

# Watch Our Wildlife



*Wildlife you might see throughout Caithness and Sutherland in Winter.*

## Caithness

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Head to the rocky coasts and shorelines for wading birds and check out Thurso and particularly Wick rivers where **otters** are often spotted on snowy days. Particularly good places for birds are Castlehill, Ham, Harrow, Sannick bay, Freswick & Keiss. Birds to see are **greenshank**, **ringed plover**, **golden plovers**, **turnstone**, **purple sandpiper** and **sanderling**. **Lapwing**, **oystercatchers**, **redshank** and **curlew** are on coastal fields. Harbours including Wick and Thurso are also worth checking for white winged gulls like **glaucous** and **Icelandic**.

Walk along the coast between John O Groats and Freswick to look for pupping **grey seals** (any you do find on shore leave alone as they are being fed there by their mothers). **Grey seals** will pup from October through to February but mostly in November and December.

Plenty of geese and **whooper swans** around. Look out for them around lochs such as Loch Watten, but for protected **Greenland white-fronted goose** watch in the comfort of the Loch of Mey hide.

Wintering ducks such as **longtail** and **goldeneye** are on lochs and also offshore at Dunnet bay and Sinclair's bay. These two spots are also good for **great northern divers** and **red-throated divers**. The Wick River can be good for other wintering wildfowl such as **teal & wigeon**.

**Snow bunting** and large flocks of **finch** including **twite** can be seen on the beaches and also neap and stubble fields. Look there also for hungry **roe deer**.

**Fieldfare** and **red wings** are around; try Newtonhill Woodland for the larger flocks.

## West Sutherland / Assynt

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Once the snows appear you can expect flocks of **snow buntings** to start appearing right down on the coast. Clachtoll and Elphin seem to be good places to look for them in bad weather.

During any period of cold weather it is worth going down to the beach. At Culkein Stoer, for example, **stonechats**, **starlings**, **rock pipits** and **pied wagtails** join the usual waders on the shore. Look out for **purple sandpipers**, **turnstones** as well as **ringed plovers** and **dunlin**. Meanwhile Lochinver harbour is always worth searching for **glaucous** and **Iceland gulls**.

Many of the inland lochs will have **whooper swans** during the winter. Loch na Claise near Stoer occasionally gets large numbers of **goldeneye** as well as **teal** and **pochard**. The **little grebes** usually leave the freshwater and head out to sea. **Long-tailed ducks** are often seen riding the surf at Balchladdich bay.

And remember the breeding season can start very early. **Golden eagles** perform their spectacular sky-dancing displays in February in some of the remoter glens and **golden plovers** and **skylarks** can often be on the hill by the end of February. The optimist is always on the look out for **snowy owls** or **gyr falcons** but a **white-billed diver** is more likely.

**Red deer** will be coming down the hill in bad weather and drivers need to take care on the roads, especially near Inchnadamph. Any casualties are worth taking note because they quickly become a source of carrion for **foxes**, **wildcats**, **ravens** and **eagles** including any passing **white-tailed sea eagles**.