

WILD HAGGIS (*Haggisus hairii*)



The wild haggis is a four legged hairy animal which is endemic to Scotland. It lives on hills and mountains where it eats grass and heather. The legs are longer on one side of the body than the other allowing them to easily move around their hilltop homes. Haggis come in a range of sizes to suit the hill which they live upon - they perform exactly one circuit of their home hill every year so grow only large enough to make this possible

For historical reasons almost all male haggis live on the East Coast of Scotland, and all females live on the West Coast. Cumbernauld is one of the few places where these two populations meet and is therefore vitally important for the future of the species.

Haggis are sexually dimorphic meaning that the male and the female of the species have major physical differences. The most obvious is that male haggis have longer legs on the right hand side of their bodies meaning they can only run around hills in an anti-clockwise direction.

Females have longer legs on the left hand side which means they must run around hills in a clockwise direction. As the males and females are always moving in opposite directions mating can only occur on those brief occasions, once per year, when they meet while travelling around the same hill. Traditionally this happens every year on Hunt the Gowks Day (April 1st)

It can be difficult to tell the males and females apart when they are stationary, in these cases the best thing is to look for the pleats on the back of the kilt of the male haggis – the same technique can be used to correctly sex Scottish midges.

Haggis are believed to be of the same genus as Nessie and share that specie's peculiar ability to camouflage themselves perfectly from sight should they be startled.

The most reliable way to see them is to stake out likely habitat at dawn on the morning of April 1st. As this is the only day males and females meet they are often too distracted to hide.

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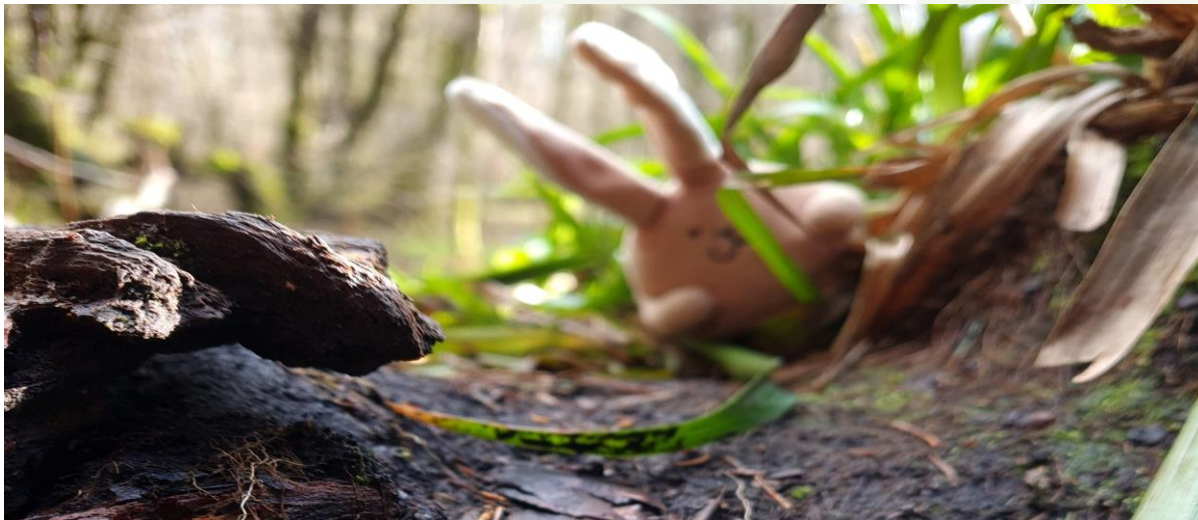
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Some great places to see wild haggis in Cumbernauld are:

- **Rabbit Hill in Ravenswood LNR** – in high winds watch for them swimming in circles in the nearby pond after they are blown off the hilltop.
- **The Castle Mound in Cumbernauld Community Park** – some of the smallest haggis in Scotland can be found at the top of this mound.
- **Forest Wood Wildlife Reserve** – Haggis in this reserve actually migrate right round the whole Slammanan Plateau, showing why Landscape Scale Conservation is such an important topic.

Haggis populations are threatened by habitat loss, persecution and over harvesting of the wild population. Many landowners still believe the traditional stories that haggis eat large numbers of red deer stags and have historically persecuted them. In reality modern research has shown that haggis do not eat deer – though they are probably responsible for the prehistoric extinction of the Scottish hermit elephant.

For some years it has been popular in Scotland to claim that haggis are edible in an attempt to fool gullible tourists into trying the so called ‘national dish’. This cruel trade leads to huge amounts of waste as in all of recorded history no one has ever managed to eat more than a single forkful. It is in fact illegal to harm a wild haggis in any way – so should you be tempted to try and eat one please ensure you only purchase ethically reared farmed haggis from a reputable supplier.



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