

Wildlife Identification in the Cairngorms National Park

Course run by Speyside Wildlife

Frequently Asked Questions

Why should I do this course?

If you've always wanted to know what the bird calls are that you hear whilst walking through the Caledonian Pine Forest, or to feel confident that you can tell the difference between a buzzard and an eagle as you scan the hills, then this is the course for you. It can lead to a fulfilling career sharing this knowledge with others, either as a wildlife tour guide, a ranger, or simply as an accommodation provider who would like to add value to your guests' experiences whilst they are staying with you.

What will I learn?

How to identify the main wildlife found in the Cairngorms National Park by both sight and sound and have the confidence to show people these iconic species. You will get to know the best places to find different things, what to look for and will be able to identify what you see.

In particular: you will

- be able to ID the main species of bird and mammal found in the Cairngorms at different times of year, both in theory and practice and be able to explain the main characteristics.
- Will be able to keep good records which build up an effective and reliable bank of information.
- Know how to handle a situation where you can't ID a species with certainty.
- Know the law and be aware of how to watch wildlife responsibly.
- Understand the importance of communicating effectively with guests paying for a guided day out, an employer wanting a survey, etc.

How much time do I need to put in?

There will be five study weekends, plus a final exam day in the field. In between each weekend, as much self-study as you can manage, which centres on the production of a field notebook, detailing all that you have seen and heard in the Cairngorms. How to produce this field notebook will be a large part of the taught weekends, as this notebook will be assessed as part of the final exam.

How long does the course last?

From March 2019 to April 2020. The study weekends are:
16/17 March; 13/14 April; 22/23 June; 7/8 September; 30 November/1 December.
Plus an exam day in April 2020

Do I need to be a birdwatcher and have some experience?

No, you don't necessarily need a lot of experience, but you do need a real interest in birds and animals – as you must be prepared for a lot of self-study. There is no quick fix to being able to identify wildlife in the field.

How many people will be on the course?

A maximum of 12, so there is a good ratio of trainers to applicants. The trainers are there to teach you as a group, but will also mentor you as individuals. There will be an online private Facebook page to allow everyone to interact, both applicants and trainers, to deal with questions outside the study weekends. Frequent interaction will build knowledge levels and so increase confidence in identification.

Will I automatically get a place?

As the spaces available are limited to 12, we shall assess from the details you provide to us on the booking form, who the course is most suitable for. You will then be contacted to advise whether you have been successful or not. Once we have contacted you, payment must be made immediately to confirm your place.

Is there an exam at the end?

Yes. It will be held in April 2020 and will comprise three parts:

- A trip out with a trainer, to demonstrate you can detect and identify the birds and animals around you.
- An assessment of your field notebook, completed throughout the year.
- A short written test

If you pass you will receive a certificate from Speyside Wildlife and also one from LANTRA, as they have accredited the course within their national accreditation regime.

Will there be homework?

Yes. At the end of each study weekend you will be set some exercises, designed to help your self-study over the next quarter. You will be required to keep a field notebook throughout the year to record what you see. The trainers will give you advice with this. At the end of the course the field notebook will be assessed. This will count towards your final exam mark.

Do I get a qualification at the end?

If you are deemed to have satisfied the assessors that you have reached an appropriate standard you will receive a certificate from Speyside Wildlife at the end of the course. In addition, the course is LANTRA (a nationally recognised awarding organisation, specialising in training and qualifications) accredited and you will also receive a certificate from them.

Will I get a job at the end of it?

There are no guarantees, but the skills you develop offer the opportunity to find work in a variety of ways in the great outdoors. Wildlife identification however, is an ongoing process and this course is designed to give you a good base from which to develop skills further into the future.

Is there an age limit?

No.

What happens if I can't attend some of the taught weekends?

The dates are fixed and will set the direction for your whole study process, so missing a weekend will set you back. Attendance however does not form part of the final assessment, so if you demonstrate sufficient knowledge on your final assessed day out, plus having an acceptable standard of field notebook, you will not necessarily fail the course.

What is the cost?

£1200 + VAT per person.

Who is doing the training and the exams?

Guides within Speyside Wildlife who are qualified teachers/trainers, with a huge amount of experience running guided wildlife watching holidays all over Scotland and around the world. They are passionate about their subject; love showing people wildlife and are full of stories about their travels and experiences.