

SCOTLAND 7 June 2013- 14 June 2013

My trip to Scotland this year was 100% because of something I had read on mammalwatching.com. I had been to Scotland once before in 1995 but that trip had only included looking at castles, drinking lots of whiskey, and the only wildlife that was chased had a Scottish accent. I was reading Mark Hows 2012 report from a trip he took to Scotland. He had picture of a wee European pine marten on a post. He commented on staying at Glenloy lodge near Fort William who had almost nightly visits from a pine marten. I looked the place up and I was hooked. I needed that marten. So with my friend Jessica from work who had grown up in the UK and felt comfortable with driving on “the other side” of the road, I booked my trip to Glenloy as well as a few other spots I will describe below. I will put postal codes where I know them as they are handy to put into a GPS.

After three flights to get to Edinburgh, we picked up a rental car and drove to Loch Melfort in the highlands of Scotland. We stayed at the Loch Melfort hotel which is about a three hour drive from Edinburgh and about 19 miles south of Oban on the A816 (address Arduuaine, by Oban, Argyll, PA 34 4XG). The main reason we stayed here was because it was close to the Knapdale forest which is the official site of beaver re-introduction into Scotland. The re-introduction is a partnership between the Scottish Wildlife Trust, the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland and the Forestry Commission Scotland. Twelve beavers were trapped in Norway in 2009 and brought to Scotland to the Knapdale forest for re-introduction. The trial is supposed to end within the next year. The actual site is about 7 miles west of Lochgilphead. They have a small visitor center that has a few information boards about beavers and the other animals in the forest plus a list of recent sightings. The website does have directions to get to the visitor center – from Lochgilphead, follow the road to Oban (A816) for two miles. Take the left fork, through Cairnbaan and continue on this road for three miles, until you see the turn for Tayvallich. Take this road (B8025) for a mile then take a fork to the left. The Barnluasgan car park is immediately on the left. The visitor center is sort of tucked back on a small hill. There was no sign that was easily visible from the road about this being the start of the trial site. Also when we went a lot of the main road signs were covered by bushes or not easy to see. Because of this we used our GPS and put in Knapdale forest. Our GPS took us to a small service road that was gaited off. The service road leads to Buic Loch which was one of the release sites for beavers. The gait is on the right and about 3-4 miles from the visitor center. There was a woman by the gait who told us she lived nearby and she sees beavers on Loch buic on a regular basis but to come back after 8 pm (20:00). We

backtracked to the visitor center and found out that on Tuesdays and Saturdays there were guided tours along the trail site at 6 pm (18:00) for two pounds. The tour was worth it. While we were warned that it was not a beaver spotting tour in itself, our guide (Rob) described the works of the project and I learned more about beavers than I thought was possible. He also took us to a spot on Dubh Loch where currently a boardwalk viewing platform was being built overlooking one of the larger lodges and dam sites. Unfortunately for us workers were present on the boardwalk and making a lot of noise. This meant no beavers. Rob recommended to us to go back to Dubh Loch to try to see the beavers as well, but again later in the evening. So after the tour we drove back to the gait and walked about 1 mile to the Loch. On the way a female roe deer was in the middle of the trail, but moved too quickly for me to take a picture. The Loch will be on your left from the trail and the beaver lodge is directly across from a small fishing platform. The beavers have not built a dam here currently. As soon as we got there, one of the three resident beavers was swimming in front of the lodge. We stayed for about 45 minutes and saw a second beaver half way up the Loch.



We were also told by Rob that Eurasian otters are sometimes seen in this Loch. It is a beautiful place and a great walk to kill off some jet lag. Along the river Tay there are also approximately 120-140 beavers I was told by Rob. They are not part of the Scottish beaver trial and are most likely from released captive stock. There had been plans to cull them, but public outcry including local farmers stopped the cull. Pretty much everyone I talked to in



Scotland seemed excited/happy about the beavers being introduced. This was nice to hear, mainly because so many people around where I live consider them to be pests. The beaver re-introduction is also the first mammal re-introduction in the UK, or so I was told. Back at the hotel I saw my first European rabbit right by our room. The next morning I saw what seemed like 100 rabbits in the lawn behind the hotel in front the loch. I had never seen no many rabbits out in broad daylight, granted it does not stay dark for long in Scotland this time of year. They seemed to barely mind by presence. The one thing that would have made the sighting even more special would have been a stoat in the middle of them.....(depsite the fact that no one at the hotel had ever seen a stoat).





The second day we drove towards Fort William. We made two stops along the way. The first was in Oban to take a boat tour out to one of the seal haul outs. Allan's Boat Tours runs one hour tours every hour from right by the Oban Railway Pier (PA 34 4 LW). There were only three common seals on the rocks at the time we went. My friend had never seen a wild seal, and the boat trip allowed us to get pretty close to them (little did we know this would be the most common mammal we would see on the trip).







After Oban we went to the Scottish Sea life Sanctuary which is about 15 miles north of Oban on the A828 road towards Fort William. The sanctuary has a small aquarium and also does a lot of rehabilitation and release of orphaned or injured grey and common seals. While they had no rehab animals while we were there, they did have a presentation with three non releasable common seals as well as one with north american river otters. They had the otters to help educate the public about how amazing otters are and to care more about the eurasian otter population in Scotland. They used the NA variety because they tend to be more active during the day when the sanctuary was open.



The main reason we went however was to try to see a red squirrel. They have a “squirrel conservation area” that includes multiple feeders around a small duck pond. Unfortunately for me we timed our visit when a large herd of small humans were also present and were making a lot of noise. A lot of noise= no squirrels seen. I was told by the staff that early morning is the best time to see them.

From the Sanctuary we drove to the Glenloy Lodge. The lodge itself is about 7 miles from Fort William. Directions – from Fort William follow the signs for Iverness and the Road to the Isles (Mallaig). Leave the A 82 on the outskirts of Fort William and turn left to follow the A830 across the Caledonian Canal. After crossing the canal turn right on to the B8004 signposted to Banavie and Neptune's Staircase. Follow the road for 4 miles where you will see a Forestry Commission car park on the left with a sign that says “Glen Loy”. Just after the first hill bear left. At the bottom of the hill take a left towards Glenloy and just after this the Lodge will be on your left. The lodge is run by Jon Mercer, a geneticist by trade from England who decided on leading wildlife tours in Scotland as a second career. His wife Angela also helps with the tours and the general running of the lodge. Jon offers day trip tours ,to 3-7 day tours to a variety of habitats within a few hours of the lodge. He is a wealth of knowledge about the area and helped write a series of “wild Lochaber trails” brochures about where to see wildlife in the area. I decided on a 4 night stay with three days of wildlife watching. There were 6 other people on the tour with us all from England. They all seemed to be what I would consider “general enthusiasts” about nature with a lean towards birds (but they were British so that seemed normal). They had no problems with my quest to look for mammals and seemed excited as well with everything we saw. I was told by one of them that if I was not looking at a mammal I had a general glazed over look. Maybe I am turning into just a mammal watcher.....

As stated at the beginning of the report the European marten was the reason I came. Each night Jon puts out small pieces of bread with jam or peanut butter and makes a clicking/hissing noise to attract them right around 8 pm (20:00) Jon told me he had tried to offer snacks such as liver and eggs but the martens would not go for it. I had seen Jon Hall make the comment that pine martens are “partial to jam sandwiches” and he was correct. We saw a marten all four nights. The main player was the adult female whose territory was around the lodge. Her adult son was seen on two nights and one night we saw her 2-3 month old kits by underneath the deck in the back of the lodge where the female was keeping them. I really didn't know how much I loved martens until I saw one up close. Beautiful creatures!





I was also told by Jon that over a year ago an american mammal enthusiast had come to the lodge to “tick” European marten from his list. He said he only stayed

one night and kept opening the front door which the martens do not like. Needless to say he did not see one. Staying more than one night and staying calm are the best things to do to try to see one.

Jon had seen hedgehogs around the lodge (we could not find any) and common Pipistrelles. He has a bat detector which we used but could not find the pipistrelles. On two separate occasions we saw Roe deer run across the road as we were driving. I also saw a bank vole on the side of the road around 11 pm (23:00) on a walk looking for hedgehogs. The three days we went out on wildlife excursions included three separate habitats. Day 1 – included a ferry trip to the islands of Eiegg and Muck with Arisaig marine LTD. They claim to have regular sightings of minke whales and common dolphins, neither of which we saw. We were told later in the year is better for the dolphins. We did manage to see a large number of common seals as well as two grey seals.

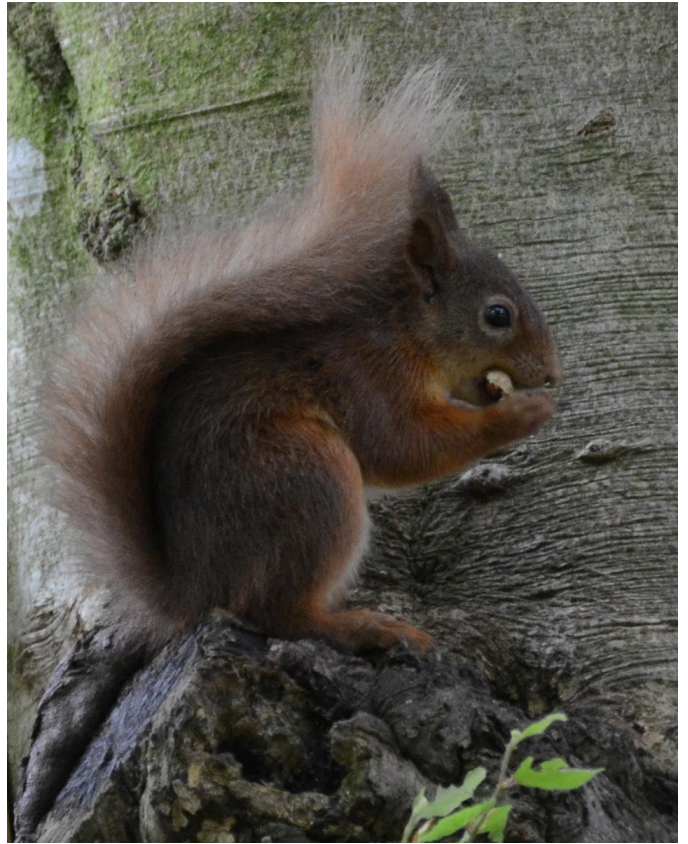


Day 2 involved a morning trip to Onich to the Glen Righ Forest to see red squirrels. Its off the A82 from Fort william just after the Corran ferry turn off , then left into Inchrigh. The area is on the left and includes an area of squirrel feeders and a large fence with viewholes to watch them. There were about 7 squirrels present when I was there around 9 am. Supposedly the highlands are currently grey squirrel free so one of the best places to see red squirrels.





After that we took the Corran Ferry onto the Ardnamurchan Peninsula towards Ardgour and Moidart. The peninsula has been previously described about being the place to look for scottish wildcats. Jon had reported that he most likely had seen one cross the road the week before. I however did not see any, but we were not just looking for them . We stopped at various viewpoints to look for wildlife and took a hike to the Garbh Eilean Hide Ardery near Loch Sunnart (Ardery NM 746619). They have a beautiful hide overlooking a common seal haul out spot as well as a good spot for Eurasian otter.



There is a post board about sightings and it appeared the otters are seen frequently, just not by me that day. We went onwards towards Castle Tioram at the head of Loch Moidart (NM664720). By the houses near the castle I saw my first red deer. They were very relaxed and allowed me to get close to take pictures.



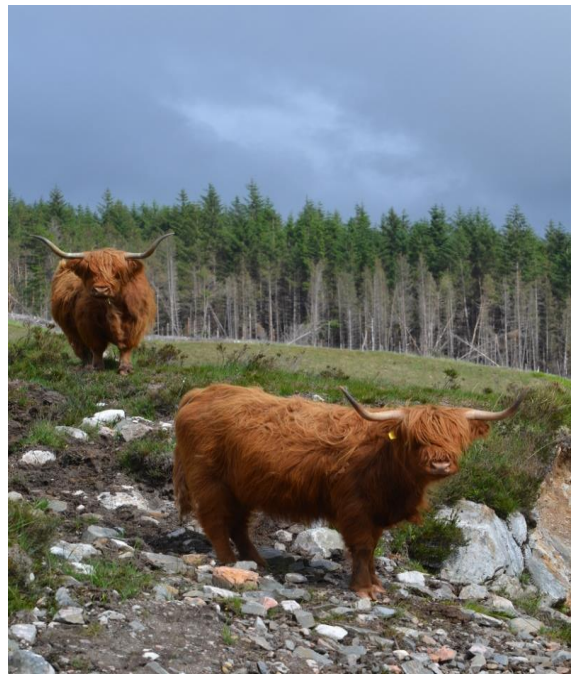
Day 3 included a trip to the mouth of the River Lochy on Loch Linnhe in Fort William itself. At high and low tide it is a reliable spot for otter. Unfortunately for me this was around 5:30 in the morning. Jon spotted two otters pretty quickly which no one else saw. After over an hour a younger otter was seen running along a small island at the river mouth. My picture only looks like a small dot so its not worth posting. Later in the morning we went onwards towards Loch Arkaig where I saw more red deer and my first European hare.





We did a short hike in the Allt Mhuic Butterfly reserve and I saw my first slow worm, which is actually a legless lizard (I know not a mammal, but....).

At the top of the hike there is also a small herd of Scottish Highland Cows. I definitely was the most excited about this in the group and almost took off in a full run when I first spotted them, only to be told by Jon, “trust me, they are not going anywhere”.







On the way out of the area a cat ran in front of our car and for a millisecond I got “wildcat excited” until my brain processed the fact that a) we were not really in the right area and b) it was an orange tabby/domestic short hair.

Our final day we drove back towards Edinburgh to the Dunbar harbour to get a boat to Bass Rock. Bass Rock contains the largest colony of gannets in the world(yeah, yeah, again not mammals) and I read somewhere that David Attenborough commented it was one of his favorite places in the world.



We were supposed to land on the rock, but the sea was too rough to safely land. A common seal was also hanging out by the stair base. There is supposedly a grey seal named Sammie that hangs out in the harbor by the fishing boats looking for a free snack, but we did not see him. All in all it was a great quick trip. Except for the seals, all the mammals were “lifers” for me.

Cheryl Antonucci

## Mammals seen

1. European beaver - “*castor fiber*”
2. European rabbit - “*oryctolagus cuniculus*”
3. Common seal - “*phoca vitulina*”
4. Grey seal - “*halichoerus grypus*”
5. Roe deer - “*capreolus capreolus*”
6. Red deer- “*cervus elaphus*”
7. European pine marten - “*martes martes*”
8. Bank vole - “*myodes glareolus*”
9. European hare - “*lepus europaeus*”
10. Eurasian otter - “*lutra lutra*”
11. Eurasian Red Squirrel – “*sciurus vulgaris*”