# Scotland's Mammals & Highlights of the Highlands

Naturetrek Tour Report

1st - 8th August 2022





Pine Marten and White-tailed Eagle

Report & images by Chris Still



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## **Summary**

This was another fabulous trip to the highlands of western Scotland. The weather was reasonable throughout, and this led some good wildlife sightings, including the five White-tailed Eagles in one sighting and the fantastic views of an Otter in Glenborrodale Bay. The sight of a bat flying through the sitting room will live long in the memory as will the close views of Red Deer. The insect life on the peninsula did not disappoint with the desired butterflies showing well, as well as the huge, rather alarming Horsefly. The food throughout the week was excellent as was the company of the group.

The group's favourite memories will be linked to the views of the Pine Martens each day and night. They regularly interacted with each other and posed for nice photographs. The sight of two scrambling over each other on the log and one falling off will live long in our collective memories.

#### Day 1

**Monday 1st August** 

Glasgow to Glenborrodale via Glen Coe and Corran Ferry

It was unusually warm in Glasgow when we went to pick up the vehicles to be used on this Naturetrek tour of the highlands. With the vehicles cleaned and ready to go, Chris went to the airport to collect five clients and Dave to the train station to collect two more clients. The last four tour participants would meet us at the Ariundle Centre later that day.

The traffic in Glasgow was surprisingly light and free-flowing and soon we crossed the Erskine bridge and headed out towards the Green Welly at Tyndrum. We drove through the scenic Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park and briefly discussed glacial history of this stunning loch. The journey continued over the wide and desolate expanse of Rannoch Moor where we saw our first herd of Red Deer grazing peacefully. Eventually we arrived at Glen Coe and we stopped briefly to get some photos of the stunning scenery.

We then pushed towards the Corran Ferry but before this we stopped at Glen Righ to see if we could find any Red Squirrels. Unfortunately, the feeders had not been filled up recently and there were no squirrels to be seen. We then boarded the ferry and spotted a couple of Black Guillemots on the water. We pulled off the ferry and drove for five minutes alongside the coast road to a layby. We got out and scanned the water spotting our first Eiders, Grey Herons and Shags of the trip.

The weather started to close in on us and we drove on to the Ariundle Centre where we would have the first of many delicious meals. As a group we then drove to the bunkhouse and got unpacked. Dave and Chris to set up some food for the Pine Martens: peanuts and strawberry jam. The group settled down to have a cup of tea and discuss the plans for the next day, when the first Pine Marten was seen dashing across the driveway and into the bushes by the wood stores. It soon ventured out and was eating jam on the windowsill. It was soon joined by two others who gleefully gobbled up the peanuts left on the picnic table. Once the Pine Martens had had their fill, they disappeared, and the group agreed this was a most promising start to our trip.

#### Day 2

# **Tuesday 2nd August**

Salen, Garbh Eilean Wildlife Hide, Loch Shiel, Castle Tioram, Strontian

The tide times had been checked the night before and most of the group agreed to meet at 7am in the courtyard of the bunkhouse. We set off down the road with a few midges accompanying us. Our first point of call was to look at the difference between a fern and bracken and then onto the bay. We stopped at the bottom of the road near the old telephone box. We were scanning across the bay and saw some Curlews and Greenshanks picking their way through the orange seaweed. To the right some Mallards slowly drifted off some rocks where they were resting on and into the bay. Heather looked from where the Mallards had come from and saw the sleek outline of an Otter starting to fish. There was great excitement from the group as the dog Otter would dive down into the water and search an area of about 15 metres from the rocks. The fishing proved easy for the Otter and would bring his catch up on to the rocks. At first, he caught a couple of small items which he ate on the rocks, providing great views. Later he caught a large crab which he ate hidden in the crack of a rock out of sight of us and any large gulls. The Otter decided not to come out after this, and we left back up the hill towards the bunkhouse for breakfast.

The weather had become drizzly, so we decided to head east with a quick stop at Salen to buy a few provisions and then headed on to Loch Shiel. We ventured out onto the jetty and had good views of Sand Martins, Little Grebes and some Tufted Ducks. We then continued to the wildlife hide at Garbh Eilean Hide. This hide is built out of local oak and set into the bunks of Loch Sunart with Atlantic woodland surrounding it. From the hide we saw lots of Harbour Seals. Some who were fishing, others lounging on the rocks and some young pups feeding from their mothers. We also watched some very energetic Seals chasing each other in full view of the hide. There was some lively discussion over identifying Goosander and Red-breasted Merganser especially as the Merganser males were in moult which made this particularly challenging.

After lunch we travelled to Castle Tioram. This castle was strategically built to control the entrance of the loch for the clan lords. It is an ancient scheduled monument and as it stands there are plans to develop the castle which helps to preserve it rugged look. We left the car park and walked along the spit of land towards the castle. At the castle we split off the explore different routes around the castle. As we were doing this the cry went up that a White-tailed Eagle had been seen. It flew past the castle and out to sea. A good view was had by most people. The group were very happy with this and as we walked back to the car park a group of Spotted Flycatchers were seen in a field near the car park. We then headed towards some community woodland near Strontian. We went searching for butterflies and enjoyed the varied landscape. We decided to head back to the bunkhouse after this.

At the bunkhouse Dave and Chris went searching for logs to enrich the Pine Martens' feeding area. We found some suitable logs and put them into position. Jam was then spread on the logs in key positions with some sunflower seeds spread on the logs. The aim was to encourage the Pine Martens to come out during the daylight. First there were lots of Blue Tits and Coal Tits who took advantage of the seeds. Then a small group of Red Deer came in to eat some of the lichen from the logs. As dinner was being set up, the Pine Martens visited. They were very playful this evening, chasing and playing with each other. This was a mother with her two cubs born this year. Later on, in the evening a fourth Pine Marten arrived. This was a male who had a distinctive notched cut out of its ear.

#### Day 3

# Wednesday 3rd August

Loch Sunart, Bloody Bay (Mull), Loch Sunart, Camas nan Geall

The group went down to Glennborrodale Bay in the morning at 7am. There was no sign of the Otter this morning, but it was very peaceful with just the sound of a Heron or Oystercatcher breaking the silence. It was windy and damp this morning. Today we would take Andy's boat to Muck. The journey started off smoothly as we made out way through Loch Sunart. We were scanning intently for ripples on the surface, but the water was becoming choppy as we made our way out towards Mull. We arrived at Bloody Bay the site of a fierce battle between two clans. We searched the skies for White-tailed Eagles as we drifted along the coast, one large eagle came into view. It was huge and used the wind to help it 'hover' in place. You could see the white in the tail which made people very happy. However, we were caught out by the changeable Scottish weather and a very heavy shower came down and we had to shelter in the boat. The wind really came in strong, and the waves were becoming quite large. As we tried to make out wide to the Ardnamurchan Point and the lighthouse it was getting too rough. It was decided that we would not be able to make the journey to Muck today. We reluctantly had to turn around and head back to the serenity and calm of Loch Sunart. There was lots of pretty scenery seen on the journey.

We arrived at the bunkhouse to dry off and have a cup of tea. The sun then made an unexpected appearance and most of the group took this opportunity to go to Camas nan Geall with its great views of Ben Hiant. We parked up in the car park and scanned the area finding some Buzzards circling up high. We then walked down the footpath to look at the different pieces of archaeology present. This site has been inhabited for at least 5,000 years with a chambered cairn and the standing stone from 4,000 years ago. It is thought the Vikings might have landed here when exploring the coastline. As we walked down to the beach a flock of five birds flew up to the fence and perched nicely in view. They were five Twite, a bird which is difficult to track down on the peninsula.

Very happy with this we headed back to the bunkhouse for another fabulous meal and watched the delights of the Pine Martens interact on their search for the jam.

## Day 4

# **Thursday 4th August**

Loch Sunart, Isle of Carna, Kentra Moss, Garbh Eilean Wildlife Hide

A small group met at 7am in the courtyard of the Bunkhouse. We walked down to the bay and scanned the area intently. We had no luck looking for Otter this morning so came back for a tasty breakfast as consolation.

We drive to Laga bay to meet Andy to go another boat journey. This time exploring the Loch Sunart and the Isle of Carna. We slowly travelled through Loch Sunart and made our way to the east side of Carna. We travelled over a deep trench hoping for Harbour Porpoises to break the surface, but we did not see any. We carried on cruising through past Carna when Chris saw an Otter. Unfortunately, by the time the boat had turned the Otter had disappeared. We then travelled to entrance of Loch Teacuis where we learnt about the unique wildlife that calls this area home. Under where we were drifting are a range of specialised organisms such as sponges, starfish and brittlestars. We then travelled back out onto Loch Sunart and around to the northern part of Carna to look at how the islands biodiversity is being restored. The Rhododendron which arrived with the Victorians and is

highly invasive is being removed slowly. The plant must be dug up and placed upside down as leaving the roots exposed is key to killing the plants. As we slowly drifted back towards Laga Bay, there was a shout of 'Harbour Porpoise!' and at least three Porpoises were seen breaking the surface of the calm waters and diving down, seen by everybody. We then returned to the bunkhouse for lunch and a cup of tea.

In the afternoon we decided to explore the central areas of the peninsula. First, we drove to Camas Torsa and had a quick look at the loch. Whilst on the beach we investigated the rock pools. Here we found some stunning red Beadlet Anemones. We then drove to Kentra Moss and had a brief walk in this area of stunning scenery. The tide was far out, and the sandy beach was very beautiful, whilst sheep grazed on the salt marsh. We then drove to the hide at Garbh Eilean. The hide was quieter today with a few common seals and a grey heron. We then drove to Ariundle centre for another wholesome dinner. It was then off to the bunkhouse for the evening's entertainment. Again, the Pine Martens came out and put on another fine display.

In the evening we had a talk from Niall who was the former manager of the Ardnamurchan estate. He came to speak to us about conservation issues in the surrounding area. Halfway through the talk a Brown Long-eared Bat came flying through the sitting room. It did several laps of the room, which no-one minded as it was taking many midges.

Day 5 Friday 5th August

Kilchoan, Loch Mudle, Sanna Bay, Glendrian

A keen group went in search of an Otter at 7am. We went down to the bay and then onto Aperitif point for a different view of the bay. There was very little wind, and the water was flat. The scene was very tranquil and every time the light changed, the vista changed as well. We came back for a tasty breakfast back at the bunkhouse.

Today we decided to head out west and started out toward Kilchoan investigating all the bays looking for Otter, but did not see one. We then drove towards Camas nan Geall but stopped a little bit earlier for a walk up to the wind turbine on the Ardnamurchan peninsula. The walk was a little steep but the views at the top were spectacular looking out to sea. At the top we saw a group of 15 Red Deer stags. Some of the stags were growing some very impressive antlers in anticipation of the upcoming rut. On the way down some people saw a couple of Dark Green Fritillary butterflies.

We then drive toward Loch Mudle and a White-tailed Eagle was seen flying overhead. It did not hang around for long, so we moved off towards Sanna Bay. This is one of the largest beaches on the peninsula with three-metre-high dune cliffs and clear turquoise seas. As we walked through the dunes, Sand Martins collected insects for their chicks and Wheatears flitted through. We ate a lovely picnic lunch and then walked through the footpaths looking at the complex flora found in the back area of the bay. We then drove to Glendrian which is an abandoned crofting township. We took a short walk to a viewpoint to look at what was left when the settlement was abandoned in 1941.

We then drove back to the bunkhouse for a meal at the bunkhouse and to watch the Pine Martens. It was good fun as they interacted with each other, including eating on the windowsills.

#### Day 6

# **Saturday 6th August**

Camas nan Geall, Kilchoan, Loch Mudle, Ardnamurchan Lighthouse, Portuairk

We went down to the bay again this morning and had a very relaxing time taking in the scenery and tranquillity. We decided to head out to the lighthouse today but first made a short stop at Camas nan Geall to look down on the bay. We then moved onto Loch Mudle where we were lucky enough to view an adult White-tailed Eagle in a tree and a youngster nearby. Overhead another eagle soared, and the youngster could be heard calling for food. As were about to leave two more eagles came down out of the sky quickly to land behind the adult in the tree. This was fabulous and most people had seen five White-tailed Eagles in one sighting.

From Loch Mudle we then headed towards Mingary pier and looked out to sea. As we were driving to Kilchoan we stopped at Allt Na Mi-chomhdhail as Dave had spotted the ghostly outline of a male Hen Harrier gliding over the moor. Every searched for this magnificent bird of prey and it did briefly show again over a ridge for three of the group. We continued to Kilchoan to look for Otters in the bay. We then drove to the Ardnamurchan Lighthouse which is the most westerly point of mainland Britain. It was breezy at the point today, but we had good views of the surrounding coastline and some of the small isles. From here we drove down to Portuairk. This is a small bay on the opposite side of Sanna. As we were walking and exploring the salt marsh, Dave spotted a Common Lizard that was soon the most-photographed lizard on the peninsula. The scenery in this area of the highlands is stunning and was enjoyed for a long time this afternoon. We then drove route from this morning back checking at the same points for more fantastic wildlife. We ate at the bunkhouse, and we watched the antics of the Pine Martens again.

#### Day 7

# **Sunday 7th August**

Ockle, Allt Na Mi'chomhdhail, Garbh Eilean Wildlife Hide, Loch Shiel, Loch Moidart

Today we decided to explore the wild northern parts of the peninsula. We drove up to Ockle until the road stops. We had nice walk along the road looking at range of good quality birds. Willow Warblers were still singing, and Lesser Redpolls sat up on the telegraph wires. The males were looking particularly splendid with their red breast and head. A bit further on a family group of at least four Spotted Flycatchers will sallying for insects as well as chasing each other through the bracken.

We drove to Kilchoan to explore the jetty and watched a large crab chased to much smaller crabs in the crystal-clear waters. We then travelled to Allt Na Mi-chomhdhail to search for the male Hen Harrier, but we had no luck. As we drove past Loch Mudle another White-tailed Eagle was seen bringing our total to 11 seen in the week. We had lunch at the bunkhouse and were visited by a Pine Marten in the middle of the day. The Pine Martens had really treated us this week to many views during the day, in good light making the photographers happy.

In the afternoon we visited the wildlife hide at Garbh Eilean and say more Harbour (Common) Seals, as well as Mergansers and Goosanders. It had started to rain heavily so we went for tea, coffee, and cake at Café Tioram near Loch Shiel. After 45 minutes the weather started to clear up and we headed out towards Loch Moidart. We

stopped at each bay and found a range of interesting bird species including Black-legged Kittiwake and Common Terns.

For the last time we headed to Ariundle Centre for our evening meal. It was another fabulous meal as had all the food which had been prepared by Kate and her team throughout the week. We headed back to the bunkhouse and enjoyed the playful nature of the pine martens for the final evening.

#### Day 8

# **Monday 8th August**

We set off immediately after breakfast for the long drive back to Glasgow. We crossed back over Loch Linnhe on the Corran Ferry before continuing through the mountains, where we enjoyed views of Glen Coe before taking a break in Tyndrum. We arrived back in Glasgow in plenty of time for everyone to catch their various trains and planes.

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# **Species lists**

#### Birds

		August 2022							
Common name	Scientific name	1 2 3 4 5 6						7	8
Canada Goose	Branta canadensis	✓	✓	<b>√</b>	✓	<b>√</b>	<b>√</b>	<b>√</b>	✓
Greylag Goose	Anser anser	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mallard	Anas platyrhynchos		✓	<b>√</b>	✓		<b>√</b>	✓	
Tufted Duck	Aythya fuligula		✓						
Common Eider	Somateria mollissima	✓							✓
Red-breasted Merganser	Mergus serrator		✓					✓	
Common Pheasant	Phasianus colchicus		✓				✓	✓	
Red-throated Diver	Gavia stellata				3				
Manx Shearwater	Puffinus puffinus			30+			✓		
Little Grebe	Tachybaptus ruficollis		✓		✓			✓	

			August 2022						
Common name	Scientific name	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Grey Heron	Ardea cinerea	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Northern Gannet	Morus bassanus			✓		✓	✓		
European Shag	Gulosus aristotelis	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Great Cormorant	Phalacrocorax carbo				✓			✓	
White-tailed Eagle	Haliaeetus albicilla		1	1	2	1	6	1	
Common Buzzard	Buteo buteo	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Ringed Plover	Charadrius hiaticula					<b>√</b>			
Eurasian Oystercatcher	Haematopus ostralegus	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Eurasian Curlew	Numenius arquata	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		
Common Greenshank	Tringa nebularia			✓		✓	✓		
Common Sandpiper	Actitis hypoleucos		<b>√</b>	<b>√</b>		<b>√</b>			
Black-legged Kittiwake	Rissa tridactyla						<b>√</b>	<b>√</b>	
Black-headed Gull	Chroicocephalus ridibundus		<b>√</b>		<b>√</b>	<b>√</b>	<b>√</b>	<b>√</b>	
Common Gull	Larus canus	<b>√</b>	<b>√</b>	<b>√</b>	<b>√</b>	<b>√</b>	<b>√</b>	<b>√</b>	
Great Black-backed Gull	Larus marinus		<b>√</b>	<b>√</b>	<b>√</b>		<b>√</b>	<b>√</b>	
European Herring Gull	Larus argentatus	<b>√</b>	<b>√</b>	<b>√</b>	<b>√</b>	<b>√</b>	<b>√</b>	<b>√</b>	<b>√</b>
Lesser Black-backed Gull	Larus fuscus graellsii	1							
Common Guillemot	Uria aalge			<b>√</b>					
Razorbill	Alca torda			<b>√</b>					
Rock Dove	Columba livia		<b>√</b>				<b>√</b>		
Feral Pigeon	Columba livia 'feral'		✓				✓		
Common Wood Pigeon	Columba palumbus		✓	<b>√</b>	<b>√</b>	<b>√</b>	✓	<b>√</b>	
Eurasian Collared Dove	Streptopelia decaocto		✓			✓	✓	✓	
Common Cuckoo	Cuculus canorus						✓	✓	
Great Spotted Woodpecker	Dendrocopos major			<b>√</b>	<b>√</b>	<b>√</b>	✓	✓	
Common Kestrel	Falco tinnunculus					-		✓	
Eurasian Jay	Garrulus glandarius		<b>√</b>	<b>√</b>	<b>√</b>	<b>√</b>	<b>√</b>	√	
Hooded Crow	Corvus cornix		√	√	√	√	√	√	
Northern Raven	Corvus corax		√	√	√	√	√	√	
Coal Tit	Periparus ater	<b>√</b>	√	√	√	√	√	√	<b>√</b>
Eurasian Blue Tit	Cyanistes caeruleus	<b>√</b>	√	√	√	√	√	√	<b>√</b>
Great Tit	Parus major	<b>√</b>	√	√	√	√	√	√	<b>√</b>
Sand Martin	Riparia riparia		√		√	√	√	√	_
Barn Swallow	Hirundo rustica	<b>√</b>	√	<b>√</b>	√	√	√	√	
Common House Martin	Delichon urbicum	<b>√</b>	√	√	√	√	√	√	<b>√</b>
Long-tailed Tit	Aegithalos caudatus		. •			•	√		_
Willow Warbler	Phylloscopus trochilus		<b>√</b>		<b>√</b>	<b>√</b>	_	<b>√</b>	
Eurasian Blackcap	Sylvia atricapilla		<b>√</b>		<b>√</b>	•		•	
Goldcrest	Regulus regulus		_	<b>√</b>	<b>V</b>				
Eurasian Wren	Troglodytes troglodytes		<b>√</b>	, v				<b>√</b>	
Common Starling	Sturnus vulgaris		<b>V</b>				<b>√</b>	<b>V</b>	
Common Starling  Common Blackbird	Turdus merula	<b>√</b>	<b>√</b>	<b>√</b>	<b>√</b>	<b>√</b>	<b>√</b>	<b>√</b>	<b>√</b>
		<b>V</b>	✓ ✓	_ v	<b>V</b>	_ v	✓ ✓	<b>V</b>	V
Song Thrush Mistle Thrush	Turdus philomelos Turdus viscivorus		<b>V</b>	10			V	<b>√</b>	
			2	10				4	
Spotted Flycatcher European Robin	Muscicapa striata Erithacus rubecula	<b>√</b>	✓	<b>√</b>	<b>√</b>	<b>√</b>	<b>√</b>	<b>4</b> ✓	<b>√</b>

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		August 2022							
Common name	Scientific name	1	2	3	4	6	7	8	
European Stonechat	Saxicola rubicola		<b>√</b>		<b>√</b>	<b>√</b>	<b>√</b>	<b>√</b>	
Northern Wheatear	Oenanthe oenanthe					✓	✓		
White-throated Dipper	Cinclus cinclus							✓	
House Sparrow	Passer domesticus	✓	<b>√</b>			✓	✓	✓	
Dunnock	Prunella modularis		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Pied Wagtail	Motacilla alba yarrellii		<b>√</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Grey Wagtail	Motacilla cinerea		✓	✓	<b>√</b>	✓	✓	✓	
Meadow Pipit	Anthus pratensis			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
European Rock Pipit	Anthus petrosus		<b>√</b>	✓		<b>√</b>	<b>√</b>	<b>√</b>	
Common Chaffinch	Fringilla coelebs	✓	✓	✓	<b>√</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Twite	Linaria flavirostris			✓					
Common Linnet	Linaria cannabina			✓				✓	
Lesser Redpoll	Acanthis flammea			✓			✓	✓	
European Goldfinch	Carduelis carduelis		<b>√</b>		✓		✓	✓	
Eurasian Siskin	Spinus spinus		✓		✓			✓	

# Mammals

	August 2022								
Scientific name	Common name	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Eurasian Otter	Lutra lutra		1		1				
Pine Marten	Martes martes	3	4	3	3	4	3	2	1
European Badger	Meles meles				1	1			
Roe Deer	Capreolus capreolus								
Fallow Deer	Dama dama								
Red Deer	Cervus elaphus	✓	<b>√</b>	<b>√</b>	✓	<b>√</b>	✓	✓	
Red Fox	Vulpes vulpes								
Harbour Porpoise	Phocoena phocoena			1	3				
Harbour (Common) Seal	Phoca vitulina	✓	<b>√</b>	<b>√</b>	✓	<b>√</b>	✓	✓	
Grey Seal	Halichoerus grypus								
Brown Long-eared Bat	Plecotus auritus				✓				
Wood Mouse	Apodemus sylvaticus	✓							

# Amphibians

Scientific name	Common name
Common Toad	Bufo bufo
Common Frog	Rana temporaria

#### Insects

Scientific name	Common name
Small White	Pieris rapae
Green-veined White	Pieris napi
Ringlet	Aphantopus hyperantus

Scientific name	Common name	
Meadow Brown	Maniola jurtina	
Common Darter	Sympertrum striolatrum	
Migrant Hawker	Aeshna mixta	
Scotch Argus	Erebia aethiops	
Dark Green Fritillary	Speyeria aglaja	
Grayling	Hipparchia semele	
Small Tortoiseshell	Aglais urticae	
Dor Beetle	Geotrupes stercorarius	
Red Admiral	Vanessa atalanta	
Peacock	Aglais io	
Dark Giant Horsefly	Tabanus sudeticus	

#### Reptiles

Scientific name	Common name
Common Lizard	Zootoca vivipara

#### Plants (courtesy of Stephen & Sue Place)

Redshank Lesser Spearwort English Stonecrop Silverweed Red Clover Herb Robert Purple Loosestrife Bell Heather Lady's Bedstraw Hemp-nettle Monkey Flower Yellow Rattle Common Butterwort Field Scabious Pineapple Mayweed Ragwort

Marsh Thistle Bog Asphodel Fragrant Orchid Male Fern Ragged Robin Round-leaved Sundew Meadowsweet

Tufted Vetch White Clover Common Milkwort

Hogweed

Cross-leaved Heath Wood Sage Marsh Woundwort

Foxglove

Marsh Lousewort Common Valerian Devilsbit Scabious

Yarrow Burdock

Black Knapweed Common Spotted Orchid

Cotton-grass Hard Fern Meadow Buttercup Grass of Parnassus

Tormentil

Bird's-foot Trefoil Wood Sorrel

Rosebay Willowherb

Heather Thrift Self-heal Thyme Eyebright

Common Cow-wheat

Honeysuckle Harebell Sneezewort Creeping Thistle Hawkweed

Heath Spotted Orchid Maidenhair Spleenwort