

# Ben Lawers

NATIONAL NATURE RESERVE



The National Trust  
for Scotland

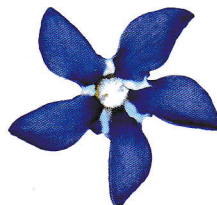


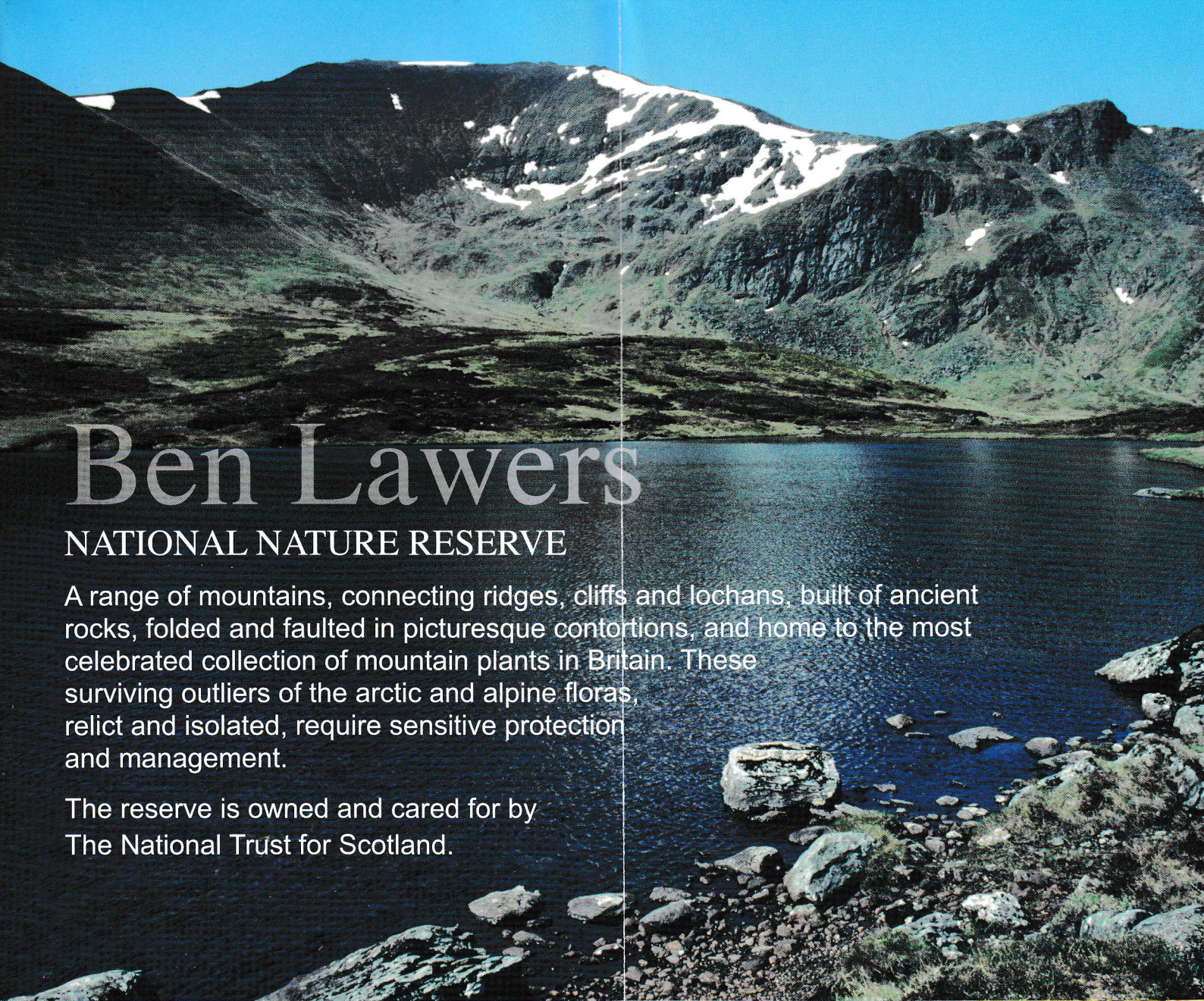
Scotland's  
National Nature  
Reserves

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*'The Peak of Plant Conservation'*

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# Ben Lawers

## NATIONAL NATURE RESERVE

A range of mountains, connecting ridges, cliffs and lochans, built of ancient rocks, folded and faulted in picturesque contortions, and home to the most celebrated collection of mountain plants in Britain. These surviving outliers of the arctic and alpine floras, relict and isolated, require sensitive protection and management.

The reserve is owned and cared for by  
The National Trust for Scotland.

# Botanical riches

The mountain plants discovered in the 18th century are the reason why most field botanists aspire to visit these hills at least once. They are the reason why the Trust bought these hills – to conserve the rare plant communities and species of national and international importance.



Alpine saxifrage  
Discovered here in 1768



Cushion grassland  
The best of its kind in Britain

## A celebrity roll-call

Ben Lawers is home to several of our rarest plants. Some of them are found in only a few places in Scotland.



Left to right: Alpine gentian, alpine woodsia, alpine mouse-ear



Many other striking plants may easily be seen:

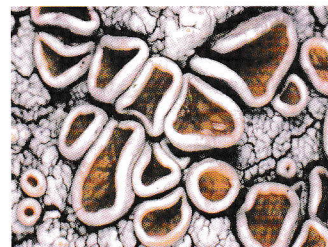
Left: Alpine lady's mantle Right: Moss campion

## Understudied

Less well known than the flowering plants and ferns are the 'lower plants', especially mosses and lichens. Ben Lawers is possibly the most important UK site for lichens. New species may still be discovered here.



A moss found nowhere else in Britain



A lichen growing as crusts on rocks

# Stocktaking

The responsibility for conserving this special place means we need to take stock of what is here. A programme of detailed mapping and counting the rare plants has shown that, whilst some are holding their own, the future for others is bleak. Collecting has drastically reduced some populations, while the natural ranges of many have become so restricted by centuries of over-grazing that they are on the brink of extinction. We are trying to reverse such declines. Through our monitoring we can evaluate the impact of management and other factors on the plants.

Scientific investigations are carried out both by Trust staff and researchers from universities and other institutions. The information gathered has led to the programme of 'habitat restoration' and 'species recovery'. The highland saxifrage, our most endangered species, is being saved by propagation and planting to replace those that have been collected.

## Plant monitoring



The last surviving highland saxifrage

# Hillside safari

Here be animals! Be alert and you may be rewarded with exciting sightings; these are just a few.

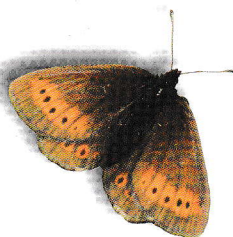
**Black grouse:** In decline, but should gain from our enhancement of its woodland and moorland habitats.



**Frog** Thrives on these hills, and often jumps just under your feet!

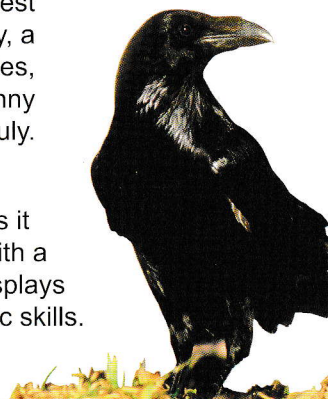


**Mammals:** Tell-tale signs such as droppings, footprints and burrows may be all that is seen of wary beasts such as fox, wildcat or otter.



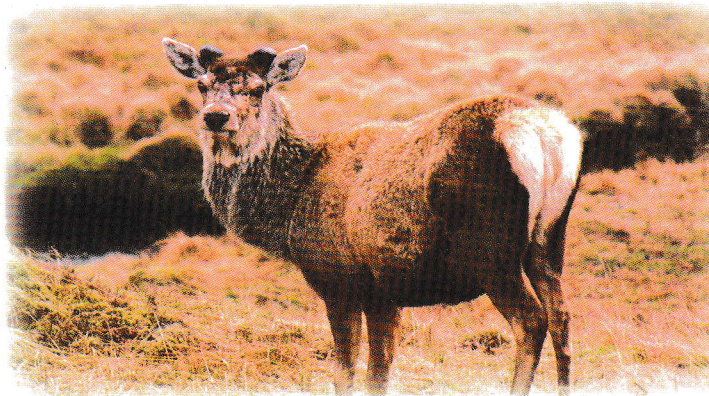
**Mountain ringlet:** Our best known special butterfly, a local, upland species, abundant here on sunny days in July.

**Raven:** Hard to miss as it proclaims its presence with a loud throaty croak, and displays its aerobatic skills.



# Pastoral history

People have made a living from these hills for nine thousand years. The cultural landscape is a particularly outstanding record of life over the last four centuries. The most conspicuous sign of this is in the many groups of shielings – small dwellings built halfway up the hill for seasonal use of summer grazings. Their stone walls, often banked with turf, can be seen close to most main paths.



Red deer

## Where are all the trees?

The concentrated sheep grazing since the 18th century, and increasingly large deer populations now, have had a profound effect on the vegetation. Trees, shrubs and tall



Birchwood on ledge

herbaceous plants cannot survive and regenerate and are now confined to cliff ledges. Farmers have rights to graze their sheep on Trust land on the Ben Lawers range, and the red deer is a native of the

hills and its presence is important to the land. However, numbers are such that seedling trees cannot escape the many hungry mouths, so culling of deer is carried out on the reserve. The deer are easy to see and an exciting attraction for many visitors.

# Healing the hills



Ben Lawers path scar

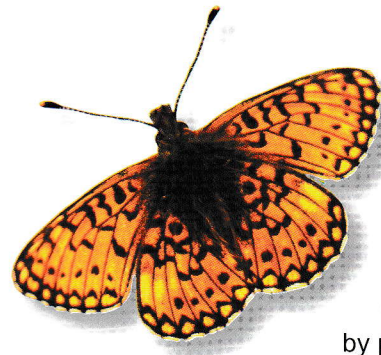
It is said leave 'nothing but footprints', but on such popular mountains, even these have an effect. Walkers on Ben Lawers leave over 250 million boot prints a year, more than the fragile mountain vegetation can tolerate: it quickly dies. Dead turf, boots and rain water on steep ground equal erosion, creating enormous scars defacing the landscape. We counter this by expensive path repairs and maintenance to heal the scars and prevent them from widening. But with some 32km of paths, we are still trying to catch up and even when all the basic repairs have been done, maintenance will be a full-time job. Repairing the scar on Ben Lawers is taking years of path work, some experimental, at high altitude and often in unpleasant conditions with only the raven for company.



Path repair team

## Paradise lost?

One outcome of the prolonged human occupation of this area is the survival of the native trees, shrubs and tall herbaceous plants, which are inaccessible to grazing animals. These show that Ben Lawers Highlands – a paradise for naturalists. Using fences in the area to protect flowering plants on the Reserve for future generations to enjoy. Big, colourful moths and their caterpillars, which are now o



▲ Small pearl-bordered fritillary

Rowan



Angelica regenerating



## Close encounter

Experience the varied plants and animals of an area slowly returning to a variety of life. This 1km walk through the gorge to reveal the secrets of the area. A booklet is available for sale. We offer a programme of guided walks by prior arrangement. Please d

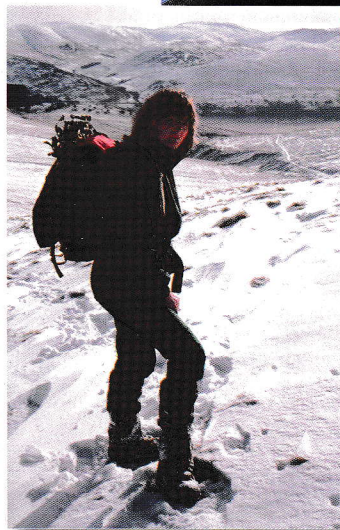


the loss of some of the natural flora and fauna. Only remnants which once flourished, most now confined to cliff ledges that are able to support the most flower-rich treeline woodland in the area. In the long term, we are trying to restore viable woodland, scrub and tall grassland. This developing habitat is already attracting exciting birds and plants, and is a key feature on the Nature Trail.

ers

and wildlife on the Reserve by walking around the Nature Trail, through a dynamic, sparse, patchy woodland habitat for an increased view of Loch Tay and the mountains beyond. A self-guiding tour is available from the Mountain Visitor Centre. During the summer the Ranger staff are available for visitors of all ages. They may also be able to assist groups to identify the wild plants. Leave them for everyone to enjoy!

Red grouse



## Walking high

Ben Lawers and the neighbouring mountains are popular high level walks, enjoyed by thousands of people each year. With nine summits over nine miles, you have a choice of several different day walks. Although not unduly hazardous, there

are risks, as with all mountains, and a mistake may have serious consequences, **especially in winter**. We are not adapted for winter survival like the ptarmigan (right). Please ensure that you are competent and equipped for the walk you plan to do, **before** you go out on the hill. We wish you an exhilarating and safe day on the hills.

