**Introduction to Assynt**

Beautiful, scenic, spectacular, dramatic – all words that have been used to describe Assynt, a parish situated in the North West corner of the Highlands of Scotland and which has some of our country’s wildest and most remote mountain and coastal scenery.

A legacy of glaciation, much of the hinterland consists of rugged, distinctive and isolated mountains set amidst immense tracts of bare moorland and blanket bog, all strewn with a patchwork of lochs and lochans – where deer are more likely to be encountered than human beings. The coastline is deeply indented by numerous lochs or arms of the sea, producing stunning glimpses of savage beauty at every turn. Sparkling salmon rivers run to the sea where rocky shores are interspersed with stunning sandy beaches. Viewed from different vantage points, groups of mysterious and weirdly-shaped mountains peer above the skyline, presenting a panorama of ever changing shapes which may confuse the traveller on the move. Always vast, this landscape can in turn seem intimidating or, thanks to a sudden weather change, assume a mantle of breathtaking beauty.

Assynt has a unique and rich biodiversity, bound by the sea on the north and west, lochs to the south and majestic mountains on the east, rising to 987 metres on Conival.  The geology is unusually varied and the landscape accommodates over 680 lochs.  There are many valuable habitats including rocky and sandy shores, Atlantic hazelwoods, dry and wet upland heaths, mires and crags, dwarf juniper scrub, lochs and rivers, upland limestone grassland and heath, montane heath and scree.  The importance of Assynt’s habitats is recognised by the existence of some ten designated sites.

Notable mammals include mountain hare, water vole, otter and pipistrelle bat.  Red deer are present in high numbers. Ptarmigan may be seen on the mountain ridges which, overlooking huge tracts of lower ground, also offer the chance of seeing golden eagles. Assynt has an extensive collection of large oligotrophic freshwater lochs. These lochs are important for breeding Black-throated Divers whilst surrounding upland habitats support small numbers of specialist breeding birds such as Greenshank and Golden Plover.