



Wild Globe Travel Consultancy

Tailored Wildlife, Wilderness and Adventure Travel Across the Globe.

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SCOTLAND

Date - September 2025

Duration - 8 Days

Destinations

Inverness - Cairngorms National Park - Aviemore - Pitlochry - Loch of the Lowes - Blairgowrie - Bridge of Cally - Braemar - Ballater - Glenlivet - Glenmore - Cairn Gorm - Boat of Garten - Loch Garten - RSPB Loch Garten - Nethy Bridge - Rothiemurchus Highland Estate - Lochan Mor - Loch an Eilein - Aigas Field Centre - Glen Strathfarrar - Loch Beannacharan - Isle of Skye - Carbost - Fairy Pools - Armadale - Mallaig - Ardnamurchan - Salen - Loch Sunart - Garbh Eilean Wildlife Hide - RSPB Glenborrodale - Kilchoan - Corrachadh Mòr - Isle of Mull - Tobermory - Knock - Loch Na Keal - Loch Usig - Loch Spelve - Glenforsa - Salen - Ballygown Bay - Treshnish - Croig - Loch Torr Wildlife Hide - Craignure - Oban - Ellenabeich - Lunga - Scarba - Jura - Knapdale - Loch Barnluasgan - Loch Coille-Bharr - Ardrishaig - Fort William - Fort Augustus - Loch Ness - Whitebridge - Cromarty - Cromarty Firth - Moray Firth - Elgin - Newburgh - Forvie National Nature Reserve

Trip Overview

As was the case with our recent visit to the Azores, we had a few days spare at the end of a work trip and I decided to introduce my partner Karina to the Scottish Highlands, easily one of the most picturesque regions on earth and an area she had somehow never found her way to. Given we barely had eight days available, it was never going to be a very comprehensive tour and I decided instead to show her as many highlights as possible, including Cairngorms National Park, the Ardnamurchan peninsula and the dramatic isles of both Skye and Mull. I would have dearly loved longer to include any number of equally ravishing locations, including several a great deal further north, but these will now have to wait until a trip we have planned for the Outer Hebrides and Orkney Islands. Considering how many locations we were attempting to explore in just over a week, I did not exactly expect this trip to be a wildlife bonanza and these expectations were not greatly improved when we landed in Inverness to 60mph winds and the news that this was as good as the weather had been for several days. Indeed, we would later discover that the whale watching tour I had booked out of Tobermory had been unable to operate for six days straight and that even the walking tours at the summit of Cairn Gorm were being cancelled due to the high winds. As it was, after a fairly damp start searching for mountain hares in the Cairngorms, the weather turned massively in our favour and we experienced very little rain and no real indication of the lower temperatures you can start to expect at this time of year across much of the Highlands. In fact, some days could perhaps even be described as balmy and of our three boat tours and the same number of ferry crossings, none were ever in any danger of being cancelled. On the penultimate tour, a superb general wildlife jaunt around the Inner Hebrides island of Scarba, I was standing on deck photographing dolphins and seals in a t-shirt and apart from one fairly chilly evening sitting in an open hide, I can barely remember an activity that was even impacted by the weather, which I do not believe I have ever previously written in terms of a visit to Scotland, certainly not in late September. Good weather of course generally means good wildlife sightings and although I had again not expected this to be a particularly productive trip, given the amount of travelling we would be doing within a relatively short period, I was continually surprised by both the number of animals encountered and how well we were able to observe the vast majority. As the mammal sightings below hopefully convey, this was a surprising little trip filled with memorable highlights and for more information regarding several of the areas visited, as well as almost all of the species observed, please refer to my trip report from August 2024, as I explored many of the same destinations last year and encountered most of the same mammals.





Mammal Sightings

Order Carnivora - Family Mustelidae (Mustelids - 3)

1. Eurasian Otter - *Lutra lutra*

This was one of the few species I was not able to observe as well as on my previous visit, as we simply did not have sufficient time to devote to the shores of Loch Spelve on the Isle of Mull, where Eurasian otters are often observed feeding among the seaweed at the water's edge. That said, Mull very much remains one of the best places to watch otters in the entire UK and we did still spot three of these delightful creatures whilst exploring Ballygown Bay in the early morning, including one foraging just out of the water at dawn. Unfortunately, I was driving on this occasion, as opposed to sitting watching quietly at a discreet distance, and although I pulled over more or less immediately, the otter had already seen us and quickly returned to the sea. What though I missed this time in terms of proximity, we more than made up for in duration at the famous Garbh Eilean Wildlife Hide on the Ardnamurchan peninsula, where we watched a pair of otters swimming and hunting for the best part of an hour. Whilst they spent most of their time exploring the narrow channel between the hide and the small island it overlooks, they did both emerge to feed on rocks and the views are always pretty sensational at Garbh Eilean, particularly with a decent pair of binoculars in good weather, which we were again fortunate to enjoy.

2. Pine Marten - *Martes martes*

Given that Karina had never seen a pine marten, I booked visits to two private hides, just in case we were unfortunate at one. This did actually turn out to be the case, but happily, the blank evening occurred at the second hide on our final night and we had already observed three of these charismatic forest mustelids at the first. As much as I enjoy watching pine martens at hides, I had been slightly disappointed to miss them in genuinely wild conditions back in 2024 and was therefore thrilled to pick one up with a thermal imager during a short night walk in the Loch Garten region. This individual was perched on a tree when I spotted it and as I raised my spotlight to show Karina, it ran down the trunk and bounced off into the forest in characteristic fashion. The sighting was typically brief for a wild pine marten, but we both had an excellent view and I was thrilled that Karina had been able to observe one of these gorgeous little predators in an entirely natural setting.



3. Eurasian Badger - *Meles meles*

That sadly was not the case in terms of our only badger sighting, which again took place at a hide. That said, this was one of the best badger encounters I have experienced at a hide, which was really a small floodlit hut from which we had a more or less 360-degree view. Whilst I will not reveal the exact location, badgers have been watched in this part of the Cairngorms National Park for around 30 years and records of the sett here date back more than a century. As such, the badgers now take absolutely no notice of either the hut itself or anyone within and you are treated to an almost entirely natural display. Obviously the feeding aspect is not natural, but the behaviour largely is and we enjoyed extremely close views of a big old sow mainly feasting, whilst two of her offspring from this year played boisterously around the sett, stopping to snuffle a few peanuts every now and then. I was told that the female was at least eight and her hair was beginning to get slightly patchy in places, but all three of the badgers looked in excellent condition and we were even able to open a window without disturbing them. As hide sightings go, certainly of a single species, this was as good as it gets and although I will always prefer watching animals in authentically wild conditions, I would equally recommend this particular hide to anyone who has never had the pleasure of observing these beautiful creatures at close quarters.



Order Carnivora - Family Phocidae (True Seals - 2)

4. Grey Seal - *Halichoerus grypus*

Given that harbour seals are more commonly observed than grey seals on Scotland's west coast, where we experienced most of our boat tours and transfers, I made a specific point of visiting the grey seal colony at Newburgh near Aberdeen, where often hundreds of seals can be observed on the sand dunes of the Forvie National Nature Reserve. The viewpoint is from the opposite bank and there are usually seals swimming in the narrow channel between the two, where the mouth of the River Ythan meets the open sea. As far as I am concerned, this is one of the best destinations to view seals anywhere in the United Kingdom and we were particularly fortunate on the day of our visit, when the entire beach was bathed in glorious sunshine and the massive seals looked magnificent against a perfectly blue sky and the breaking white waves directly behind them. This was in fact the last destination of our entire trip and whilst it would prove to be a superb finale, it was also something of a relief, as until this point, we had only encountered a handful of grey seals around Ardnamurchan and the Hebridean island of Scarba, almost all of which were observed at distance.



5. Harbour Seal - *Phoca vitulina*

Having said that, whilst we certainly encountered far more harbour than grey seals, none of our sightings of the significantly smaller harbour seals were either particularly close or particularly memorable, with most observed swimming offshore or from boats. We did also either visit or chance upon a number of small colonies, where low numbers of seals were hauled out resting, but again, none were especially close and the picture below is a pretty good illustration of what was probably our best view. Also known as common seals, there are actually far less harbour seals across the British Isles and the last detailed survey indicated that the larger grey seals outnumber harbour seals by almost four to one, with estimated populations of approximately 162,000 and 43,000 respectively.



Order Artiodactyla - Family Cervidae (Deer - 4)

6. Sika Deer - *Cervus nippon*

Although Sika deer have always been fairly easy to see in the Whitebridge area near Loch Ness, where I did again encounter them on this tour, this introduced species now occurs across much of Scotland and the United Kingdom in general. In fact, as I highlighted in my trip report from last year, sika deer have been breeding pretty much unchecked with our native red deer for decades and some sources suggest that there will be no genetically pure red deer remaining on the Scottish mainland by as early as 2050. Pure populations continue to endure on a few Scottish islands, Jura in the Inner Hebrides and South Uist in the Outer Hebrides for example, but these aside, the only genetically distinct versions of either species are thought to be the sika deer populations of the Scottish Borders and the New Forest in southern England. In addition to the few sika deer observed at Whitebridge, we had additional confirmed sightings at Ardnamurchan and on the Isle of Mull and probably observed a few more throughout our stay, as it can be difficult to determine between hybridised animals at distance and we did not generally stop to check.



7. Red Deer - *Cervus elaphus*

Red deer were encountered at several locations, from the slopes of the Cairngorms, to the shores of Loch Sunart and the remote isles of the Inner Hebrides. However, as per the previous section regarding sika deer, it was not always possible to distinguish between the two species and the photograph that I have reproduced above perfectly illustrates the issue, as I believe that both of these stags are hybridised versions of red and sika deer. In fact, I saw more what I would describe as genetically pure red deer in fenced farms across the country than I did in the wild and the situation is clearly getting worse, not only in the UK, but across Europe, where the introduced sika deer is also now widespread. At some stage, perhaps even in the short-term, it will only be possible to encounter genetically distinct red deer on the big shooting estates that dominate so much of the highlands and possibly on a few of the outlying islands. When that occurs, as it surely will, we will have lost another of our most impressive land mammals, almost, it seems, without anyone even noticing.

8. European Roe Deer - *Capreolus capreolus*

We had the same type of issue with roe deer as harbour seals, in that we saw quite a few, but none as well as I would have liked. To be entirely fair, this was partly due to the fact that at no one destination did I specifically search for them and when we did encounter one, it was usually while we were searching for something else or just exploring in general. The reality was that we just did not have time to do justice to every possible species, or any locations at all for that matter, and again, the picture below probably represents our best overall sighting of one of only two deer species native to the British Isles, the other being red deer, which are significantly larger.



9. Fallow Deer - *Dama dama*

The distribution of fallow deer in the Highlands is pretty irregular, as this is another introduced species and they become more common the further south you travel in both Scotland and England. They are fairly easy to observe around Knock on the Isle of Mull, where they are believed to have been introduced for hunting purposes during the eighteenth century, and I again photographed several there, including the shot below. Our only other fallow deer sighting took place from the unlikely vantage point of a small boat bobbing around in the Atlantic, as we spotted one individual and a small group whilst circumnavigating the Hebridean island of Scarba, as well as red deer and a number of feral goats.



Order Artiodactyla - Family Bovidae (Cattle, Goats, Sheep, Antelope and Goat Antelopes - I)

10. Wild Goat - *Capra aegagrus hircus*

Speaking of which, wild domestic goats are a real favourite of mine and I make a point of searching for them wherever they occur. On this trip, that meant visiting the ravishing Glen Strathfarrar, where I photographed a pair last year and hoped to show Karina a few more. Happily, this did prove to be the case and in all we probably observed between 30 and 40, including a few at close quarters. The goats on Scarba were much further away, but we were still able to enjoy good views of them feeding along the seashore and they also occur on the Isle of Mull, where I had initially hoped to encounter them as well. Unfortunately, for the second year in a row, I did not have sufficient time to devote to the coastal hike from Carsaig to Carsaig Arches, where you are again likely to encounter a small population of these resilient creatures.



Order Artiodactyla/Cetacea - Family Phocoenidae (Porpoises - I)

11. Harbour Porpoise - *Phocoena phocoena*

We experienced three sightings of what are the smallest cetaceans in the United Kingdom, all of which were typically transitory. The first occurred on the ferry crossing between Kilchoan and Tobermory on the Isle of Mull, where we observed a single porpoise, as well as a few common dolphins, and our second and best encounter took place on a superb boat trip out of Ellenabeich, just south of Oban. The voyage included seven different mammals, three on land as we circumnavigated the island of Scarba, as well as both UK seals, common bottlenose dolphins and another individual harbour porpoise, which I was able to take a couple of reference shots of. There was no such opportunity in terms of our final sighting on the Moray Firth, which basically involved two extremely fleeting views of three porpoises.

Order Artiodactyla/Cetacea - Family Delphinidae (Dolphins - 2)

12. Common Dolphin - *Delphinus delphis*

As mentioned above, our first view of these attractive dolphins took place on the ferry between Kilchoan and Tobermory, where I had arranged a three to four hour voyage just an hour or so after the ferry docked. Given that the tour was departing in the same waters we arrived on, more common dolphins were always likely and in all we must have observed around 200 throughout a spectacular trip, many of which were swimming and jumping in characteristically playful fashion alongside our boat. If, as I had at least partially anticipated, this was to be our last common dolphin experience, it would have been a magnificent way to end, but in fact, we would see them again just after dawn the next morning, as we drove along the shore of Ballygown Bay, primarily searching for otters. Having chanced upon three, otters that is, we arrived at the point where the mouth of the bay meets the open sea and I stopped to admire the breathtaking view from the top of the cliff, when I noticed multiple splashes in the ocean below. I was initially unable to tell which species we were watching given the distance, but common dolphins were always likely in terms of the number of splashes and I was quickly able to confirm with binoculars. There were actually several groups cutting distinct paths across the smooth surface of the water, or, more accurately, one large group that had spread out to feed. The sighting itself could not compare with our actual cruise in terms of sheer spectacle, but there remains something special about watching cetaceans from land, particularly when the encounter is entirely unexpected.



13. Common Bottlenose Dolphin - *Tursiops truncatus*

If you were creating a wildlife tour for someone visiting Scotland for the first time, you would almost certainly include the famous bottlenose dolphins of the Moray Firth. The animals here are the biggest bottlenose dolphins in the world and for decades people have been watching them from land at Chanonry Point, where they feed as the incoming tide pushes fish into the firth. Given the limited time available, I had to choose between either a boat tour in search of dolphins or a land based vigil at Chanonry Point. I ultimately opted for the boat tour, principally because it would provide an opportunity to observe other species, including the minke whales and basking sharks that were being regularly encountered as the firth stretches out into the open sea. By this point of the tour, so basically our penultimate morning, we had already observed bottlenose dolphins extremely well just minutes from the harbour at Ellenabeich and we were therefore fairly relaxed as we set out from Cromarty on what was an idyllic morning, with bright sunshine overhead and a flat sea stretching out beyond. To describe the subsequent tour as disappointing would be unfair, as we enjoyed close and extended views of these iconic dolphins in the best weather imaginable. However, the two-hour cruise is just not long enough to get you to the best areas for other species and as soon as we arrived where basking sharks were being seen, we had to more or less turn round and head back. I had actually attempted to book a three-hour cruise with this company, but they only run these periodically and were not able to offer one during our stay, which was a real shame, as obviously sightings are never guaranteed, but I already knew that time was going to be an issue in terms of the distance we could cover. Personally, I would always rather pay more for a longer more productive tour, than have to leave an area after just a few minutes, which is pretty soul destroying, particularly when you consider how far people travel for the chance to see these animals.





Order Artiodactyla/Cetacea - Family Balaenopteridae (Rorquals - I)

14. Common Minke Whale - *Balaenoptera acutorostrata*

Whilst minke whales are routinely observed on boat tours from Tobermory, you usually have to wait until you get out to their feeding grounds in open water to see one, which was very much not the case this time, as we encountered three whales more or less as soon as we left the shelter of the harbour. More would follow, including several feeding close to our boat, but as I mentioned after my tour last year, the four cetaceans observed on this trip were really a minimum requirement and I had hoped that Karina would see at least one of the slightly rarer species that occur in these waters. Humpback, fin and killer whales are all feasible, as well as risso's, white-beaked, striped and Atlantic white-sided dolphins, not to mention basking sharks, which are regularly observed here, as well as in the Moray Firth. That said, although we were not overly fortunate in terms of the species encountered, we were astoundingly lucky with the weather, as our whale watching boat was the first to leave harbour in seven days and if we had arrived during any of the previous six, we would have basically seen nothing.



Order Lagomorpha - Family Leporidae (Rabbits and Hares - 3)

15. European Hare - *Lepus europaeus*

Depending on where you live or visit in Scotland, you will consider that European hares are either incredibly common and easy to see or extremely rare and almost impossible to even catch a glimpse of. North of Dundee, they really only occur in or around the Cairngorms, where they are indeed routinely encountered, but they are pretty much impossible to see west of Loch Ness and anyone who thinks they have seen a European hare on the Isle of Mull, has actually been watching a mountain hare. There are exceptions of course, including in the extreme north of the Highlands, but in the areas we visited, the Cairngorms National Park very much remains the stronghold for this species. We saw several in less than an hour a few miles south at Loch of the Lowes, but no more at all until we returned to the general region towards the end of the tour, initially at Blairgowrie and then further north in the actual Cairngorms at Loch Garten.



16. Mountain Hare - *Lepus timidus*

Given that the European or brown hare was introduced to the UK by either the Celts or Romans, depending on which source you refer to, mountain hares are our only native hare species and two varieties occur in Scotland. The *lepus timidus scoticus* subspecies is found across most of the country, while *lepus timidus hibernicus* occurs on the Isle of Mull. The latter is more commonly known as an Irish hare and the two subspecies are actually fairly different, that is to say, Irish hares live at much lower elevations than their mainland cousins and are often observed in fields, basically more like the European hares we are so used to seeing in open countryside. I have photographed both previously and we decided that for this trip we would attempt to concentrate on the more traditional of the two and then perhaps attempt to see the introduced subspecies later on Mull, as Karina had not seen either and we both agreed that it made more sense to start with the native animal. As it was, it was not really an overly happy beginning, as we set out before dawn in the rain on our first morning and would eventually encounter ten dead mountain hares on the Old Military Road through the Cairngorms as far as Braemar. I stopped to scan at regular intervals, but we simply did not have time to search such vast landscapes adequately and I eventually decided that I would use my thermal imager instead, which produced what I thought was probably a hare within less than half an hour. Thankfully, and as per the photograph reproduced below, this proved to be the case and I was eventually able to locate the hare with binoculars, as this picture was taken with a 400mm lens and the hare would have been practically impossible to spot without a thermal, unless of course, I had taken the time to methodically scan this and perhaps every other distant hill. The hares on Mull are actually a great deal easier to observe, as they basically emerge to feed before dusk like European hares and it is usually just a case of looking for a brown blob in an otherwise uniformly green field. Unfortunately, our time there was extremely limited and, having already encountered this native species, we decided to concentrate our efforts on other animals, as well as simply catching the various ferries on time.



17. European Rabbit - *Oryctolagus cuniculus*

Another introduced species, European rabbits first appeared in the British Isles during Roman times, but just as food and wild populations were not established until another highly invasive species, the Normans, began to import them in or around the 12th century. Apart from a brief view of one on a transfer drive to Ellenabeich, all our rabbit encounters took place on either the Ardnamurchan peninsula, most notably on the drive between Kilchoan and the Ardnamurchan lighthouse, or on the Inner Hebrides islands of Skye and Mull, where I again observed several melanistic individuals on the shore of Loch Spelve, one of which, I was able to take a few reference shots of.



Order Eulipotyphla - Family Soricidae (Shrews - I)

18. Common Shrew - *Sorex araneus*

I had been hoping to show Karina a shrew at RSPB Loch Garten, where they have a small mammal feeding box at the visitor centre, however, the box did not appear to be in use during our initial brief visit and there was no sign of any shrews. We tried again at night with the thermal imager, but were again unsuccessful and our only view of one of these tiny insectivores occurred at our first hide, where a pine marten disturbed a shrew from under the hide and we were able to watch it scurrying away through the grass. It was not a great view to be honest, which was why we ultimately tried twice at Loch Garten, but it is always nice to catch even a glimpse of an animal that whilst constantly active, remains difficult to observe.

Order Rodentia - Family Castoridae (Beavers - I)

19. Eurasian Beaver - *Castor fiber*

I have been watching wild beavers in the Blairgowrie region of Scotland for well over a decade, but had never visited Knapdale Forest, the site of the famous five-year Scottish Beaver Trial, which ran from May 2009 to May 2014 and was supposedly intended to assess whether it would be feasible to reintroduce beavers to Scotland, where they had of course existed for millennia until we exterminated them. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the trial concluded that beavers were indeed capable of surviving in Scotland and in November 2016 the Scottish Government announced that beavers would be allowed to remain. As such, these extraordinary ecosystem engineers became the first mammals officially reintroduced to the British Isles. Sadly, that was not the end of what should have been a wonderful story of hope and renewal across these environmentally ravaged isles, as hundreds of beavers have since been killed by farmers, who of course objected to their release in the first place, arguing that agricultural land would be severely damaged by their return. Indeed, in 2021 a Scottish judge ruled that all of the killings authorised under licence by NatureScot, the organisation responsible for the conservation of Scottish wildlife, '*had been unlawful*' and that genuine reasons had to be provided before beavers could be killed. The culling has continued since then, but now more animals are thankfully moved than killed and in February 2025 the British Government announced that beavers would also be allowed to return to the wild in England, where I have again been watching them already for several years. At Knapdale beavers occur in both Loch Barnluasgan and Loch Coille-Bharr, but access to the latter is not great in terms of visibility and there is a hide at the much smaller Loch Barnluasgan, where you can sit and watch the beavers emerge from their lodge. Unfortunately for us, at this time of year and as winter approaches, the beavers often emerge after dark and the best time to watch them is in the long summer months of June and July, when it barely gets truly dark this far north. As such, we missed them leaving to begin foraging for the night and although we were able to clearly observe two beavers swimming with our thermal imager, we did not want to disturb them with bright lights and therefore made the decision to return just before dawn, when we would hopefully catch them returning to bed. Although this did eventually prove to be the case, much to our immense delight, it was well after 8am when one finally appeared and we were both fairly convinced we had missed them by that stage. As it was, we enjoyed excellent views of one swimming directly in front of the hide and then returning to its lodge, on a loch that has been its home since the original release back in 2009.



Order Rodentia - Family Sciuridae (Squirrels - I)

20. Eurasian Red Squirrel - *Sciurus vulgaris*

Whilst some might find this surprising, red squirrels are actually incredibly hard to observe beyond hides and the many feeders created for them across the country, particularly at guest houses, all of which want their own resident squirrels. As such, I was determined to show Karina an authentically wild red squirrel and what I considered might be the first of several attempts, I decided would take place on the trail around Lochan Mor on the Rothiemurchus Highland Estate, which forms part of the Cairngorms National Park. Within just a few minutes I had spotted a few partially gnawed pine cones, which the squirrels strip to get at the seeds, and almost instantly heard the highly distinctive and exceptionally close chatter of a red squirrel. Having told Karina just how difficult this native animal would be to find, I basically looked up and showed her one after perhaps ten minutes of searching at most. We would see another wild squirrel darting across the road between Balmoral Castle and Ballater, or at least I would, as Karina was fast asleep in the passenger seat, but the picture below was taken at one of the hides at the Aigas Field Centre, which I had booked for a couple of hours just in case the wild red squirrels were as difficult to find as I had originally anticipated.

Order Rodentia - Family Cricetidae (Muskrats, Voles, Lemmings and Hamsters - I)

21. Bank Vole - *Clethrionomys glareolus*

The hide at Aigas was also the setting of our only bank vole sightings, as a small colony thrives below the various bird and squirrel feeders. I watched them here last year, darting back and forth to collect the debris left by the other visitors. This time it was a little different, as they were using hazelnuts for the squirrels, some of which had not been shelled and were almost as big as the tiny voles attempting to cache any nuts the squirrels had missed. At times I was reminded of the acorn obsessed Scrat from the *Ice Age* films, as the poor little voles tried desperately to carry, roll, push and drag the nuts back to their nest. Two actually managed to do so, or the same one twice of course, where the supreme effort would be amply rewarded, as these diminutive rodents have incredibly strong teeth and are more than capable of gnawing through the hard shell to the actual nut.



Order Rodentia - Family Muridae (Mice, Rats and Gerbils - I)

22. Long-tailed Field Mouse - *Apodemus sylvaticus*

This was one of only two mammals that I did not encounter on my previous visit to Scotland in August 2024, as I spent very little time searching at night with a thermal imager. To be fair, I did not devote a great deal more time to nocturnal activities on this trip, but a few short walks produced several wood mice, as they were known until fairly recently, and I also watched two or three more in the artificial light of the last hide we visited, which was just as well, as there were sadly no pine martens to divert our attention.

Order Chiroptera - Family Vespertilionidae (Vesper Bats - I)

23. Daubenton's Bat - *Myotis daubentonii*

The daubenton's bat was the only other mammal that I encountered on this visit and not the last, although in reality, I probably did see them back in 2024 and just did not record it, as I do not use a bat detector and usually struggle to identify bats on the wing. That was not really an issue here, as these microbats are famous for the way they hunt across the water and as I sat waiting for the beavers at Knapdale, bats were continually diving and swooping just above the surface of Loch Barnluasgan. In all, eighteen bat species have been recorded in the United Kingdom, seventeen of which are known to breed here, and one of my future projects will be to start identifying reliable roosting sites for as many of these as possible.

Excluding several additional bats observed, but not identified.



Trip Summary

Having visited Scotland on several occasions, including twice within thirteen months, this trip was more about introducing Karina to the country and as much of the resident wildlife as possible, particularly as we have been considering moving to Scotland for a while now. Given the limited time available, clearly we could not visit as many areas as either of us would have preferred, or that she will eventually need to see, but we did still cover a lot of ground, much of which we were able to take at least some time to explore. We actually ended up encountering far more wildlife than I thought might be the case and only missed red fox, hedgehog and brown rat from last year, as well as grey squirrel, which we made no attempt for, but are easy at specific largely urban destinations, if you basically just want to add a species to a tour. We were both upset by the absence of a red fox, which we have in our garden back in the south, but they are ruthlessly persecuted by farmers and gamekeepers alike and you can never really expect to see one in Scotland, which is of course a problem in itself if you move here. Hedgehogs are usually easier, but you obviously need to spend time searching at night, which is also the case for most rodents, including rats. As I mentioned last year, if we did make our home in Scotland, my intention would be to offer guided wildlife tours, which would mean a great deal more research on my part, particularly regarding Scottish wildcat conservation and the Saving Wildcats initiative, which I would like to support. The project, which was launched in 2020, has already involved the release of captive bred wildcats within the Cairngorms National Park and in May 2024, camera trap footage confirmed that the released wildcats are breeding. It is early days of course, but the initial signs are immensely encouraging and just think how incredible it would be to share this extraordinary landscape once more with the Highland Tiger...and perhaps even the Eurasian lynx. As I have already touched upon, Scottish waters are home to an impressive variety of marine species, including more than twenty cetaceans that have been recorded here, and Shetland and Orkney, both of which we hope to visit soon, are probably the best destinations to observe killer whales in all of the UK. At each, more or less all the whale watching takes place from shore, to which the orcas often approach to within a few metres. Although birds are not my area of expertise and I neither have the knowledge or will to offer tours devoted specifically to them, I would certainly hope to include at least a few iconic species as part of a general wildlife tour. Whilst we missed golden eagle and osprey on this abbreviated trip, they are both relatively easy to see, as are puffins at the right time of year and of course white-tailed eagles, which are common around the Ardnamurchan peninsula and on the isles of Skye and Mull. We encountered five in all on Mull, an individual and two pairs, and other notable sightings included a gorgeous tawny owl at one of the hides, lots of buzzards, some of which are huge here, and a Eurasian or common kestrel. Not bad for just eight days, not when you consider the number of locations visited and the amount of driving involved just to get to them all. Hopefully we will return soon, as parts of Scotland are as beautiful as I have known anywhere in the world and I can certainly see us both exploring here for years to come.













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