

In brief

The Outer Hebrides are a stronghold for several of Scotland's most iconic birds of prey. Here, vast open vistas provide fantastic opportunities to watch these predators. Low intensity crofting agriculture and extensive areas of remote moorland and coastline provide large areas of continuous habitat free from human disturbance. With little disturbance, birds of prey are often encountered at close quarters on the quiet roads, tracks and paths.

You can hope to see up to ten bird of prey species living along the trail. Those that hunt over open landscapes and nest on the ground or cliff ledges fare best and include golden eagle, white-tailed eagle, hen harrier, short-eared owl and merlin, all real highlights of the trail.

The trail links 11 viewing locations and two ferry journeys across the 130 mile long archipelago from Barra in the south to Ness at the northern tip of Lewis. The trail can be explored by car, bike or by a combination of public transport and on foot. Interpretation installed at viewing locations provides information on the species present and routes to follow for the best chances of sightings.



www.hebridesbirdofpreytrail.co.uk
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THE BIRD OF PREY TRAIL



Top predators

Birds of prey are Scotland's only remaining land-based top predators – in particular, the golden eagle and white-tailed eagle. These spectacular species perform an important role in the ecosystem, maintaining a balance in the populations of species further down the food chain. On the Outer Hebrides they thrive among an abundance of other birdlife including important populations of seabirds, waders, divers and the elusive corncrake.



Top 5 birds of prey to look out for

Golden Eagle

The rugged hills of Harris, Lewis and South Uist host some of the highest densities of golden eagles found in Europe. Golden eagles are most active in bright, breezy weather conditions.

White-tailed Eagle

Often described as a 'flying barn door' due to its sheer size and broad wings. Since its successful re-introduction to Scotland in the 1970s the white-tailed eagle has re-colonised the entire coastline of the Outer Hebrides.

Hen Harrier

This elegant bird of heather moorland and young forestry is typically seen quartering low over the ground in search of prey. Male and female have dramatically contrasting plumages.

Merlin

The vast peatland areas of North Uist and North Lewis are strongholds for this tiny falcon. It is most often seen in low darting flight in pursuit of its prey.

Short-eared Owl

Scotland's only day flying owl is a common sight on the Uists where voles, their favoured prey, are abundant. Short-eared owls are most active on calm mornings and evenings.

Short-eared Owl



Spotting Tips

Watch the skies

Frequent scanning of the skyline is the best way to spot birds of prey. They are most obvious when they break the ridgeline and are silhouetted against the sky.

Watch the reactions of other birds

Crows, waders and gulls will frequently mob birds of prey in an attempt to drive them away. Their alarm calls are often the first sign that a bird of prey is about.

Be patient

Birds of prey will hunt in bursts of activity in favourable weather conditions or at certain times of day. Patient observation over several hours is often rewarded with the most exciting sightings.

Birds of prey are specially protected

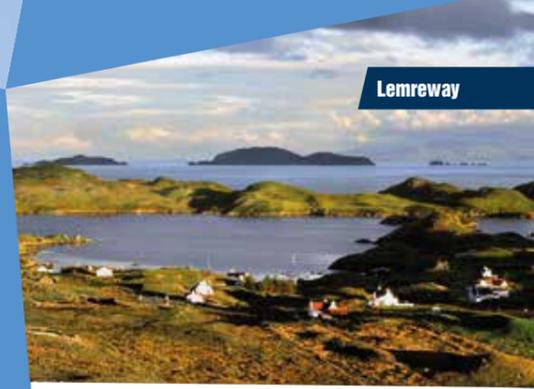
Birds of prey are sensitive to human disturbance especially during the breeding season. Most species have been awarded special protection which makes it illegal to disturb them at their nests. If you come across a nest or become aware of alarming birds or agitated behaviour, retreat to watch from a safe distance of several hundred metres.



Merlin



Golden Eagle



Lemreway

1 Loch Stiapabhat

A hide provides excellent views over the loch and its surrounding wetland. This Local Nature Reserve is a refuge for large numbers of wildfowl and waders especially during migration. The activity attracts regular visits from hunting peregrine, merlin, hen harrier and white-tailed eagle in addition to the resident buzzards.

Map Ref: NB 523 641

3 Aline Community Woodland

From the car park follow a forest track to the shore of Loch Seaforth. The undisturbed shoreline of this long sea loch is well used by white-tailed eagles and otters. Keep an eye on the distant ridges for golden eagles too. The woodland provides a welcome habitat for sparrowhawks and buzzards.

Map Ref: NB 217 152

2 Ravenspoint

The visitor centre is an excellent base from which to explore the remote Pairc peninsula – a stronghold for the white-tailed eagle. It hosts a Sea Eagle Exhibition and the cafe looks out across the shore of Loch Erisort where white-tailed eagles are regular visitors.

Map Ref: NB 341 203

4 Bogha Glas

A good track leads up Glen Vigidale into the North Harris hills. This is an excellent area to watch both golden eagles and white-tailed eagles as they hang and soar in updrafts on either side of the glen. In good weather it is often possible to see several eagles in the space of a few hours.

Map Ref: NB 185 115



Hen Harrier

8 Langais

Beinn Langais often attracts young golden and white-tailed eagles whilst the surrounding moorland supports breeding hen harrier, merlin, short-eared owl, kestrel and buzzard. A path leads up to a Neolithic chambered cairn with spectacular views over the surrounding mosaic of lochs and peat bog.

Map Ref: NF 835 658



Loch Druidibeag

11 Loch Sgioport

This sea loch is at the northern end of a large area of remote coastline and moorland containing the Uists' highest peaks. White-tailed eagles are often seen from the coastal path that follows the indented coastline south and golden eagles frequent the higher slopes.

Map Ref: NF 827 385

12 Sound of Barra Ferry

On its approach to Barra this ferry route passes several smaller islands where golden eagle, white-tailed eagle and peregrine are often seen. Golden eagles are also regularly seen on the approach to Eriskay. The Sound of Barra is also home to a large common seal colony and is regularly visited by bottlenose dolphins.

White-tailed Eagle



Short-eared Owl



7 Committee Road

All bird of prey species breeding in the Outer Hebrides can be seen from this location but the area is particularly important for hen harriers and short-eared owls. The rolling moorland and young forestry provides ideal hunting and nesting habitat. The roadside carpark on this quiet single track is an excellent vantage point.

Map Ref: NF 791 704

9 Rueval

A path leads 5km east across Benbecula through heather-clad moorland and rocky knolls interspersed with lochans. This area is home to breeding hen harrier, merlin and short-eared owl. They are often seen commuting long distances between their moorland breeding sites and rich feeding areas on the machair grasslands.

Map Ref: NF 812 534

Rueval

13 Craigston

From the end of the road a path leads into the interior of Barra. The surrounding moorlands are home to breeding merlin and a resident pair of golden eagles. White-tailed eagles are often seen as they commute across the island between feeding areas.

Map Ref: NF 663 015

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