



Brown hare

2.4 Habitats and wildlife

The Cateran Trail runs through three main types of habitat, described below:

- farmland and river valley
- woodland
- heath and moorland.

If you are keen to spot wildlife, carry binoculars and either walk quietly and alone, or seek fellow-walkers who share your interest and are willing to tread softly. Try to set off soon after sunrise, or go for a stroll in the evening. Animals are much more active at these times than in the middle of the day. Since this applies to midges too, protect your skin thoroughly, especially in summer and in still weather. Fortunately, however, midges are nowhere near as troublesome here as in the west of Scotland.

Farmland and river valley

The Trail begins with a riverside walk along the Erich, and runs through the river valleys of Strathardle, Glen Shee and Glen Isla. You are walking through or alongside farmland for most of its length.



Wild primrose

The rivers are especially rich in bird life. Look out for grey heron in the shallows: sometimes they stand tall and motionless, at other times they stalk their prey. In flight, they trail their legs and their huge grey wings beat very slowly. Near rapids you might see a dipper, a small athletic bird which fearlessly plunges into fast-moving water to catch tiny fish and invertebrates.

Farmland supports a range of animals, from brown hare to small rodents such as field voles and mice, and a range of birds. Look out for the orange-billed oystercatcher, its wings making a white-on-black M-shape in flight, and listen for their piercing shrieks. You will also see lapwings, large black-and-white birds with an iridescent sheen and tall crest. Known locally as 'teuchits', their aerobic flight is wild and wheeling, their wings distinctively rounded.



Lapwing (adult male)

You may well spot Britain's most widespread bird of prey, the kestrel, which feeds on small mammals, mainly voles and mice. It hovers over the fields by sculling its wings, its sharp eyesight detecting tiny movements below. It hunts in a fast dive with its chestnut-coloured wings half-closed. Near a loch, you might even be lucky enough to sight an osprey, taking fish in its talons and carrying it off torpedo-style.

Woodland

The Trail passes through several large wooded areas: Kindrogan Wood, Calamanach Forest, Blackcraig Forest and the woods around Dalnaglar Castle and Broom Hill. These consist mainly of productive conifers, but also host native species such as aspen, birch, hazel, sessile oak, rowan and Scots pine. These woodlands provide food, nesting sites and shelter for wildlife as well as crops of economic value.



Thistle, with bee