

Environmental charity urges West Lothian locals to discover Scotland's wildlife

Scotland is renowned for its unique natural heritage, breathtaking scenery and exotic wildlife and 2013 has been named the Year of Natural Scotland.

To mark this occasion, environmental charity Central Scotland Forest Trust (CSFT) is encouraging locals in West Lothian to take advantage of the opportunity to explore the wildlife on their doorstep.

VisitScotland and Scottish Natural Heritage have joined forces to showcase some of the country's best loved wildlife with Scotland's Big 5 campaign.

The initiative celebrates the red squirrel, red deer, golden eagle, otter and harbour seal and is aimed at promoting the enjoyment of these creatures in their natural habitats.

- The red squirrel – this tufted acrobat is one of Scotland's most popular and enchanting creatures. The country is home to around 120,000 of the animals – more than three quarters of all the red squirrels in the UK. The young squirrels come out in early summer to learn about their woodland world, and develop their acrobatic skills hanging upside down from branches and playing chases around tree trunks.

- The red deer – a roaring monarch that is the largest land mammal in the UK and one of the biggest deer across the globe. The key feature of the stags which sets them apart from the hinds and gives the classic red deer profile is the crown – antlers.

- The golden eagle – a high flyer which symbolises the wild Scottish uplands and is at the top of the bird watching wish

list for visitors. Expert at soaring, gliding and fast aerial dives, the golden eagle is a creature with a wingspan over 2 metres and bodyweight of several kilos. It combines power, size and grace.

- The otter – this whiskered diver is a semiacquatic mammal found in almost every part of Scotland that feeds on fish and shellfish. Otters are hard to see due to their nocturnal habits and their wariness of people.

- The harbour seal – a curious seadog which can be spotted on rocks and sandbanks along many Scottish firths and sea lochs. From the minute they are born they spend most of their time in the water and savour every second when they are above it, arching their backs to help them stay airside for longer.

Simon Rennie, Chief Executive of Central Scotland Forest Trust, said: “We welcome the opportunity to shine the spotlight on Scotland’s natural beauty, historic landscapes and biodiversity.

“We hope the Year of Natural Scotland and Scotland’s Big 5 will inspire people to appreciate and protect the wildlife in their surrounding environment and we’re encouraging West Lothian locals to vote for their favourite creature.”

For further information about Scotland’s Big 5 and to vote for your favourite, please visit <http://www.snh.gov.uk>

For more information about CSFT, please visit <http://www.csft.org.uk>

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