

Ardnamurchan – Wild Scotland in Spring

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline Itinerary

Day 1 Travel to Glenborrodale Centre from Glasgow

Days 2 - 7 Excursions around Ardnamurchan Peninsula, including a visit to the Treshnish Isles

Day 8 Travel to Glasgow

Departs

April, May, June, July

Focus

Birds, Mammals, and General Natural History

Grading

A. Easy Day Walks

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code GBR51) 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
- Raptors to include Golden and White-tailed Eagle
- A visit to the Treshnish Islands for Puffins and other seabirds



Puffin, Pine Marten, Camas nan Geall



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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, breath-taking 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 shall be based throughout on the Ardnamurchan Estate which lies close to Glenborrodale Castle. Previously an outdoor pursuits centre, it was completely refurbished in 2012 and taken over by wildlife enthusiasts. It offers comfortable, warm, private rooms and as our group are the only occupants it allows for a really great “house party” like 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 to the best areas for wildlife. Being just a short walk from Loch Sunart we will have the opportunity for early morning 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 both Red and Roe Deer. Fallow Deer can also be seen along with 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 and we hope our 100% success rate with attracting these enigmatic mustelids will continue! The great bonus of this base is that we will be able to keep watch from the comfort of the living room!

With most of these species easily looked for after dark, we may head out on a night drive around the peninsula on darker nights. Using a spotlight, we shall hope to obtain close views of Red Deer which tend to venture to lower levels after dark.



View from Loch Sunart

One of the highlights of the week will be a full day visiting the Treshnish Islands which lie off the south west coast of Mull. Puffins are the undisputed stars of the show here and we will make a landing on Lunga, the largest of the islands, and get up close and personal to these wonderful birds. Be sure to have cameras at the ready! The

islands here are also home to large numbers of Guillemots, Razorbills, Kittiwakes, Shags and Fulmars and the sight and sound of a thriving seabird city such as this will live long in the memory!

Our days will be spent exploring the many special sites around Ardnamurchan, which is home to seabirds, raptors, seals and European Otter among many more. 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 Harbour and Atlantic Grey seals can be seen, often “spy-hopping” to get a better view of their human admirers! Gannets, Manx 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 while Golden and White-tailed Eagle have a thriving population here in this most remote of regions.

This holiday really allows you to get off the beaten track, away from the hustle and bustle of daily life and to be surrounded by spectacular scenery and wildlife. You will have the chance to see a range of wildlife in unspoilt and unforgettable locations.



Ardnamurchan Point

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 has recently been refurbished and offers comfortable private rooms with en-suite shower rooms. We will have sole occupancy of the centre and in the evenings, being able to 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 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.



European Otter

Days 2 - 7

Exploring the Peninsula

As we will be based so close to Loch Sunart there will be an optional dawn walk to watch for Otters and other wildlife before returning for a hearty breakfast.

Over the next six full days we will explore different areas around the peninsula seeking out a range of species as we travel along the single-track roads through our beautiful surroundings. There are

several bays from Glenborrodale to Ardnamurchan Point which can harbour Otters and Harbour Seals and we shall take gentle walks to appreciate anything we may find.

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.

In the small village of Kilchoan, Otters can sometimes be found feeding in the shallow bay while seabirds and waders can also be observed and the shop and community centre offers useful facilities.

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.

Sanna Bay is another very interesting area to visit. Fifty-five million years ago, a volcanic caldera



Common Cuckoo

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. The more wooded areas

at this time of year can hold Redstart and Wood Warblers while Willow Warblers a common here and Cuckoo should be found.

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 and a number of other species. During the week we shall also hope to find the very range restricted Chequered Skipper butterfly and the floral displays at this time of year can be wonderful. If Chequered Skipper is a particular target please choose one of the June departures.

We will choose one day this week to board a boat and head out to sea, travelling south to the Treshnish Islands off the coast of Mull. We shall be keeping sharp eyed on our way for cetaceans

and seabirds of course and once around the islands we will enjoy the Guillemots, Razorbills, Shags, Fulmars and Puffins which will have arrived to breed once again from the open ocean. All being well, we will land on the unique island of Staffa, home to Fingal's Cave, and also Lunga, where we will be able to get close to the seabird action. This will be a full day out and whilst we certainly hope that the conditions will allow the journey to these wonderful islands, if the seas are very rough a visit to the Island of Mull will be a fitting alternative.

As explained, we hope and expect to make a landing on Staffa and Lunga. A large inflatable pontoon is used to get from the boat to the shore. Even with this, there will be a short area of uneven rocks which can be slippery the vast majority of the time. On Lunga, there is then a 10-15 minute walk across the shore and up a hill to the areas where Puffins can be found at close range. Whilst there will be absolutely no rush to complete the walk, if you find it difficult walking on uneven and slippery terrain then this excursion may prove to be more challenging. Most people are able to make it ashore and the leaders and boat staff can help. If anyone did stay on the vessel, excellent bird sightings can be enjoyed without going up the hill on Lunga. Great Skuas harassing the seabirds, Razorbills, Guillemots and Puffins feeding on the water and flying overhead. If you would like further information on the walk then please do not hesitate to give us a call at the office and ask to speak to Tom Mabbett, the tour's Operations Manager.

In the evenings there will be the option to relax at the centre and watch for Pine Martens or possibly venture out for a night drive. It is a rare privilege to witness the nocturnal activities of deer, foxes, owls and with luck, Pine Marten may be seen.

The peninsula has a great many fascinating sites and is a wonderful place to explore and enjoy. We shall undertake walks where possible but there is nothing strenuous and any walks will be at a relaxed pace.



Atlantic Puffin

Day 8

Travel to Glasgow

Today we will say farewell to Ardnamurchan for the journey back to Glasgow, a journey of around 4 hours with stops on the way. Again, we will make stops at both Paisley Gilmour Street Station and Glasgow Airport.

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 all our 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 since using the bunkhouse. It is often a single individual but up to 4 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'll 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 birds and mammals. It must be stated that mammals are hard to find and success cannot be guaranteed but with superb knowledge of the area and help from local contacts every effort will be made. Due attention will be paid to the wider natural history of the area of course and everything will be enjoyed but 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.

Weather, Clothing & Equipment

The weather can be very pleasant but wind and rain are of course always possible. Although some of the wildlife on this tour can be observed from our accommodation and vehicle, please bring waterproof clothing to make the most of our week. Binoculars are required for the tour. A telescope will be very useful if you have one.

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!

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.

Extending Your Holiday

Whilst there are no set extensions for this tour, some clients enjoy continuing on to other parts of Scotland. Depending on the dates, it may be possible to do this holiday back to back with the St Kilda holiday (GBR48). Please do let us know at the time of booking if this may be of interest to you.

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 you 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 (*Martes martes*)