



SCOTLAND

Home to snow-capped mountains, 31,000 lochs and a stunning coastline that stretches for 13,000km, Scotland is *alive with incredible wildlife!* NG Kids jumped aboard the Caledonian Sleeper train and woke up in the Scottish Highlands to check out the region's wonderful species...



Red squirrel

Hands up if you love red squirrels! Well, these cute, cuddly critters *really* need your help. One hundred years ago there were several million red squirrels in the UK and Ireland — now there are just over 160,000, 75% of which are found in Scotland.

Sadly, our native squirrels have been 'out-muscled' by larger non-native grey squirrels, which were introduced from North America to the UK in the late 19th Century and into Ireland in 1911. As well as competing with reds for food and having twice as many young, greys also carry a disease called squirrelpox virus, which is deadly to reds.

Hide and seek

Thankfully, red squirrels are doing well in the Highlands of Scotland, but wildlife experts are trying their best to protect them in other parts of the country. In the south of Scotland conservation efforts are focussing on slowing down and halting the spread of the virus in an attempt to safeguard Scotland's red squirrel population.

By preserving their forest homes and controlling grey squirrel populations, there's hope that these cheeky-looking creatures will grow in number. "Squirrelpox is the single biggest threat to the survival of our native red," says Karen Ramoo, from conservation group Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels. "So it's really important to report both red and grey squirrels when you're out and about or at home, as this helps in targeting efforts. Please keep your eyes peeled and report them via our website!"

Scamper over to scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk or rast.org.uk now!



DID YOU KNOW...?
Red squirrels have four fingers on their front paws and five toes on their feet. They communicate with their tails!

NG Kids visited the Wild Lochaber Festival (outdoorcapital.co.uk) in May, travelling to the Highlands on the Caledonian Sleeper train (scotrail.co.uk/caledoniansleeper). We stayed at the Moorings Hotel in Fort William (moorings-fortwilliam.co.uk) and toured the Highlands with Wild West (wildwestsafari.co.uk)

Pine marten

Some 6,500 years ago, when Britain and Ireland were still covered in forest, pine martens were the second most common meat-eaters on these islands. But these elusive members of the weasel family have suffered ever since from the clearance of woodlands and hunting by humans. Today, there are very few remaining in England and Wales, but in the Highlands of Scotland, and in parts of Ireland, they're thriving! Scientists believe that the cute critters have helped boost the red squirrel population in parts of Scotland — because they love a good game of chase — pursuing and eating grey squirrels! Natural pest control. Yay!



Also found in



Red deer

With 300,000 red deer living wild and free in Scotland, you're never too far away from one of these majestic beasts. Growing up to 137cm tall from floor to shoulder, these hardy heroes are the UK and Ireland's largest land mammal, the world's fourth largest deer species behind moose, elk and sambar deer. Making their homes in woodlands, marshes, moors and even mountains, adult males (called stags) shed their impressive antlers each spring, giving them enough time to grow back (at 2.5cm per day!) in time for autumn when they use them to attract females and fight off rivals. Super strong!



Also found in



Golden eagle

Soaring over the open moorlands and mountains of Scotland's Highlands and islands, this breathtaking bird of prey scours the ground below, looking for rabbits, mountain hares, grouse and ptarmigans. Golden eagles' large eyes are so good they can spot a rabbit 2km away! And with an incredible 2.3m wingspan, you're in for a treat should you be lucky enough to spot one flying overhead. Their nests, called 'eyries', can be on cliffs or in trees and over the years they can become remarkable structures, measuring up to 3m across and 4m deep. Wow!



Also found in



Wild things to do in SCOTLAND!



Be a cool kayaker!

Sound of Arisaig, West Coast
Fancy going for a paddle in the Atlantic? Well, grab a wetsuit and jump in a *kayak*! Sea kayaking is a fun-filled way to explore the ocean *and* see wildlife! If you're lucky, you may get to see otters, seals, eagles and even dolphins, minke whales or basking sharks. Amazing!
glenuig.com



Go monster hunting!

Loch Shiel, Glenfinnan
You probably know about Nessie, the famous Loch Ness Monster, but have you heard of Seilag, the elusive beast that's said to live in Loch Shiel?! Well, cruise up this 30km loch for a look. Just in case she doesn't show, keep your eyes peeled for red deer on the mountainsides, eagles in the sky and rare black-throated divers fishing near the shoreline.
highlandcruises.co.uk



Enjoy the beach life!

Scotland-wide
There are hundreds of gorgeous sandy beaches to explore up in Scotland. Head to Dunnet Bay, near Thurso in the far north, for surfing, or St Andrews on the east coast for kite-surfing. But the gleaming white sandy beaches dotting the coastline between Arisaig and Morar in the west are some of the best in the UK!
welcometoscotland.com

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