

## **Ardnamurchan Peninsula, Argyll and Bute**

The Ardnamurchan Peninsula is one of the best areas for watching mammals in Britain. With a bit of luck Wildcat, Pine Marten, Otter and a diverse selection of other species may be seen. Ardnamurchan Peninsula is best reached via the Corran-Ardgour ferry, off the A82, 13 miles south of Fort William. **Otters** are occasionally seen from the ferry.

From Ardgour, drive south-west along Loch Linne (both **Grey Seal** and **Common Seal** can be seen on the rocks along this stretch of road) and then west through Glen Tarbert along the B861. Shortly before you reach Strontian you reach the start of Loch Sunart. **Otters** occur in this area.

From Strontian continue west along Loch Sunart (B861) through Ardnastang and Resipole to Salen. It is worth stopping several times to scan for **seals**, **Otters**, and **Harbour Porpoise**, which has been seen as far east as Salen. **Water Shrews** also occur on the shore of Loch Sunart to the east of Salen. **American Mink** occur commonly along Loch Sunart.

In Salen turn left on the B8007 towards Glenborrodale and Point of Ardnamurchan. The road continues to skirt Loch Sunart and it is worth stopping regularly to look for **seals**, **Otters** etc. After seven miles or so the road goes through Glenborrodale where **Pine Marten** have reared young in the roof of the hotel. Two miles further west you pass the Glenmore Natural History Centre on the left (NM.586.624). It is worth stopping here (open from early May to late September) to ask about recent sightings. **Brown Long-eared Bats** occur in the centre itself. **Red Deer** occur on the hills to the north of the road and the centre sometimes has a CCTV link-up to a nearby **Pine Marten** den.

Continue west for a further 200-300 metres. Port na Croisg, a bay to the south of the road is good for **seals** and prolonged views of **Otters** are often possible here. Although dawn and dusk are the prime times for **Otters**, they can be seen throughout the day especially on the falling tide as the rocks and pools become exposed. Looking south from the road can produce sightings of **Roe Deer** and **Red Deer** on Eileen Mor.

A further quarter of a mile west is Cala Darach (NM578618). This was formerly a bed and breakfast where Pine Martens came to the bird table. Unfortunately, the property was sold in 2004 and no longer operates as a B&B. Nevertheless, the general area is worth a stop as you head down the peninsula. **Wood Mouse**, **Bank Vole** and **Common Shrew** have all been seen in and around the garden.

'**Common**' **Pipistrelle** breed in the roof of Cala Darach and **Brown Long-eared Bat** have been seen feeding over the garden in July. **Otters** frequently occur in the bay opposite Cala Darach.

Despite the demise of the bed and breakfast, there is still a chance of seeing **Pine Marten**, as they are relatively common along Loch Sunart visiting bird tables at other houses. They are also frequently seen if you spotlight along the road between Cala Darach and Cladh Chiarain (NM562617). **Hedgehog** is also often seen along this stretch of road.

The 5-6 mile stretch of road from Cala Darach to the junction with the Kilmory road (at NM526665) is reputedly the best area for **Wildcat**. The best stretch is the two miles or so beyond Cladh Chiarain especially the scree slopes (at NM560623) and the rush fields (at NM553630) where they hunt for voles. The best chance of seeing **Wildcat** is to go spotlighting an hour or so after it gets dark, but they are by no means easy. Most people have needed to spend at least two nights spotlighting before being successful. A powerful spotlight is essential as the cats may be well off the road. Although most people have had no problems spotlighting here one group was asked to stop spotlighting by the local laird because of problems that he and his gamekeepers had been encountering with poachers.

**Wildcats** have also been seen along the road from Kilchoan to Sanna at the western end of the Ardnamurchan Peninsula.

There are several areas worth checking beyond Cala Darach. The car park at Cladh Chiarain above Camas nan Geall (NM563617) is worth a stop as both **Minke Whale** and **Harbour Porpoise** are possible. Look out for large congregations of Manx Shearwaters feeding in the loch as there is a good chance that they will be accompanied by cetaceans.

The moorland further along the road past Loch Mudle and just before the junction with the Kilmory road is excellent for **Red Deer**, well over 100 can be seen here principally from dusk to dawn. Fewer are seen during the day. **Red Fox** also occurs here and **Roe Deer** occurs at dawn and dusk along the woods to the south-west of the road.

The north coast from Fasadale Bay to Ardtoe Island is worth checking. **American Mink** and **Otter** have both been seen just west of Ardtoe Island.

The final point of call is the westernmost point of Britain, the Point of Ardnamurchan (NM415675). **Seals** are common off here and **Otters** are frequently seen in the bay to the south, Briaghlan. The sea off the point can be good for cetaceans including **Harbour Porpoise**, **Common Dolphin** and **Minke Whale** (for further details of cetaceans that occur off the Point and whale-watching companies please refer to the 'Inner Hebrides and mainland Argyll' section).