

# SCOTLAND

CAIRNGORMS N.P.

with  
**Willi  
Rolfes**

June 7 - 13, 2025

ospreys | red squirrels | dolphins 6 nights,  
| old pine woods | lochs and glens GBP 2650

photo © Willi Rolfes



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# our formula

**F**OOD AND PHOTOGRAPHY RETREATS combines a high standard of hospitality with the sharing of professional photographic experience accumulated over 30 years. We create a home-from-home for you in the large comfortable houses we rent for the Retreats, freeing you of the restrictions of hotels. Over the course of the week, this space and our field locations become the settings for learning, sharing and enjoying good food and conversation with like-minded people.

Maybe it helps that we enjoy our work with guests. We take a lot of pleasure in seeing the lights go on in the eyes of someone who realises they have just made something special. Or who has understood a setting properly for the first time. Or whose expression is pure delight as a plate is set down before them.

We enjoy sharing because, in one way or another, it always rewards. We know how ideas go out into the world from our Retreats, grow and develop with other guardians only to return to us later, mature and fully-formed. And how recipes are taken home and meals recreated for the enjoyment of friends and families we will never meet.

We hope you will join us to make some new stories together.



*Charlotte and Niall Benvie, your hosts and directors of Food and Photography Retreats Ltd.*

the location



**S**COTLAND'S SECOND NATIONAL PARK, the Cairngorms, is the UK's most extensive mountain environment. The Spey valley retains some of the largest tracts of the pine forest that covered much of the Highlands after the last Ice Age. Its distance from the sea means that the area's numerous lochs and marshes are often wreathed in early morning mist.

Not only is Speyside a refuge of the ancient pine forest and a host of species that have disappeared from much of the rest of the country—such as capercaillie and red squirrels— it is also the setting of exciting re-wilding initiatives which are seeing the return of montane scrub and woodland to areas that have not had forest cover for centuries. There is simmering tension between those who'd rather see wide open vistas and those who place biodiversity ahead of visual amenity. So, for photographers interested in creating story-led collections of pictures, Speyside has plenty of scope. Our base's owner, Pete Cairns, is himself deeply involved in various re-wilding initiatives and can provide insider information on these.

Pete has also been active for many years in the development of eco-tourism in the area, with others following his lead. Amongst these, the fish pools on Rothiemurchus Estate attract many ospreys and we will have exclusive use of the hides for one day of the Retreat.









**H**ERE ARE SOME OF THE OPTIONS we have, depending on the interest and fitness of the group. As we will have two leaders, the group can be split.

- Fishing ospreys from low levels hides on Rothiemurchus\*
- Red squirrels at a summer feeding station\*
- Loch Garten pine woods
- Loch Morlich at dusk
- Coire-an-Sneachda to look for ptarmigan
- Mountain landscapes
- Wild-living domesticated reindeer in Glenmore
- Field studio photography of plants, frogs and insects

**and if we want to drive a bit further (1.5 - 2 hrs each way)**

- Gannets and other seabirds at Troup Head
- Bottle nosed dolphins at Chanonry Point
- Perhaps Scotland's most beautiful glen, Glen Affric.

In between times we will have review and critique sessions when we discuss the work we have made.

*• indicates that these are additional charged-for add-ons. We don't build them into the price of the Retreat in case the weather means they don't run.*



photo © Willi Rolfes



**W**E WILL BE STAYING at Ballintean Mountain Lodge in the pine-woods of Glenfeshie. This provides a well-appointed base for our travels as well as a relaxing venue for eating, talking and, occasionally, sleeping! Each bedroom has its own bathroom and there is wi-fi throughout the Lodge as well as spacious social areas and a library of nature photography books.

Balintean is at the centre of the re-wilding Glenfeshie and you are welcome to take some time to yourself to wander through the pine-woods or down to the river Feshie. Just let us know where you've gone; there aren't many formal footpaths here.

Good food is at the heart of our Retreats, from breakfast through to after-dinner chocolates, all made by Charlotte. We take the view that even a good day is made better by the prospect of a lovely meal at the end of it. We eat largely vegetarian food at home but the range broadens to encompass all tastes on Retreat. She uses local ingredients, when they are available, in dishes that are delicious and imaginative without being fussy. Food allergies and intolerances are catered for sensitively when notified in advance on the booking form. Expect to eat well, for breakfast, lunch and dinner. And in between times too.





**Price: GBP 2650 per person**

**starts: 17:00, 7<sup>th</sup> June 2025, finishes 09:00, 13<sup>th</sup> June 2025**

*What's included:*

- 6 nights' accommodation at Ballintean Mountain Lodge, Feshiebridge
- All meals
- Transfer from and to Inverness Airport or railway station or Aviemore railway station
- Transportation during the Retreat

*What's not included:*

- Your travel to and from Inverness, from home
- Alcoholic drinks
- Travel insurance
- All day osprey session (cGBP 160)
- Squirrel photography session (cGBP 100)
- Reindeer visit (cGBP 30) (these last three are all elective)

**To book**

Visit [www.foodandphotographyretreats.com](http://www.foodandphotographyretreats.com), click on the MAKE A RESERVATION button in the top right, scroll down to read our *Terms and Conditions*, then complete and send us the booking form below. At that point will you be invoiced for the deposit, amounting to 19% of the total. The balance is due 5 weeks before departure.

## Travel

Our pick-up and return points for guests are Inverness airport and railway station and Aviemore railway station. Let us know which suits you best. We will return to Inverness on the final day for around 11:00. Please check times with us before booking return travel.

## The daily routine

Whatever we are shooting, it tends to look better in the early morning or late afternoon when low-angled light shows relief and colours better. With dawn at around 04:30 and dusk around 22:00, it's potentially a *very* long day but if we do a dawn shoot, you'll be given the chance to rest a bit during the day. If we have a dawn session, we take coffee or tea just before we leave and eat breakfast on return.

The plan for the next day is published at dinner, outlining the weather forecast, the locations and ideas for the next day, drive times, walking distances, where and when we'll eat and what gear you'll probably need.

We've learned over the years just how much guests value being able to discuss the work they are creating, with the leaders and other guests, and to this end we'd urge you to bring a laptop. We set up a Zoom meeting within the room which makes it much easier for the leaders to teach and the guests to share.

While the emphasis is on photography and review, Niall and Willi will advise on post-production too.

## Safety

We take your safety seriously during our Retreats. At locations with known risks, such as drop-offs, tree roots, muddy shores, busy roads etc., we will draw your attention to them before we leave the vehicle. Thereafter, you are responsible for your own safety. We provide guests with a hi.-vis. vest to attach to their camera pack—it makes you, and it, easier to locate. We also issue guests with a two-way radio in order that we all may keep in touch in town or in other areas where the group scatters. This also makes it easier to access help or guidance from Niall. We do not recommend leaving equipment other than tripods in our vehicle overnight. While there is uneven ground to cross, the distances we cover are quite short (100m - 5km, exceptionally) so even if you are only moderately fit, you won't find this Retreat too taxing. The walk to the reindeer is relatively short and on a well made path. The walk into Coire- an-Sneachda does, however, demand a higher level of fitness and proper walking boots.

## COVID

At the time of writing, the threat from COVID has receded. Nevertheless, if there is a resurgence, we will require guests to conform to the statutory guidelines pertaining at the time.



## Spending money

There are numerous cash machines in the area, should you need one. Pretty much every businesses takes payment by card, although it will make things simpler if you can pay the osprey, squirrel and reindeer “operators” with cash.

## Insurance

*It is a requirement of booking that guests provide evidence of personal travel insurance to cover cancellation and curtailment, medical and emergency expenses (including repatriation), personal accident, injury and death in addition to loss of/damage to luggage and possessions, personal possessions and flight cancellations/ delays.*

## Passport and visa requirements

A passport valid for at least six months beyond the length of the stay is required for non-UK visitors. EU citizens should check on the latest requirements for travelling to the UK. Be aware too that passports issued more than 10 years before the date of travel may be invalid.

## Language

English is spoken, although non-native speakers might struggle with the local accent!

## Climate

If we are lucky with the weather in the Cairngorms, we can expect temperatures in the low 20°C's and sun. But overcast skies and a temperature range in the low teens is just as likely.

## Clothing

It's best to plan for the worst and bring your waterproof gear (including trousers) and warm clothes, even although it is June midges will be in action in the Cairngorms so we'd recommend a head net and cap as well as your choice of midge repellent. We are also in tick territory and highly recommend [this device](#) for easy removal.

*In addition:*

- Walking boots are fine but a pair of wellingtons is useful too for shore work. You can buy some locally if bringing a pair isn't practical
- Slippers for the house
- A sun hat -you never know!

## Equipment

If you are travelling by air, you may be concerned about carry-on luggage restrictions. The way round this Niall has used for many years is to pack as much gear as you reasonably can into a photographer's waistcoat. This counts as a garment, not

hand luggage, and you can still take your carry-on allowance in to the cabin. Equipment you'll need during the Retreat:

- If possible, please bring a laptop with Lightroom/PS or CaptureOne or Exposure X
- You could use any lens between 16 mm and 500 mm but a macro lens, a 100-400 mm zoom and a moderate wide-angle will get most use. The osprey need something in the range 200 - 300 mm, depending on the camera's sensor size
- A tripod - for versatility
- Please pack a head torch, for safety and navigation
- A walking pole or staff is useful in the mountains
- Bring all the chargers, cards, batteries and backup media you need, plus UK power adaptor if you're travelling from abroad.
- A polarising filter and graduated ND's, but only if you have the latter.

### **About us**

After many years leading tours and workshops for other companies at home and abroad, Niall and Charlotte Benvie incorporated Food and Photography Retreats in 2018. Our offer combines the cultivation of your creativity in attractive locations with great hospitality, conversation and food.

*Willi Rolfes* is a leading German natural history photographer,

tutor and author with a meticulous approach to his work and a talent for communicating his skills. He is also Director of the Katholische Akademie Stapelfeld in Cloppenburg.

*Niall* has been a professional photographer, writer designer and guide for 31 years with a massive publication record including seven books and hundreds of articles. He has been involved in founding and running several of the biggest outdoor photographic initiatives of the last 15 years, including Meet Your Neighbours, Wild Wonders of Europe and 2020VISION and is widely recognised for the innovative nature of his work- and capacity for re-invention.

For 28 years, *Charlotte* combined a career in the Civil Service with freelance catering and hosting roles before coming to work with husband, Niall. Guests value not only her expertise in the kitchen and dining room but her attention to detail and her warmth. She has a keen eye for a picture too. She is a trained chocolatiere.

specifics

**Contact Niall and Charlotte**

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*with the Benvies*



**NIALL  
BENVIE**  
artwork

