

Ardnamurchan – The Red Deer Rut

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Itinerary

- Day 1** Travel to Glenborrodale Centre from Glasgow
-
- Days 2 - 4** Excursions around Ardnamurchan Peninsula
-
- Day 5** Travel to Glasgow
-

Departs

September & October

Focus

Red Deer, other Mammals and Birds

Grading

A. Easy Day Walks

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code GBR52) or brochure

Highlights

- Travel through the breathtaking scenery in Scotland's wild west
- Focus on observing the Red Deer rut
- Woodland around our accommodation has a high density of Pine Martens and chance of Red Squirrel.
- Raptors to include Golden and White-tailed Eagle
- Night-time drive to look for the area's nocturnal wildlife



Red Deer and Pine Marten



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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.

With this tour having a distinct focus these dates have been carefully chosen. The end of September into the first two weeks of October is the best time of year for witnessing the Red Deer rut and this shall be our aim during our time here. 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.



Ardnamurchan

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, we are 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. In recent years, Red Squirrels have also been visiting and while not as regular as the Pine Martens there is now a chance to see this charismatic creature. All this can be enjoyed from the comfort of the living room with a hot drink or maybe a glass of wine.

On arrival we will outline the plan for the coming days and prepare for our first Pine Marten watch for those that wish.

Days 2 - 4

Exploring the Peninsula

We will have three full days to explore the peninsula and focus on witnessing the spectacle of the Red Deer rut. This will involve some early starts, evening drives and a degree of patience to observe

A feature every year on the BBC Autumnwatch series this annual event is seen as one of the most spectacular of all wildlife events in Europe and over these three days we will have a fantastic opportunity to experience it for ourselves. We will be working closely with local contacts to visit the best areas in the hope of witnessing the stags in action.

At this time of year the stags are in their prime. Their antlers are magnificent and they full of testosterone for this most important of seasons. A dominant stag will defend his harem of hinds

with the aim to mate with as many of them as possible when they come into season. The moorlands here come alive with the bellowing and barking of the stags as they try to sound as mighty as possible to help put off any attempted take over from a rival! When this tactic fails and a rival stag mounts an attack to take over the harem, the animals will often lock antlers and fight, sometimes to the death, in order to ensure they are the ones to pass on their genes. At times during each day we will aim to observe this famous event.



Red Deer stag

Of course we will not be watching rutting Red Deer throughout each day and when not doing so we will enjoy exploring this fascinating peninsula. The coast road here 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 may see skuas and terns and 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.

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



White-tailed Eagle

Ardnamurchan, Ben Hiant. We will stop and scan the mountainsides for raptors, with the possibility of both Golden and White-tailed Eagle.

We will also stop in the small village of Kilchoan, where Otters can sometimes be found feeding in the shallow bay. Sanna bay is another spot we will make an effort to visit. 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.

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!



European Otter

After dinner we will relax back at base before the option of venturing out for a night drive. It is a rare privilege to witness the nocturnal activities of deer, foxes, owls, Pine Marten and possibly Badger. Each evening there is of course the option to stay up and keep watch for Pine Marten from the comfort of our living room where the success rate is very high as they visit for the peanuts on offer.

Day 5

Travel to Glasgow

Today we shall say farewell to Ardnamurchan for 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. 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 3 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 rutting Red Deer as well as a plethora of other interesting wildlife. It must be stated that mammals are hard to find and success can never be guaranteed. With superb knowledge of the area and help from local

contacts every effort will be made to locate the rutting deer and other interesting mammals. 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.

Weather, Clothing & Equipment

The weather in late September into October can be very unpredictable and wind and rain are 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. The midge should be past its peak emergence time but please also bring your preferred insect repellent.

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 hair-dryers or kettles provided in the rooms. Towels and toiletries (shower gel/shampoo) are provided. There is communal, complimentary, 24hr tea and coffee making facility available. 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 any 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. It also doubles as an excellent Pine Marten hide when night falls with great success!

Travel Arrangements

For those meeting at Paisley Gilmour Street train station we ask you to be there at 1400. 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 1415 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 5) we plan to drop people at the airport at around 1230 before continuing to the train station, dropping there at about 1245.

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.

Extending Your Holiday

Whilst there are no set extensions for this tour, some clients enjoy making their own arrangements to continue exploring other parts of Scotland.

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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Red Deer stag