunart there will be an optional dawn walk to watch for Otters and other wildlife in the early morning.

Today we will explore the southern shore of the peninsula, seeking out a range of species as we travel along the single-track road. There are several bays from Glenborrodale to Ardnamurchan Point which can harbour Otters and Common Seals. We can hope to see flocks of Kittiwakes, Manx Shearwaters and Gannets. Solitary Black Guillemots and Shags can be found feeding close inshore whilst on the shoreline Oystercatchers and Grey Herons are a common sight.



European Otter

The coast road terminates at Ardnamurchan Point, which is dominated by the historic lighthouse. This is the most westerly point on the British mainland and provides a dramatic view across the Sea of the

Hebrides. We will spend time looking out to sea, where we should be able to add skuas and terns to our bird list. A flock of Twite can occasionally be found flying around the rocks close to the lighthouse. With luck and calm conditions, it is even possible to see dolphins and Minke Whale from here.

On our way back, we will stop in the small village of Kilchoan, where Otters can sometimes be found feeding in the shallow bay. Seabirds and waders can also be observed and the shop and community centre offer useful facilities.



Golden Eagle

Although birds of prey can be seen virtually anywhere on the peninsula, the best place to look for them is the viewpoint at Camas nan Geall, which provides panoramic views of the highest peak on Ardnamurchan, Ben Hiant. We will stop and scan the mountainsides for raptors, with the possibility of both Golden and White-tailed eagles.

After dinner we will relax before the option of venturing out for a night drive. It is a rare privilege to witness the nocturnal activities of deer, foxes, owls and with luck, Pine Marten.

Day 3

Sanna

Today there will again be the option to go for a pre-breakfast Otter watch.

After a well-deserved breakfast we will head out on the remote road to Sanna. Fifty-five million years ago, a volcanic caldera was formed when magma exploded up to the earth's surface, leaving behind concentric rings of volcanic rock. This period of intense geological activity contributed to the formation of the Atlantic Ocean. Our route to Sanna will take us through the concentric rings of rocky ridges, which create an atmospheric landscape. Birds here can include Hen Harrier and Merlin. Sanna Bay itself is a wild place with a stunning white sandy beach surrounded by rocky outcrops. Here we can look for resident Rock Pipits, Red-throated Divers, migrating Wheatears and waders.

In the afternoon we will take time to explore the central hills and moorland, where herds of Red Deer are a frequent sight - the stags are in magnificent condition at this time of year. We will also look for the more elusive Fallow and Roe Deer. Birds of prey also inhabit this wilderness, including Golden and White-tailed Eagles. We will check for both species along the road to Swordle, where large numbers of Ravens often display. We will also stop near Loch Mudle to enjoy close views of a Sand Martin colony – the young will have fledged and will be preparing to leave by late Autumn. This is also a good location for Scotch Argus butterfly.

Although human settlement on the peninsula is limited to a handful of tiny villages, there are places to find refreshments and possibly a break from any inclement weather!

We will return to the Bunkhouse and again keep watch for Pine Marten from the comfort of our living room.

Day 4

Boat trip to Muck or Mull

Today we will travel on a chartered boat trip on the "Laurenca", to search for cetaceans and seabirds around the Sea of the Hebrides. We can expect to see good numbers of both Harbour and Atlantic



Minke Whale

Grey Seals, visible as surface to peer inquisitively at their human admirers. Black Guillemot, Eider, and more rarely, Basking Shark can also be seen in the waters around Ardnamurchan at this time of year.

We will sail south past some of the most dramatic coastal scenery in Scotland and pass close to Ardnamurchan Point, gaining a sailors' view of the

famous lighthouse. With luck, we may encounter dolphins or Minke Whales and this last leg of our voyage offers probably the best opportunity. Seabirds can fly close to the boat and might include Arctic and Great Skuas, Arctic and Common Terns as well as Manx Shearwaters and even Storm Petrels.

We will return along the sheltered waters of Loch Sunart, where we can encounter more seabirds, seals and Harbour Porpoise. Risso's Dolphin are even possible here! After an exciting day at sea, we will be more than ready for a relaxed evening meal and for those wanting to stay up to keep watch, the table will again be baited for the Pine Marten.

Day 5 Kentra Moss & Garbh an Eilean

Again we will offer the chance for those interested to go for a pre-breakfast Otter watch.

We will begin with a visit to village of Acharacle in the hope of seeing Red Squirrels, which are thinly spread and hard to find on Ardnamurchan. After a brief stop, we will continue along the beautiful Shiel river and out across Kentra Moss. This is a fine example of a blanket bog and is a breeding area for the enigmatic Hen Harrier. We will pause on the jetty at the mouth of Kentra Bay, where terns often feed close inshore. Before lunch, we will continue travelling eastwards to visit Castle Tioram. This is an impressive ruin that overlooks the point where Loch Moidart meets the Shiel River. Of great strategic importance, this castle has a turbulent history. Our walk takes us alongside coastal woodland, where we can look for bird species that we might have missed further west.

Back in Acharacle, we will stop for a while on the jetty and look for ducks and divers on Loch Shiel. We can also visit the community-run café and post office.

The remainder of the afternoon will be spent at Garbh an Eilean, where a superb and comfortable hide overlooks scenic islands in Loch Sunart. This is a great place to watch Harbour Seals, which are usually present in small numbers. Otters are also regularly sighted from the hide and birds can include Red-breasted Mergansers.

Again, we will enjoy another delicious meal at the Natural History Centre before relaxing in the living room at the Bunkhouse hoping that a Pine Marten will visit to take the nuts.

Day 6 Isle of Càrna & Loch Sunart

The whole morning will be dedicated to a trip across Loch Sunart to the Isle of Càrna. The crystal-clear waters around the island are very shallow and offer superb habitat for Otters, which can feed largely undisturbed because the island has no permanent inhabitants. Birds can be numerous, especially gulls and terns, though birds of prey are also seen. We will spend about two hours looking for Otters around the shore, both White-tailed and Golden Eagles are possible.

Day 7 Explore the Peninsula

Again there will be an option for those interested to go for a pre-breakfast Otter watch.

Our final day is left free to revisit favourite sites from the week and to leave time to seek out any species we may have missed thus far. We might revisit the lighthouse at Ardnamurchan Point, go for lunch on Swordle Bay or take a walk through the RSPB Reserve at Glenborrodale. It may also be possible to explore the north shores of Loch Shiel.



View from the Isle of Carna © Marcus John

Day 8

Travel to Glasgow

It will soon be time to say goodbye to Ardnamurchan and begin our return journey back across the Corran ferry, through Glencoe and on to Rannoch Moor. We will have time to stop and enjoy the highland views before we return via Loch Lomond to Glasgow.

Pine Martens & Video Footage

Please follow the link below for a sneak preview of what is possible from the living room window at the Glenborrodale Centre. This has occurred regularly on our August tours! Of course with wild animals a sighting like this is never guaranteed but we have been very fortunate in encountering Pine Martens outside the centre on each tour we have run using the centre. It is often a single individual but up to four animals have been seen together and many guests enjoy sitting up each evening in the hope of seeing these wonderful animals.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cd3TdzRVgpA>

Tour Grading & Focus

On this tour we will spend part of our time in our vehicles, either touring or using our vehicles as hides, safari-style. We will also spend time watching and scanning from strategic viewpoints, and we will also undertake some walks, though none of them will be long or strenuous (any longer walks will be optional). The tour is therefore suitable for all ages and for all degrees of fitness, though it will involve early optional starts each day, and late finishes.

One of the main objectives will be to provide participants with observations of the above-mentioned mammals as well as a plethora of other interesting birds but it must be stated that mammals are hard to find and success cannot be guaranteed. With superb knowledge of the area and help from local contacts every effort will be made to locate interesting mammals but even on

the most favourable of days it is unlikely that the animals will be viewable for more than a fraction of the time spent in the field. At all times, including during the searches for these species, due attention will be paid to the wider natural history of the area and as the most conspicuous and widespread members of the fauna, it is probable that a significant amount of time will be spent looking at birds. People who do not enjoy birdwatching might not enjoy the tour, and need to think carefully before committing.

Weather, Clothing & Equipment

The weather in August and September can be glorious but wind and rain are always possible. Although some of the wildlife on this tour can be observed from accommodation and vehicle, please bring waterproof clothing to make the most of our week. One highland creature we are certain to encounter is the midge, so please also bring your preferred insect repellent. They are rarely a big problem but certain areas can be an issue. Finally, please remember to pack suntan lotion, lip-balm and seasickness tablets (if required) for our day at sea. Binoculars are required for the tour. A telescope will be very useful if you have one.

What's Included

All meals are included in the price of the holiday. We are very lucky to have Sandra and Arron from the Ardnamurchan Natural History Centre provide our breakfasts, lunches and evening meals. All evening meals will be eaten at the Natural History Centre and breakfast is self-service at the Bunkhouse with a range of bread, jams, cereals and fruit available – very much fitting the relaxed communal style of the holiday. Packed lunches will be provided every day.

Accommodation

Our accommodation is an out-building of Glenborrodale Castle, and is constructed around a paved courtyard, which is now covered by an impressive glass canopy. Being previously used as an outdoor pursuits centre it was refurbished in the summer of 2012 and offers 8 comfortable private rooms with en-suite showers. We are situated close to the castle, just off the coast road and surrounded by coniferous woodland. Please note that there are no hairdryers or kettles provided in the rooms. Towels and toiletries (shower gel/shampoo) are provided. There is communal, complimentary, 24-hour tea and coffee making facility available, as well as a microwave, fridge and kitchen. There are also no laundry facilities at the bunkhouse. No alcohol is available at the bunkhouse. A stop will be made en-route to purchase anything you require, or it can be brought with you if you are driving yourselves. This is not a luxurious hotel but a comfortable, warm, convivial base which lends itself to a 'house-party' kind of atmosphere as our group will be the sole occupants. It is indeed a friendly, welcoming, ideally located base and with excellent food prepared for our groups. Wi-Fi is available. It also doubles as an excellent Pine Marten hide when night falls with great success!

Extending Your Holiday

Whilst there are no set extensions for this tour, some clients enjoy continuing on to other parts of Scotland.

Travel Arrangements

For those meeting at Paisley Gilmour Street train station we ask you to be there at 14:00. Your leader(s) will wait for you at a location in the station, to be confirmed in your final joining instructions. When we send your final joining instructions about two weeks prior to departure we'll provide the mobile telephone number of the tour leader should you need to communicate on the day.

For those meeting at the airport we'd like to meet you at 14:15 at the Pick-up and Drop-off zone just next to car park 2 just to the left of the main terminal building when you exit (rather than having to park and walk in to the terminal).

Please aim to be in time for the pick-ups and feel free to call your leader if not.

On the final day (day 8) we plan to drop people at the airport at around 12:30 before continuing to the train station, dropping there at about 12:45.

Train

Trains to Glasgow Central can be researched and booked at www.thetrainline.com and at www.nationalrail.co.uk. It is a short train journey (less than 15 minutes) from Glasgow Central to Paisley Gilmour Street with departures every few minutes.

Flights

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

British Airways Fly from London Gatwick and London Heathrow
www.britishairways.com

EasyJet Fly from London Gatwick, Luton and Stansted as well as Belfast and Bristol
www.easyjet.com

Coach & Bus

For those travelling to Glasgow via coach or bus, these can be booked via both National Express (www.nationalexpress.com) and Megabus (<https://uk.megabus.com>). Although we do not offer a pick up point at Glasgow Bus Station, this is a short walk/taxi ride from Glasgow Central Station, with local buses also being available. A shuttle bus is also regular available from the airport's bus stop to Glasgow City Centre, should this be required.

Once you have made your travel arrangements, please could you contact Tom Mabbett by email tom@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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Pine Marten