

NATURE



HIGHLANDS, ISLANDS AND LOWLANDS

SCOTLAND THE NEW WILD

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3 x 50 min., 4K, 5.1 + Stereo



Scotland is moving into a new age of the Wild. Driven by the passion of youth and a spirit of innovation, re-wilding has become a flagship issue for the 21st century. With a new appreciation of the wild and its wildlife, the future of Scotland's most iconic habitats may be wilder than we could ever imagine ...

In this dramatically realised three-part series, we present the definitive 4K portrait of the natural world in Scotland. Using the most sophisticated time-lapse, slow motion, aerial and underwater camera systems known, this is the wildlife of Scotland as it marches into the future. From city to coast to island to mountain to the bottom of the ocean, we present a portrait that is both iconic and surprising. Although Scotland may have the oldest landscapes in Europe, it's not a static place – the natural world is as dynamic as the people that reside here. Ever-changing it is now poised to enter a new phase as we and our natural heritage adjusts to the new wild. As climate change, shrinking habitats and an ever-increasing human population make their indelible mark, the natural world here must make a heroic stand if it's to even remain a shadow of what it was. Yet, despite this pressure, many wild animals and plants here are increasing, thriving and even returning from extinction. We need a strong diverse wild Scotland more than ever – for nature, for our mental health, for our legacy, for the health of the planet itself.

Episode 1: HIGHLANDS

The *Highlands* are a vast landscape, covering much of Scotland and dominated by mighty hills, glens, lochs, rivers and forests. But it's a landscape that's been heavily altered by humans and climate. Once a great forest covered much of this land, and now little remains. In the central highlands lie the Cairngorms, home to Scotland's only free-roaming reindeer herd. For thousands of years they roamed these hills but were eventually lost to hunting and climate pressures, in the 1960's these animals were reintroduced. Higher up on the plateau above, a jewel of the *Highlands* is returning, the dotterel. These trusting little birds have

come here to breed, only it's the males who will be hard at work rearing the chicks, as the females move on in search of other partners.

In the glen below lies the largest remaining fragment of the great wood of Caledon, this special forest is among the last places critically endangered capercaillie can be found here. Huge wood ant nests are dotted around the forest with thousands of workers gathering in the branches of the scots pines above. Here they farm aphids, protecting them and gathering honeydew for the colony.

Nearby a female pine marten is raising a family of her own, hidden in the roof of an abandoned cottage. These mammals are helping out the local red squirrels, preying on the larger invasive grey squirrel as it steadily marches northward towards the reds last great stronghold.

The hills of the highlands are the starting point of Scotland's greatest rivers and here a pair of dippers are hard at work building a nest, these industrious birds are nesting earlier than ever before in response to a warming climate. In the Moray Firth a great migration is underway as Atlantic Salmon begin their journey to the spawning grounds, but bottlenose dolphins and great waterfalls stand in their way. In the bog pools of the forest and flow country tiny dramas play out as a bograft spider hunts for prey and builds a nurse web, and sundews catch unsuspecting flies.

Gatherings take place throughout the *Highlands* as people celebrate the history and culture of the landscape, while in the hills beyond the black grouse lek gets underway. Every morning the males gather to fight and display, hoping to impress the watching

females. While on the edge of a nearby loch a pair of Osprey are busy raising a family, the male is seen hard at work, trying to catch enough food for his partner and growing chicks. Winter can be brutal in the highlands with temperatures dropping as low as -27° C, in tough weather mountain hares wait out the storm as red deer are forced off the mountains and into the forest in search of food.

Less snow is now falling now, in the past patches survived from year to year but that's changing. A warmer and wetter highlands looks quite different. But there is hope for the landscape here as woodland recovers and peatland is restored.

Episode 2: ISLANDS

Scotland's islands are among the most biodiverse places in the country, where the mix of low intensity agriculture and wild spaces has benefitted numerous species. The remote Monach Isles have been uninhabited since the 1940's and every autumn these white sand beaches host the largest breeding colony of Grey Seals in Europe. More than 10,000 pups are born as bulls fight for dominance and the right to mate.

Just a few kilometres to the east lie the Uists, Scotland's lowest lying chain of islands. The west of the isles are home to an incredibly rare habitat, the machair. Here low intensity agriculture on sandy soils allows wildlife to flourish, with huge populations of waders nesting here. Tiny lapwing chicks can be seen foraging as their parents ward off curious neighbours. In the nearby crofters barn a pair of wrens are raising a family, all under his caring and watchful eye. While on the far side of the croft a pair of short-eared owls have chicks of their own. They're getting themselves into more bother, wandering widely and coming face to face with this years' lambs, who aren't the most delicate of playmates.

In the shallow waters around *Scotland's islands* great fields of seagrass can be found. An incredibly important habitat for numerous species here, while buffering against the impact of storms and collecting huge quantities of carbon, locking it up in the sediments below. Warmed by the gulf stream, the



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rich waters of the west coast attract the second largest fish in the world during the summer months, basking sharks. These huge fish come here to feed on plankton every year. But they're not the only species drawn here. Scottish waters are home to hugely important seabird colonies, and on the Shiant Islands more than 10% of the UK's puffins can be found. Nesting in an auk metropolis alongside guillemots and feisty razorbills.

High up on the rugged Isle of Rum, eerie calls fill the night sky. When the Vikings came here they thought these hills were inhabited by trolls, but in fact here one of the world's largest colonies of manx shearwaters can be found. On the lower slopes one of Scotland's most iconic mammal can be seen and heard. As the glens are filled with the roaring of red deer, it's rutting time and the dominant stag is about to face challenges to his supremacy. In the far North, otters are faring well, Shetland is home to the highest density in Europe and a mother is busy foraging for her 10-month-old cub.

Wildlife is benefitting people in numerous ways in the islands and on Mull eco-tourism is big business, with more than £8million generated for the local economy each year. White-tailed eagles are the star attraction, these birds were reintroduced in the 1970's and Mull is now home to more than 20 pairs of these huge birds.

Episode 3: LOWLANDS

More than 80% of Scotland's population live in the Lowlands, a vast swathe of the country stretching from Aberdeenshire in the North East, to the border with England in the South. This is a landscape characterised by sprawling urban centres, huge areas of agricultural farmland, fragmented forests and mighty rivers. The Lowlands are the most intensely managed part of Scotland's landscape. But wildlife

still survives here, clinging on, and in some places a few species are beginning to stage a comeback.

The sky above Scotland's capital city of Edinburgh is now graced daily by the fastest animal in the world – the peregrine falcon. A pair have recently started raising a family here in the heart of the city, just a few decades on from the cusp of extinction in Scotland. Other animals have adapted to the urban environment here too. By the Water of Leith, we see a family of fox cubs starting to explore the world outside their den, learning the skills needed for independence. Across the central belt in Glasgow, we find a hardy population of water voles, living nowhere near water!

Further North lies Scotland's longest river, the Tay, here it passes the mighty Tay reedbed, home to Scotland's largest population of bearded tits, that only colonised here in the 1990's. In Perth, Scotland's first urban population of beavers can be found. These industrious rodents have recently returned from extinction, after an absence of over 400 years. On the mudflats of the River Tay by Dundee, huge numbers of wading birds gather to forage throughout the winter, battling the tide in search of food, before finding somewhere quiet to rest. While in the agricultural heartlands of Tayside, two families of Marsh Harriers are filmed nesting for the very first time in Scotland.

Some fragments of native woodland do remain here, scattered throughout the Lowlands and are home to roe deer, woodpeckers, red squirrels, badgers and glow worms, who are all facing different challenges. While on the border between the highlands and lowlands thousands of toads are returning to their ancestral breeding pools, battling for the right to a mate. On the Buchan coast lies Scotland's only mainland gannet colony, where hundreds of birds dive around the fishing boats of the North Sea fleet, all in search of an east meal. Further South the lowlands greatest wildlife gathering is taking place at Montrose Basin, where 85,000 pink footed geese are returning as the autumn migration gets underway. Many will continue further south, but tens of thousands will remain here in the lowlands throughout the winter.

Wildlife has often been pushed to the periphery in the lowlands, and the animals that found here are characterised by their resilience. But as in other parts of Scotland, there's a growing desire to see the return of more wild spaces for the benefit of people and nature.

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