

'Scotland's Best Nature
Based Experience'
Year of Natural Scotland
Thistle Awards



Aigas

FIELD CENTRE



Highland Wildlife
& Bird Watching
Holidays

Nature Photography
and Specialist
Nature Courses

*"Thank you to Aigas for all that you
have done and continue to do to help
the corner of the planet that we share."*

Sir David Attenborough OM, GCMG

Sharing the Wonders of the Wild Highlands

Welcome

There is nowhere quite like Aigas. For almost 50 years we have been Scotland's premier field studies centre, dedicated to nature conservation and environmental education. A family home; a community; a thriving nature reserve; an example of responsible ecotourism and restoration ecology; and a place where like minded individuals from around the world meet to learn and enjoy the wildlife, scenery and cultural heritage of the Scottish Highlands



"I am convinced that man has suffered in his separation from the soil and from the other living creatures of the world; the evolution of his intellect has outrun his needs as an animal, and as yet he must still, for security, look long at some portion of the earth as it was before he tampered with it"

Gavin Maxwell



The Aigas Experience

The House of Aigas and surrounding estate is located on the south facing side of Strathglass – a beautiful wooded glen through which the River Glass flows from the high mountainous peaks of Glen Affric to the estuarine mud flats of the Beaully Firth. Only 15 miles south west of Inverness, we couldn't be better placed to access and explore the Scottish Highlands, its unique wildlife and dramatic scenery, led by a team of passionate and dedicated rangers.

The Aigas team are friendly, well trained and welcoming. As well as guiding you during the day, our rangers host evening dinners around a long communal dining table in the grand Victorian hall, a relaxed and comfortable setting to enjoy a dram and share the adventures of the day.

Our private network of nature trails and wildlife hides are free for guests to use as they like, providing excellent opportunities to see a huge array of species such as red squirrels, crested tits, crossbills and pine martens in the pinewoods, and otters, beavers and osprey on the loch.

In late spring, we regularly record over 120 bird species and 15 mammals on the Aigas Estate. Where else can offer exclusive access to such a thriving habitat?

"The variety of wildlife we saw was wonderful, and the rangers are extremely knowledgeable with deep areas of expertise. I look forward to visiting again"

Sharon Birrel, Aigas Guest

WHEN?

Anyone can stay at Aigas from April until the end of October on a full week wildlife programme, or as a tailor-made guest (see page 17)

WHERE?

Close to Inverness transport links, we are easy to get to.

WHAT'S INCLUDED?

Our wildlife programmes are fully inclusive of all accommodation and meals, all travel, tolls and entrance fees, expert leadership and guidance, access to the Aigas estate, wildlife hides and nature trails, use of Swarovski telescopes and access to other Swarovski optics.

FOR MORE DETAILS, DATES AND COSTS PLEASE VISIT OUR WEBSITE

WWW.AIGAS.CO.UK



© Laurie Campbell



Accommodation & Food

AIGAS LODGES

In 25 acres of tranquil gardens, lawns and Victorian arboretum, guests at Aigas stay in cosy timber lodges dotted amongst the trees. Heated and carpeted, they contain twin and double rooms with en-suite bathrooms with a shower or bath, hand basin and loo. While guests enjoy complete privacy in their rooms, there is a comfortable shared lounge area in each lodge.

Single supplements are never charged for programmes based at Aigas.

DELICIOUS HOME COOKING

Food at Aigas comes from local producers wherever possible and takes full advantage of seasonal highlights. The menus are written up every week and everything is freshly prepared. Dinner is a three course set menu, and breakfast is a Continental buffet with hot pin-head oatmeal porridge and a variety of cereals, pastries, yoghurts and fruits to choose from. Every day fresh rolls or sandwiches are made up for guests to enjoy in the field where rangers will provide tea, coffee and hot chocolate. We always strive to meet all special dietary needs.

"We are made to feel so special and very much part of the family and that is one of the reasons why we keep coming back. Ella had to write an essay at school on her favourite place in the world and she wrote about Aigas!"

Jerry & Ella Kinsley, Aigas Guest



The Aigas Rangers and ARTS

GENEROUSLY SPONSORED BY SWAROVSKI OPTIK

We are very proud of our ranger team and the huge success of the Aigas Ranger Training Scheme (ARTS), which has been running for more than 30 years. During that time we have trained nearly 200 rangers who have gone on to full time career posts in wildlife management, nature conservation or environmental education.

The intensive Ranger Training Scheme is supported by The Aigas Trust for Environmental Education. Subjects cover Highland natural history (birds, mammals, wild flowers, soils, native trees, invertebrates, reptiles and amphibians etc), glaciology and landforms, fresh water, woodland and moorland ecology, marine biology, local history and archaeology, land-use, crofting, farming, forestry, wildcat husbandry and the Highland sporting tradition. We also provide formal training in first-aid, minibus driving, health & safety at work and lecturing and presentation skills.



©Lesley Pilgrim

ACADEMIC PLACEMENT STUDENTS

In recent years, Aigas has teamed up with The University of Exeter to provide a placement year in industry for three (each year) conservation biology students.

These placement students partake in ARTS and are trained alongside our ranger team to later assist with guiding guests and wildlife spotting on days out, feeding and tending to our wildcats (see page 18) and assisting with the management and upkeep of the estate. They very quickly become an integral part of the team.



The Aigas Estate

What makes Aigas Field Centre so special is the land on which we are based - it is what sets us apart from other nature based experiences in the UK.

Our very own little piece of heaven; a private nature reserve for our guests to explore and enjoy as they please. If you are an early riser, why not wander up to the loch to look for a beaver or an otter, or meander through the pinewoods listening to the dawn chorus? Spend an afternoon in our woodland hide watching red squirrels and crested tits, or hike up to our Iron Age hill fort for views to the snow capped Affric hills in the west and the Moray Firth in the east.

The jewel in the crown of the Aigas Estate is our loch, Cuil Na Caillich - host to a huge array of birds and mammals, fungi, plants (including several rarities), invertebrates and more.

AIGAS HIGHLIGHTS:

- ✓ Beavers
- ✓ Red Squirrels
- ✓ Pine Martens
- ✓ Osprey
- ✓ Crested Tit
- ✓ Otters
- ✓ Crossbills
- ✓ Badgers
- ✓ Twinflower
- ✓ Adders



All photos © Laurie Campbell



EST. 1976

BIRD SPECIES

142 different species of birds recorded around estate including crossbills and passing white-tailed eagles.



 30 MAMMALS
(recorded)

8 WILDLIFE HIDES

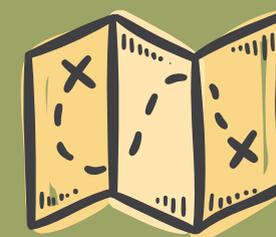


64% of guests return to Aigas



300 ACRES

dedicated to wildlife



The Famous Aigas Wildlife Weeks

Our flagship **Aigas Wildlife Weeks** have become internationally renowned. Based at Aigas, our guests spend six full days (7 nights) exploring the hills, glens, forests, coasts, moorland and marshes of the Highlands of Scotland.

Programmes shift with the turning season, specialising in whatever aspect of wildlife is current. We regularly see well over 100 species of birds in a week and many of the Highland's iconic mammals, all in spectacular scenery.

A TYPICAL WEEK WILL INCLUDE:

- Dawn outings to search for otters or black grouse.
- Short walks in local specialist habitats such as ancient Caledonian pine forests to look for crested tits and crossbills.
- Exploring the Highland glens looking for golden eagles, vast glacial lochs for black and red throated divers, sandstone cliffs for ravens, and grassy moorland for red and roe deer and wonderful wildflowers.
 - An estuary visit for coastal and sea birds; guillemots, razorbills, waders, gulls, geese and ducks, as well as coastal flowers in season.
 - Loch and wetland sites for ospreys, waders and wildfowl.
 - Ranger-led evening badger and pine marten watches in on-site hides.
 - A day on the west coast to look for sea eagles and great northern divers.
 - Time spent at Aigas exploring the estate and gardens, enjoying the array of daytime hides available to guests.
 - An optional boat trip to search for the bottlenose dolphins and seals of the Moray Firth.

© Laurie Campbell



Bird Watching Weeks at Aigas

SPRING BIRDS

Our Spring Birds programme offers early morning visits to watch lekking black grouse at our local RSPB reserve. The middle of April is when the Highlands bids farewell to thousands of pink-footed and greylag geese and welcome back ospreys, cuckoos, wheatears and many other summering birds. Tits, finches and warblers are all showing wonderfully well, just before the burst of leaves in the trees. With luck guests could see large numbers of long-tailed duck inshore and even elusive species such as hen harrier and goshawk.

SUMMER BIRDS

Raptors, especially osprey and golden eagle, are regularly seen hunting, with well grown chicks to feed at the eyrie, whilst occasional honey buzzards and red kites circle above woods, meadows and moorland, each choc-a-bloc with warblers, tits and finches. A visit to Handa Island, a vibrant colony of over 200,000 seabirds, complete with puffins, black and common guillemots, eider, razorbills, fulmars and kittiwakes, not forgetting the exciting walks through great and Arctic skua territories.

AUTUMN BIRDS

Migration is in full swing, with a huge diversity stopping by, some to stay the winter. Others, like the hundreds of whooper swans that congregate in nearby fields, will only refuel for a few weeks before heading further south. Summer migrants have left by the autumn, to be replaced by thousands of continental fieldfare, redwing, goldcrest and robins. With luck guests will pick up a brambling or waxwing, or perhaps something much rarer at this exciting time of year.

RAPTORS - EAGLES, HAWKS AND HARRIERS

This week will focus on finding the Highlands' birds of prey. This programme will take you from the rugged west coast to the huge expanses of blanket bog in the north, looking for species such as white-tailed eagle, hen harrier and, of course, the iconic golden eagle. Evening walks will be led around the estate in search of tawny and barn owl, as well as to our raptor and tree-top hides which overlooks a moorland feeding station where red kites and buzzards are often seen.



© Laurie Campbell

Top Five

1. Golden Eagle
2. White-tailed Eagle
3. Crested Tit
4. Crossbill
5. Black Grouse

"If you like wildlife and nature there can be no better place to visit than Aigas'... 'It is truly somewhere I am more than happy to keep returning'"

John Wright, Aigas Guest.



© Laurie Campbell

Walking & Wildlife

This popular programme showcases a selection of the best lowland leg stretches for wildlife and landscape in the Highlands. Striding out on long but low level walks, guests will explore coastlines and rivers, through glens and around lochs. Destinations may include the iconic landscapes of Glen Torridon and Beinn Eighe National Nature Reserve, the rocky headland of Tarbat Ness to spot seabirds and cetaceans at sea, and remnant ancient Caledonian pine forest in Glen Affric National Nature Reserve, with an average of 5-8 miles per day led by an Aigas ranger. If interest and ability allows, we often include a hill walk during the week.



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© Laurie Campbell



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Nature & Landscape Photography with Laurie Campbell

Laurie Campbell is widely recognised as one of Scotland's foremost nature photographers. In 2015 he was the recipient of a Lifetime Achievement Award from the RSPB. His latest of several books is entitled *Highlands: Scotland's Wild Heart* (Bloomsbury 2016) and is co-authored by Stephen Moss.

His patient teaching style, individual attention and limitless knowledge are always hugely appreciated by Aigas' photography guests. These programmes suit photographers with DSLR, Mirrorless, or Bridge cameras.

The courses will also include a one-to-one review and photo-editing session with Laurie, during which he will provide constructive feedback on guests' images.



NATURE PHOTOGRAPHY WORKSHOP:

Now limited to only ten participants, this course is suitable for everyone from very proficient photographers to relative beginners in the camera world. The range of possible wildlife subjects is extensive and will also include a well balanced mixture of opportunities to photograph anything from fungi to landscape.

LAURIE'S MASTERCLASSES:

Laurie's masterclasses are limited to a maximum of six participants. The programmes are designed for those who are already proficient with their cameras and are looking for more specialised help, both with specific technical information, and also in developing their fieldcraft skills. Practical tuition sessions will include guidance on all aspects of macro photography, different uses for electronic flash and triggering systems and improvised hide construction and usage.

For online booking, and information on equipment requirements, itinerary and species that can be photographed, go to our website or please contact the office.



© Laurie Campbell



© Laurie Campbell



© Laurie Campbell





Specialist Programmes

FASCINATING FUNGI

Fungi are fascinating - by turns they are colourful, deadly, delicious, predatory, vital to ecosystems, luminous, rare, ubiquitous and laden with folklore associations. Join Liz Holden, one of Scotland's leading mycologists on a week of discovery and identification workshops.

INCREDIBLE INVERTEBRATES

Methods such as moth trapping, sweep netting and pond dipping will give you a close look at some complex and extraordinary species, and a series of illustrated talks will be on offer to guide you through the life cycles of these fascinating creatures.

"It's my 9th trip and I'm considering my 10th. I think that says it all!" Caroline Bray, Aigas Guest.

TERRIFIC TREES

Trees are simply astonishing, and there's much more to them than meets the eye. Join naturalist Dan Puplett for a deep dive into their world. Discover the fascinating role they play in the lives of wildlife and the wider ecosystem, from birds to beetles and ferns to fungi.

All photos © Laurie Campbell

Botany and Garden Programmes

GARDENS OF THE HIGHLANDS TO LEARN ABOUT THEIR PLANTING HISTORIES

Accompanied by avid gardener and plant collector, Sue Pomeroy, and Highland district organiser for Scotland's Gardens, Lucy Lister-Kaye, we will visit a carefully curated collection of private gardens and meet their owners to learn their planting histories, successes and struggles in creating beautiful gardens in often difficult landscapes and climates.

GARDENS AND WILDFLOWERS

This popular programme combines a selection of gardens, each one unique, with astonishing wildflower habitats such as coastal dunes and ancient pine woodland. A morning can be spent admiring colourful meconopsis in a remote west coast garden, and exploring meadows of wild orchids in the afternoon.

WALKING AND WILDFLOWERS

Timed to match optimum flowering, this week combines long but gentle walks (average 5 miles per day) to search for orchids, sundews and delicate moorland flowers like milkwort, tormentil and lousewort, as well as specialist rarities such as twin flower and one-flowered wintergreen. The week is led by botanist David Bale who will teach you to find and identify a wide range of plants across a diversity of Highland habitats, and become familiar with the use of a hand lens and identification key.

GARDENS AND HIGHLAND HOMES

Specially designed by garden lover and Scotland's Gardens district organiser for the Highlands, Lucy Lister-Kaye, this programme visits some of our most spectacular local homes, both open to the public and private, with nearby gardens. This programme will be led jointly by Aigas rangers, guest leader Sue Pomeroy and Lucy Lister-Kaye.

"The future of wildlife is in our hands. At Aigas you can experience the joys and the excitement - and the wonder - of wild nature."

Kate Humble, Television Presenter



All photos © Laurie Campbell





All Photos © Laurie Campbell

Explore the Islands with Aigas

The Outer Hebrides in Spring - North and South Uist

There are over 50 pairs of eagles, both golden and white-tailed, holding territory on the Uists, well into their breeding season by May. By contrast, 340 male corncrakes have recently returned from African wintering grounds, and are calling night and day to attract a mate. Their crex crex call and the drumming of snipe are the sounds of a Hebridean spring.

The machair, that special Hebridean west coast habitat, is home to the densest population of breeding waders in Europe, and yet more shorebirds, now in colourful breeding plumage, are streaming north to Arctic breeding grounds.

The Orkney Isles

The Orkney Islands are home to a unique and special blend of abundant wildlife and globally important ancient archaeological sites. Making the best of the long summer days, this week will give you the opportunity to learn about and experience both the natural and human history of this northern archipelago.

For more info and other island trips, please visit aigas.co.uk



Highland Wildlife Art

With a plethora of wildlife right on our doorstep, Aigas is the ideal location for a wildlife art course. Celebrated artist and author of *The Wildlife Artist's Handbook*, Jackie Garner, leads a week of studying, sketching and painting a variety of flora and fauna.

"Delicious cuisine, very comfortable accommodation and fascinating daily excursions combine to make the Aigas experience exceptional and unique."

Ken Fisher, Aigas Guest.



Monarchs of the Glen

The majestic red deer and golden eagle are icons of the Scottish Highlands, and here at Aigas we are privileged to live amongst them every single day. This programme allows guests to experience the evocative roar of the stags during rutting season in nearby straths and glens, whilst golden eagles soar high above the peaks and mountainous ridges.

Whisky & Wildlife

Discover the drama and evocative scenery, wildlife and natural ecology of the Highlands of Scotland, whilst learning about our national tittle along the way. This programme will include visits to distilleries and tasting sessions with an expert, looking specifically at the way this iconic spirit has influenced the culture and heritage of the Highlands.



Environmental Education and The Aigas Trust

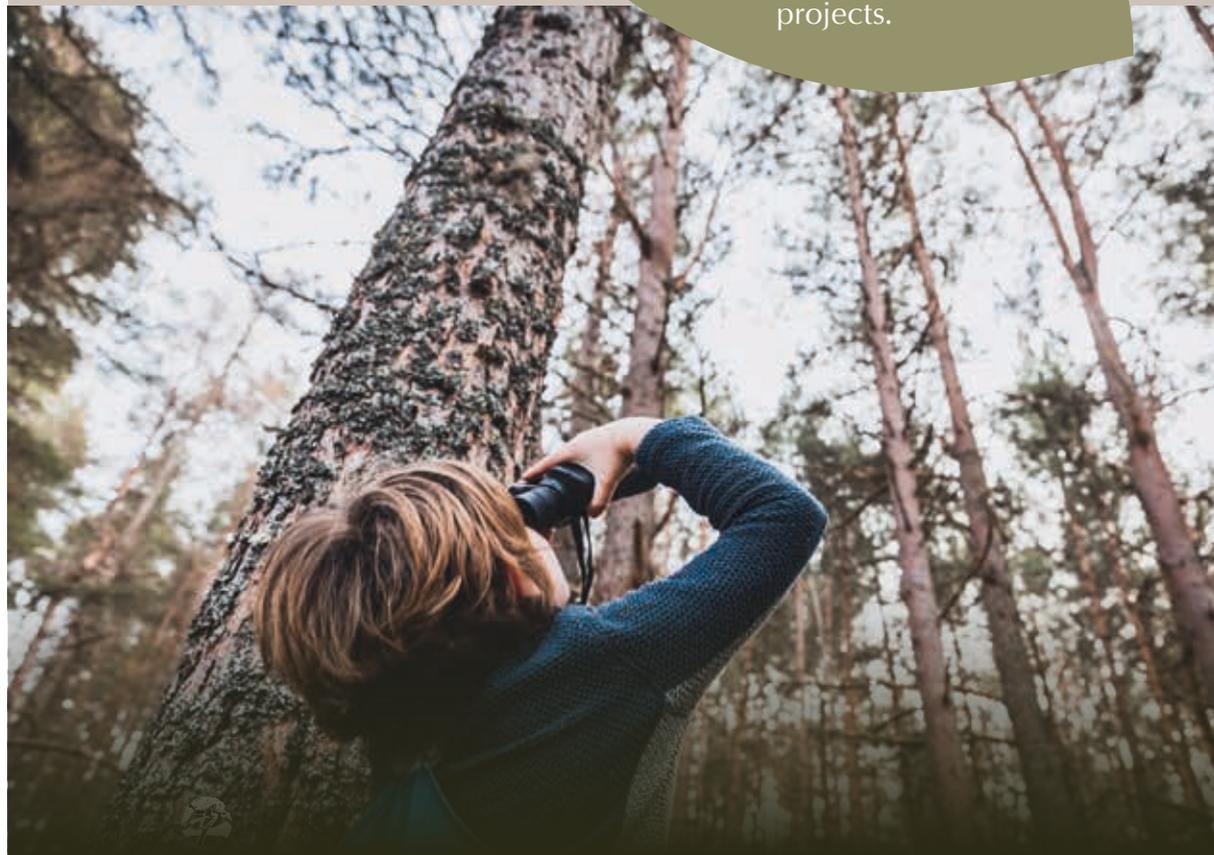
THE AIGAS TRUST EXISTS TO:

“further, through education and involvement, understanding of the value of the remaining wild places of the world and help to conserve the wildlife which depends upon them.”

Naturedays at Aigas is a registered environmental education charity, supported by The Aigas Trust. The Aigas Trust was set up by Sir John Lister-Kaye in 1980 to support environmental education work based at Aigas Field Centre.



When you book a programme at Aigas, you are helping fund our education team and the work they do with Highland schools, young adults and families from around Scotland, as well as Aigas' conservation projects.



Tailormade Stays

Use Aigas as a base for your own expeditions. Combine staying in a beautiful place with the friendly expertise of our ranger team. Those who may not wish to join an organised group programme can use our facilities and rangers, as well as stay in one of our lodges, on a B&B basis. We can help you decide where to go, what to see, show you where to find it and we can lead you there if you want professional help.



Our Wildlife Hides

PINEWOOD HIDE - a day time hide best for red squirrels, tits including crested tits and finches, sparrowhawks, jays and siskins.

CAMPBELL HIDE - a ranger led evening hide best for pine martens, badgers and tawny owls.

QUARRY HIDE - a ranger led evening hide best for pine martens, badgers, roe deer and barn owls.

KINGDOM HIDE - overlooking the loch best for beavers, otters and osprey.

TREE-TOP HIDE - overlooking the moorland from a high perspective. Good for foxes, deer and raptors.

BURN HIDE - Close to the guest lodges with bird feeders for tits and finches, great spotted woodpeckers, jays and the occasional red squirrel.

RAPTOR HIDE - our newest hide, looking onto a carrion pile to attract raptors such as buzzards and red kites.

WILDCAT HIDE - a hide looking into one of our wildcat enclosures (see page 18), to be visited with a ranger.

For more info visit aigas.co.uk



© Laurie Campbell



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Conservation at Aigas



OUR WILDCAT PROJECT - 'The Aigas Wildcat Conservation Breeding Programme' was set up in 2011 in collaboration with a large network of organisations, to breed and release wildcats back into large tracts of healthy Highland habitat allowing a wild population to not only survive but thrive and spread to colonise new areas. After over a decade of breeding, the first wildcats have been released into the Cairngorms National Park in 2023.

REGENERATION AND HABITAT RESTORATION - For almost 50 years we have been aiding natural regeneration of the Aigas estate. Hundreds of years of over grazing and irresponsible land management had created a barren "wet desert", lacking in diversity with an absence of native species. Today Aigas thrives. Today Aigas thrives - we have recorded just over 1600 species on the estate (though we expect there is more than double this).

RED SQUIRRELS - Our discreet red squirrel population was in trouble and declining, so we did a trial reintroduction of eight red squirrels which has reversed the decline to a point where we have an abundance, leading us to believe that a lack of genetic diversity was the problem.

TWINFLOWER - Of the six twinflower root stocks translocated to Aigas in 2018, all are thriving.

BEAVERS - In 2006 we introduced beavers to the Aigas Loch as a demonstration project to aid ambitions for a future UK wide reintroduction scheme. Our beavers have been an outstanding success and have created new and healthier habitat.

"What you are doing here - spreading awareness and love of nature is FANTASTIC! I love it"

Dr Jane Goodall DBE

Arrivals and departures

All Aigas based programmes commence at 4.30pm on the published start date (usually a Saturday) and end after breakfast on the last day. If you are coming by car, please aim to arrive between 3pm and afternoon tea at 4.30pm. Please make sure that you have given the office plenty of notice of your travel arrangements.

For those using public transport, we offer two complimentary minibus collections from Inverness train station every Saturday at 12.30pm and 4.00pm. The meeting place in Inverness is in the car park beside platform one at the railway station off Academy Street in the city centre. For guests arriving by air, there is a regular shuttle bus from Inverness airport to the bus station.

For guests arriving in Inverness after the pickup time of 4pm, please contact the office in advance to arrange a collection plan.

At the end of each programme, we offer two complimentary drop offs to Inverness train station at 8.30am and 10.30am.

For any guests arriving and departing out with these times, please contact the office and we will arrange taxis for you at a reduced price.

All Photos © Laurie Campbell



To find out more information please visit www.aigas.co.uk

DIRECTIONS

Aigas is easy to reach. You can come by air, road or rail. We arrange collection of groups and individuals from, and return them to, Inverness. Aigas is only a half-hour's drive west from Inverness, the Highland capital. We are situated in Strathglass on the A831, 5 miles from the village of Beaully.

AIR LINKS

There are regular flights to Inverness from Heathrow, Gatwick, Luton, Bristol, Birmingham, Manchester, the Channel Islands, Dublin, Belfast and Amsterdam. Check www.britishairways.com, www.easyjet.com and www.loganair.co.uk for details.

RAIL

Many of our guests come by rail to Inverness. Check www.thetrainline.com for schedules, prices and online booking. The Caledonian Sleeper can be booked at www.sleeper.scot.

"Congratulations to the hugely dedicated Aigas staff who all teach the importance of our connectedness with nature - that we are a part of it, not apart from it."

HRH The Prince of Wales, Duke of Rothesay



© Laurie Campbell



For more information or to book please phone, email or visit our website.

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