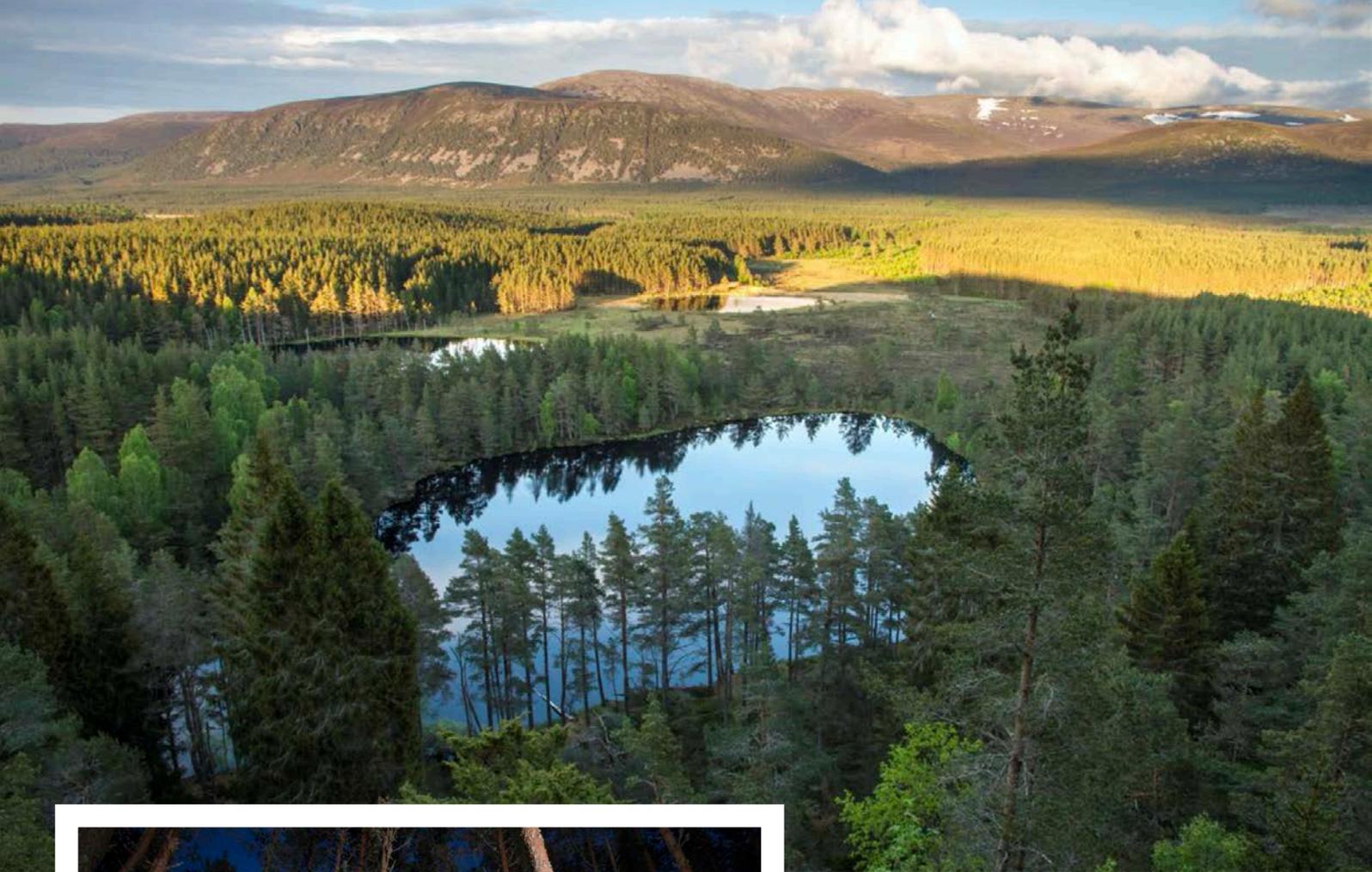


IN CONVERSATION WITH...

JAMES SHOOTER

Guide and
Head of Rewilding Escapes





You've been involved in nature tourism for a number of years, how did it all start?

I first visited the Scottish Highlands whilst studying for my MSc in Biological Photography. From that very first visit I knew the Cairngorms was somewhere I wanted to live. When an opportunity came up to move to the area in 2013, I jumped at the opportunity

and began managing a series of wildlife photography hides.

From there on in, my role grew arms and legs, and I began leading wildlife and landscape photography holidays, birdwatching holidays and in 2019 developed our flagship rewilding retreats through SCOTLAND: The Big Picture. I've now guided all across

Scotland, in every weather imaginable and consider myself incredibly lucky to be able to share our amazing natural history with others.

Rewilding Escapes is a relatively new venture, what made SCOTLAND: The Big Picture take the plunge?

We've a wealth of experience across the board

in developing and running nature holidays, so we know the platform well. What we've done with Rewilding Escapes is to take the enjoyable experiences of discovering nature, thrown in some excellent, locally sourced hospitality and food; and combined it with learning about rewilding initiatives from inspirational people on the ground. We want to showcase that wild nature provides not only ecological benefits, but has a tangible economic value that helps to sustain vibrant rural communities.

What do you think people will get out of joining a rewilding retreat in the Scottish Highlands?

Our rewilding retreats are designed to showcase the very best nature that Scotland has to offer, whilst learning about the projects making the country that bit wilder. It's an exciting time for rewilding and we want to tell people about it and show them what's happening. You can expect unforgettable wildlife experiences, picturesque walks, informative talks and a heavy dose of nature inspiration to leave you feeling revitalised and fully on board with the rewilding journey.

Ecotourism is becoming a well-used term, but what does it actually mean?

'Ecotourism' has become a well-used phrase in the travel industry. As tourists become more eco-conscious, large corporations desperate to cash in on this new market have started to dress up basic changes of sustainability as good for the planet. This green washing leads to a dangerously inadequate adaptation for a



carbon heavy industry if deemed acceptable by the end consumer.

We believe that eco-tourism has to go beyond having less of a negative impact, and for travel to have a truly sustainable future, it must be a force for good. We're not perfect, but we're constantly looking at how to improve our holidays and reduce our footprint. As a rewilding charity, all our profits get channelled back into rewilding initiatives that work towards a wilder Scotland. So, by coming on holiday with us, you're contributing to Scotland's rewilding journey.

Your base at Ballintean looks like an amazing place to stay, what's on offer?

Our mountain lodge on the edge of Cairngorms Connect is one of those places where you can kick off your shoes and feel right at home. It's walls are full of wildlife art, it's shelves are full of nature books and it's kitchen full of home-cooked, delicious, locally sourced food.

The grounds of Ballintean stretch out across 120 acres and you can walk through rich



woodland, along the banks of the river Feshie, through flower-rich meadow and all in front of an awe-inspiring mountain backdrop. Ospreys nest along the riverbank, red squirrels scamper across the garden and pine martens visit at either end of the day. There's even a small herd of photogenic Highland cattle to keep you company along the way!

Can you nail down a favourite wildlife experience in Scotland?

Oh wow! That's a tough one! I have a number of species I really enjoy spending time with. Ptarmigan are near the top of that list, their white winter finery matching their snowy mountain domain. I love hearing the trill of a crested tit from high in the pine trees. Seeing a majestic golden eagle soaring high above

your head is an unforgettable experience.

But my most memorable experiences are those that have been totally unexpected. A fly-by peregrine along the ridges of Stac Pollaidh, being checked out by a short-eared owl as I laid in the heather at Creag Meagaidh waiting for a sunset and a flash of a pine marten running across the road at 5am!

Join our Rewilding Explorer retreat in the Cairngorms