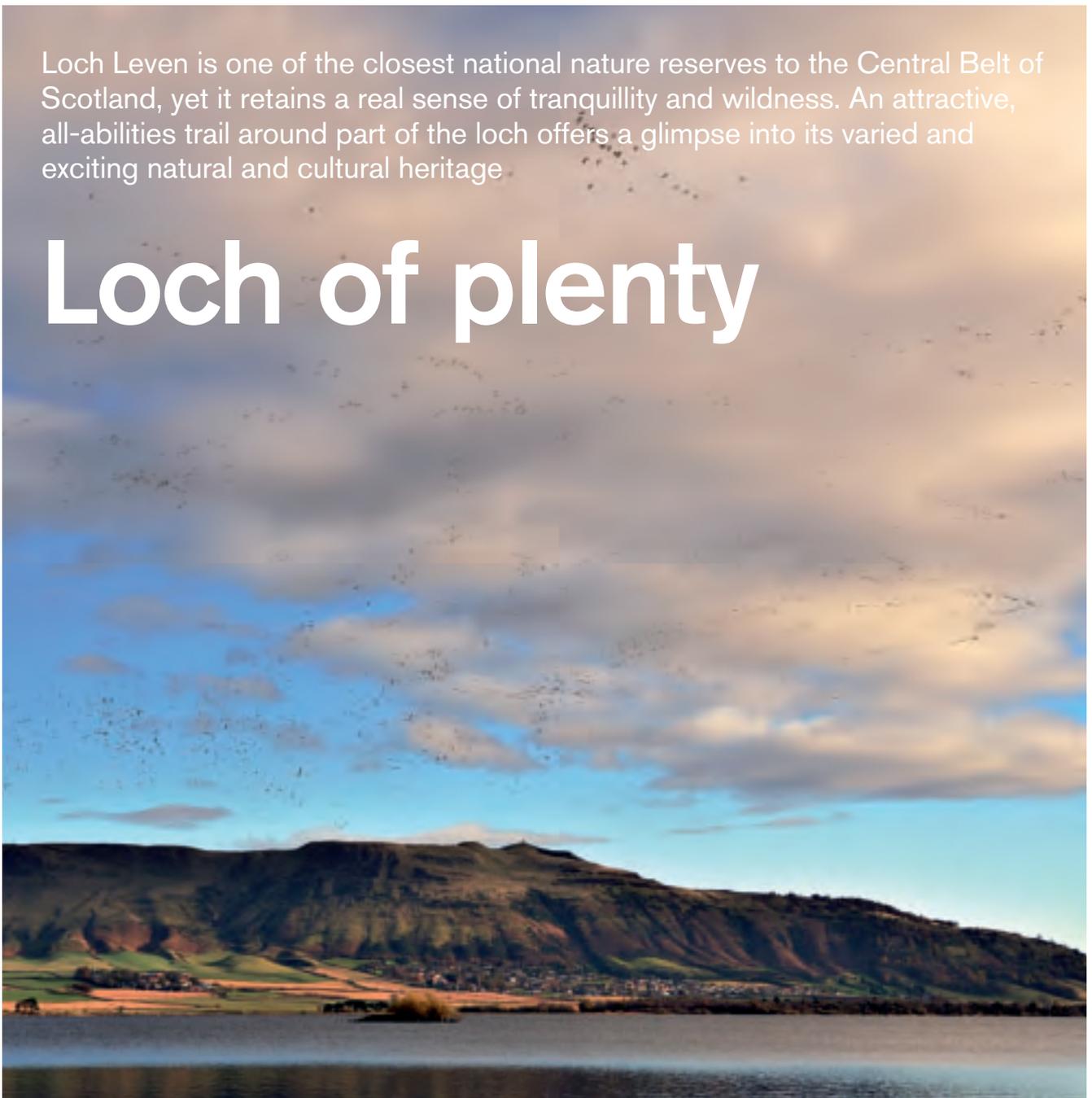


Loch Leven is one of the closest national nature reserves to the Central Belt of Scotland, yet it retains a real sense of tranquillity and wildness. An attractive, all-abilities trail around part of the loch offers a glimpse into its varied and exciting natural and cultural heritage.

Loch of plenty



Loch Leven fills over 13 square kilometres (5 square miles) of a wide basin between the Ochil, Lomond and Cleish Hills in the old county of Kinross. It forms the largest naturally food-rich loch in lowland Scotland, and its shallow waters, lochside wetlands and seven islands support some of the largest numbers of nesting duck anywhere on inland Europe.

Around 35,000 waterfowl are present in winter, including over 10,000 ducks and some 20,000 pink-footed geese – which is almost 10% of the global population of this species! The geese use the loch as important autumn and spring staging posts. Several thousand stay on,

roosting on the loch and feeding in the agricultural fields around the shore.

The loch is also an important stopping place for birds migrating between their breeding and wintering grounds. Goldeneye, gadwall, pochard, pintail, shoveler and wigeon all number in their hundreds, while teal and tufted duck can number into the thousands. Flocks of over 100 whooper swans also regularly spend the winter on the loch, and you might see large flocks of curlew, lapwing and golden plover around the shore. Recent winters have even seen white-tailed sea eagles from the east of Scotland reintroduction scheme making the shores of the loch their home.

Recent improvements in access have made it easier to enjoy the loch and see its birds without disturbing them, making it a great place for visitors, whether you're a keen birder or simply looking for a refreshing country walk. A 13 km (8 mile) heritage trail follows the west shore from Kinross around the north to reach Vane Farm on the eastern side. The path is level, well surfaced and accessible to all users.

The walk we suggest here takes you from Kinross along to Burleigh Sands on the loch's north shore (close to the A911). It's a linear route of some 4 km (2.5 miles), so you will have to return along the same route unless you can arrange for transport to pick you up at Burleigh. Use the numbered map and directions in the text to guide you.



1
Loch Leven is the largest loch in the Scottish lowlands and is home to thousands of breeding and wintering birds.



Key

- Toilets
- Refreshments
- Limited parking
- Viewpoint
- Bus stop
- Information point

..... Trail



2

1 Factory Bay viewing hide

This hide is the latest addition to the reserve and provides great views over the rich waters of Loch Leven. The loch is shallow here, with lots of plant and insect life. All this food means that it's a great place to see many of the loch's wildfowl up close, including tufted duck, pochard and little grebe. You might also catch the occasional glimpse of otters here too. After taking in the views, return back along the path towards the pier car park and follow the trail through Kirkgate Park.

2 Kirkgate viewpoint

You can enjoy panoramic views from here out to Castle Island, where Mary Queens of Scots was held captive between 1567 and 1568. It's also a great place to watch the spectacle of pink-footed geese coming in to roost. These geese visit Loch Leven in their tens of thousands from Iceland. Kirkgate Point and the small island of Scart (Norse for 'cormorant') are popular roost sites for these birds. Dawn and dusk are the best times to catch the spectacle. Continue past Kinross House.

2
Views from the new bird hide near the pier are spectacular.

3
Around 100 whooper swans visit the loch each winter from Iceland.



3

3 Kinross House

This was once the ancestral home of the Montgomeries and was built by Sir William Bruce in the 17th century. It has majestically stood looking over Loch Leven ever since. The elaborate 'fish gate' reveals the seven species of fish that used to be caught in the loch at the time the house was built. Loch Leven is of course famous for its native brown trout, which have been introduced to many different countries around the world.

4 Mary's Knowe woods

These woods are a great place to look for great spotted woodpeckers, treecreepers and flocks of long-tailed tits, along with many other woodland species. If you're lucky you may even glimpse a red squirrel here too, out searching for pine cones. On cold days, look for their tracks and half-eaten cones. We've also put bat boxes up in this area as homes for pipistrelle bats.

Carry on past Mary's ponds. Beyond the ponds (about 500 metres), look out for a junction to your left. This is the town loop, which takes you out of the reserve and back through Kinross to the pier.



4

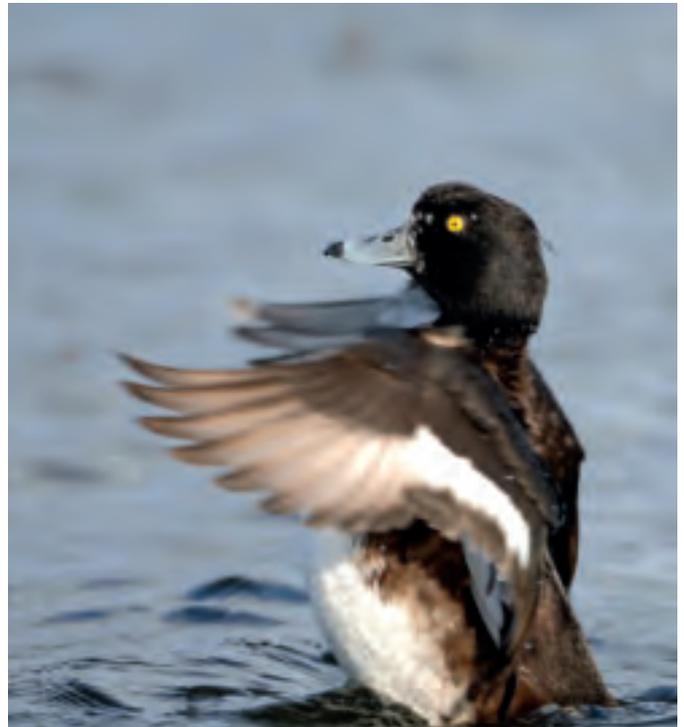
5 North Queich bridge

Carry on past the junction and on towards the bridge over the North Queich River. Peer over the bridge and you may be lucky enough to see one of Loch Leven's world-famous trout. During autumn and winter, the mature trout run up the rivers and burns that flow into the loch to spawn, often many miles from the loch itself. Look out too for otter droppings (or 'spraints'), which are sometimes left on the rocks near the bridge.

6 Kingfisher hide

As its name suggests, this is one of many good sites around the loch to see the electric-blue colours of the kingfisher. These birds are vulnerable to hard winters and some individuals move to estuaries and the coast when the temperature tumbles. This is also a great vantage point from which to spot species such as great crested grebe and mute and whooper swans, with cormorants often sunning themselves on the shingle spit. From here, you can retrace your steps back to the pier (or carry on farther if you wish).

5





4
The loch is an important stopover for wildfowl migrating between breeding and wintering grounds.

5
Loch Leven has one of the largest colonies of breeding tufted duck in the UK.



Loch Leven is one of 47 NNRs in Scotland. Find out more at www.nnr-scotland.org.uk

Essential information

Loch Leven lies between Edinburgh (50 km/31 miles) and Perth (32 km/20 miles), in the east of Scotland's central lowlands. The nearest town is Kinross. The usual approach by car is via the M90. Leave at junction 5 or 6 if approaching from the south (Edinburgh) or junction 7 or 6 from the north (Perth). There are car parks at Kinross Pier, Burleigh Sands, Findatie and RSPB Vane Farm reserve. Bus services link Kinross with major cities throughout Scotland; please check times and frequency. There's no rail service.

OS maps

Explorer 369 (Perth & Kinross)
Landranger 58 (Perth & Alloa)

Trail length

The walk from Kinross to Burleigh is about 4 km (2.5 miles). The most popular access points are zoned as 'discovery areas', with interpretation and orientation boards for visitors. The rest of the trail is treated as a tranquil zone, where conservation has priority and the emphasis is on quiet enjoyment of wildlife and landscape.

Terrain

Conditions underfoot are generally good, as the path is level and well surfaced. Exercise caution near the loch edge, especially with children.

Dogs

Please follow the Scottish Outdoor Access Code and local guidance at the reserve. Please keep your dog(s) under close control or on a short lead at sensitive times and comply with any notices you see. A short lead is taken to be two metres, and 'under close control' means that the dog is able to respond to your commands and is kept close at heel.

Nearby natural attractions

The RSPB's Vane Farm is part of Loch Leven NNR and provides an ideal day out for all the family. The three observation hides at Vane Farm offer shelter from the weather and, at the same time, a close encounter with large numbers of birds. For those who want more comfort and a warming cup of tea, the visitor centre is the ideal destination. From the large observation windows in the café you can enjoy splendid views across Loch Leven towards Kinross and Castle Island. If you prefer something more energetic, follow the steep trail to the top of Vane Hill, from where you can see as far as the Cairngorms, the Isle of May and the Fife coast.

Near Dunkeld lies the Loch of the Lowes, where the Scottish Wildlife Trust have a visitor centre. It has interactive exhibitions telling the story of the loch, its history and wildlife. The large viewing window provides great views onto mixed woodland, where tree creeper, finch, tit and woodpecker are attracted by the bird feeders. Two observation hides on the loch shore provide first-class views of the wildfowl population, which peaks in early winter. As many as 3,000 greylag geese roost on the loch, as well as goldeneye, mallard, goosander, wigeon, teal, tufted duck and great crested grebe.

Further information

You can contact SNH on 01577 864 439. You can download a leaflet about the reserve at www.snh.gov.uk/publications-data-and-research/publications/search-the-catalogue/publication-detail/?id=1620