

### 3. Special places for wildlife





'...that wild snow-splashed country of the high hills and dark lochans, the home of the mists and the four winds, and where the foot of man rarely treads.'

**Seton Gordon, *Wanderings of a Naturalist***



## Special places for wildlife

### Key theme 2

The Cairngorms National Park is made up of a unique mosaic of habitats of very high quality, and exceptional size and scale. It is a stronghold for British wildlife, including many of the UK's rare and endangered species, and those at the limit of their range.

Scientists classify animals and plants in danger of becoming extinct as 'endangered'. These are the species that need most help if they're to survive; often they are charismatic icons too, like golden eagles. And one in four of the UK's endangered species lives in the Cairngorms National Park.

Ninety-five per cent of the goldeneye ducks that breed in Britain do it in the Park. It contains one quarter of Scotland's native forest; one third of UK land above 600 metres; more breeding farmland waders than the whole of Wales; the largest population of twinflower in Scotland...

Any one of these things would make an area special. That they all come together in the Cairngorms National Park makes it remarkable.

The size and value of the habitats in the Park is something that already draws many visitors – they are the features that make it such a rich area for wildlife tourism. If the list of facts above sounds like a marketing brochure, that's because it is – for the businesses that bring people here to enjoy the Park's spectacular wildlife. Interpretation that gives people a real appreciation of their surroundings, and that impresses them with the quality of the Park as a whole, will make them more satisfied customers and therefore more likely to return.



### A priceless legacy

This theme is vital for conservation too. The Park's varied environments are of such high quality because of the way they've been managed in the past – it's an amazing inheritance, and the land is in good shape. But it needs looking after to stay that way. The Cairngorms National Park is cared for collectively, through cooperation between all the different people, businesses and agencies that have an interest in this place. Good interpretation, which encourages people to feel how the site they are visiting is part of a greater whole, can really help to get the messages of care and cooperation across.





### Mountain

The mountains are unique to the Park – and they're the place with the rarest habitats too. The high plateaux are more like parts of Greenland than anywhere else in Scotland. With so much land above 600 metres, the Park is an important place for species that need such a cold place to live. It's the most southerly site in Europe for snow buntings, and for many other species the Cairngorms National Park is a last outpost.

### Forest

Magical places of dappled sunlight and the scent of heather, imposing cathedrals of silent pines, or thin scrub on the mountainside, the great forests of the Park have evolved from woodland that's been here for thousands of years. Together, they make up the largest area of native woodland in Britain and are a key part of the Park's character. They're also home to core populations of wildlife that's scarce in the rest of Britain, like red squirrels, crossbills and capercaillie.



### Moorland

From the kaleidoscope of landscapes that turns outside the window of a visitor's car, moors are probably the one that makes the biggest impression. They also provoke what may be visitors' commonest question: 'What are those funny patterns in the heather?' Understanding muirburn, and how moorland is managed for red grouse, can be a key to understanding many other aspects of the Park.

### Farmland

If there had been better roads to the hungry towns and cities, the farmland in the Park might look very different today. But the straths were too far away from the markets, and the soil was too poor, for them ever to be farmed intensively. That makes them rare survivors, and vital places for birds such as waders.



### Water

Water, frozen and liquid, has moulded the Park. Thinking of it as one habitat doesn't do it justice: it is many. World famous fishing rivers so clean and natural they are used as benchmarks for UK water quality standards, internationally important wetlands, high arctic lochans and popular places to paddle – the Park has them all.

# Special places for wildlife

## Case Study – Glenlivet Wildlife

### Getting away from it all

David Newland runs Land Rover safaris in Glenlivet, together with a group of self-catering cottages. 'Being part of the National Park adds value to what we do here,' he says. 'Most visitors appreciate that they won't find everything the Cairngorms has to offer without travelling to other parts of the Park: if you want to see ptarmigan or osprey there are better places than Glenlivet.'

But it's easy to make links between what they can see in Glenlivet and the wider stories of the Park's wildlife. 'We'll sometimes get quite close to mountain hares here. Visitors are fascinated about how the hares' behaviour gives clues to the presence of golden eagles in the Park.'

David also finds that visitors appreciate the special qualities Glenlivet offers, while using it as a base to explore the rest of the Park. 'This is somewhere for people who want to get away from it all, to take their time about things. But they'll see the whole of the National Park as "their place" while they're here, and are quite happy to drive for an hour and a half to see other parts of it. We all need to work together to help people get the best experience of the Park.'



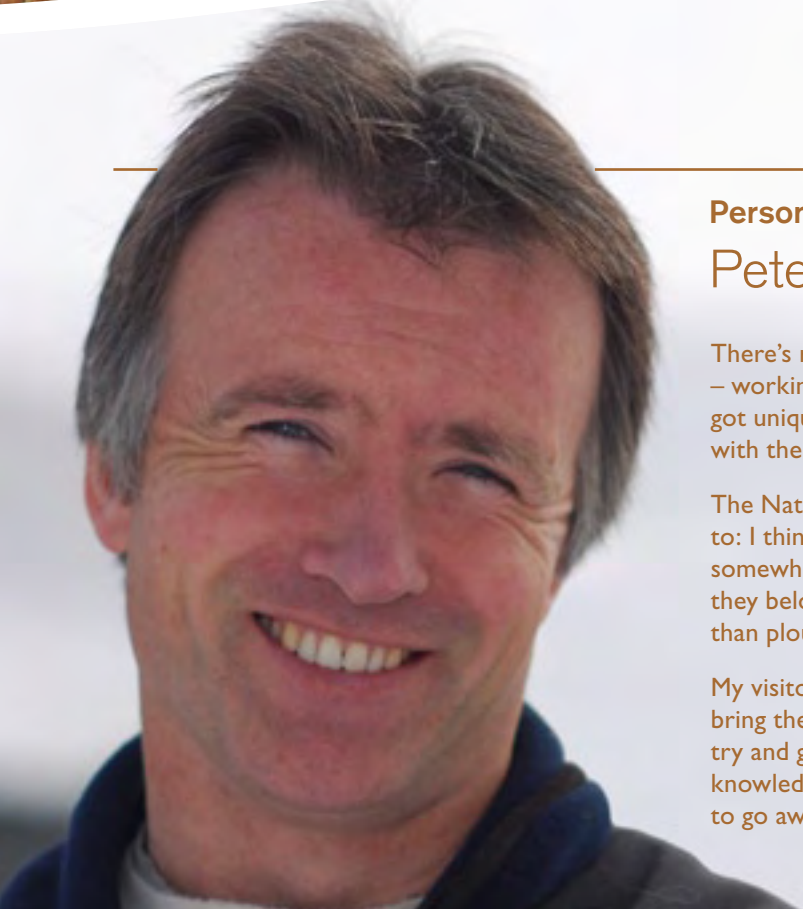
## Case Study – RSPB Abernethy

### A jewel in the crown

Loch Garten is famous for its breeding ospreys, and 35,000 people flock to the RSPB Osprey Centre each year to watch the birds on their nest. Richard Thaxton, Site Manager, sees the Park as an important context for work here. 'I think people see National Parks as "the jewels in the crown" of the country they're visiting. I know that a lot of our visitors are here because they've come to visit the Cairngorms National Park, not just to see ospreys'.

Staff at the Centre learn something about the National Park at the beginning of the season so they can put Loch Garten's birds in the context of the Park as a whole. Being part of the National Park has also helped the RSPB to explain how they manage the site. 'A few years ago people thought that some of the conservation land management here was being done in isolation, and perhaps saw it as something rather eccentric,' says Richard. 'Now it's something we have in common with other big estates, and we can present it as part of a collective effort to enhance the native pine forests that stretch across the Park.'





### Personal View

## Peter Cairns, nature photographer

There's really only one place to go in Britain for a business like mine – working as a nature photographer and running photo tours. You've got unique wildlife species, a unique mosaic of habitats associated with them, and for most of my visitors this is real 'Big Sky Country'.

The National Park gives them an international brand they can relate to: I think it suggests an image of somewhere pristine, of wildness, somewhere nature predominates. People working here need to feel they belong to that: the wider goals of the Park serve us all better than ploughing our own furrows.

My visitors are looking for animals to photograph, but in trying to bring the qualities of the Park alive I think I've got an obligation to try and get across something of what I feel about the place, and my knowledge of the species that live here. I'd much prefer our visitors to go away as better naturalists rather than better photographers!

## Starting Points



Here are some ideas about how this theme might link to places and activities throughout the Park:

- Anywhere that visitors come to watch wildlife, there's usually an opportunity to link their experience to the habitats that range across the Park. Think about how the species they might see are related to the Park's environment: you'll soon find links between what's on your site and the wider context of the Park.
- The animals and plants you may take for granted if you live here can be rare and fascinating to visitors. Setting up simple bird feeding stations outside the window can give visitors an experience they'll really appreciate, as well as chances to talk about where the birds come from.
- Find out how the habitats in your area are linked to human activity. Stories about how people have made the Park can help get across the idea that it needs good management to keep it in good shape.
- Sometimes visitors expect the National Park to be rather like the Serengeti: they think wildlife is going to be everywhere, and easy to see. In reality they'll probably be glad of some help. Make sure you know where they can find guides, or specially managed sites, and be prepared to suggest other places to visit within the Park.