

Fetlar2013

Wildlife & Nature



Birds

Fetlar is Britain's premier site for the beautiful **red-necked phalarope**, and is home to the majority of the UK's small breeding population. Other rare birds, such as the **whimbrel** and **red-throated diver**, also make the island their home.

Due to Fetlar's geographical location, the island often attracts off-course migratory birds – as Fetlar lies so far east, it is one of the first points of land fall for migrating birds in spring and autumn. Every year, Fetlar plays host to some rare vagrants and unusual migrants, which in the past has included species such as the **chestnut-sided warbler**, **common yellow throat**, and **Isabelline shrike**.

Fetlar was once home to Britain's first and only breeding pair of **snowy owls** during the late 1960s to mid 1970s. After breeding successfully for a number of years, the male bird disappeared, and by the mid 1990s, the descendants of the pair had all died out.

Marine Wildlife

The Shetland Islands are home to a large percentage of the total population of Britain's **otters**, and Fetlar is one of the best places to witness otters in their natural habitat. Otters in Fetlar are often active during the day, and may be spotted in coastal areas or in the freshwater lochs. However, their shy nature means that it is not always possible to see the otters without the

help of a specialist guide – and it should be remembered that otters are a protected species in Scotland.

Fetlar is a wonderful place to see seals, both common and grey, all around the isle. **Grey seals** are more prevalent at the remote shores of Lamb Hoga, the northern Blue banks, and the eastern cliffs. **Common seals** may be found hauled out along the coasts of Urie, and at small off-shore skerries.

During calm seas, whales and dolphins can be seen from shore and whilst on the ferries during crossings. **Harbour porpoise** and **minke whales** are the most regularly recorded, especially from the east cliffs during the summer, where **white-beaked**, **white sided**, and **Risso's dolphins** may also be seen.

Killer whales regularly make an annual appearance; however, they do not appear in any particular place, and the best place to see them is during ferry crossings.

Basking sharks have also been seen off the coast of Fetlar, although they are a more unusual sight.

Contact

RSPB Warden

Tel: 01957 733 246

Email: fetlar@rspb.org.uk

Website: www.rspb.org.uk



Top right:
Otters rest among
the seaweed.

Bottom left:
A red-necked
phalarope
stretches its wing.

© Brydon
Thomason

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Flora

Around 300 different species of flowering plants have been recorded as growing on Fetlar, and this makes it one of the richest assemblages of plants in Shetland. The well-drained, nutrient rich soils have given some unusual species of plant life the ability to grow and prosper, and the wide variety of habitats – marshes, mires, and cliff tops to name a few – have given rise to a great natural diversity of flora.

The extensive serpentine rock that makes up much of the eastern part of the island gives rise to a herb rich serpentine heath, and the area is dominated by ling, bell heather and woolly hair moss. During the summer, flowers such as **purging flax**, **mountain everlasting**, **alpine meadow rue** and **wild thyme** occur.

A host of colourful flowering plants may be seen in roadside ditches and mires, including such species as **kingcup** and **marsh marigold**. **Bog-bean**, **marsh cinquefoil**, **cuckoo flower** and **lesser spearwort** may also be found.

Some of Fetlar's rarest plants, in Shetland terms, are members of the sedge family. The only known colony of **water sedge** is found along the margins of Papil Water, while at the north west end of the same loch, **white sedge** occurs. This and the **greater tussock sedge**, found in some of the island's mires, occur only at a handful of other sites in Shetland.



Above:
The Geowall at Funzie.

© Robert Thomson

Geology

Fetlar has a fascinating geological structure, and is partially composed of ancient oceanic crust and a unique conglomerate formation, the latter of which is known as the Funzie conglomerate. The Geowall at Funzie is a visual representation of how this happened, and helps people to understand the complex geology of the island.

At north end of the island, the rock is serpentine – an unusual kind of rock that only occurs in two other places in Britain: the neighbouring isle of Unst, and at The Lizard, Cornwall. Serpentine rocks have long been used in the creation of jewellery and other fine objects, a tradition that continues to this day.

Fetlar also has relatively large deposits of steatite – soapstone – and chromite, which, in the past, were both mined. The Viking settlers who once lived on the island also used soapstone extensively in the creation of household objects.

The properties of all these rocks continue to have an impact on the soil and flowering plants that grow above them, and are remnants of the earth's ancient past.

As one of the Shetland Islands, Fetlar is part of [Geopark Shetland](#).

Contact

[Geopark Shetland](#)
Tel: 01595 694688

Email:
info@shetlandamenity.org

Responsible Access

Fetlar welcomes responsible access to its land and wildlife, and asks that the following guidelines be observed.

- Please keep dogs under close supervision, or ideally on a lead, especially during the spring and summer months when lambs and ground-nesting birds are present.
- Take responsibility and be aware of yourself and others, including any dogs.
- Take care of the environment by taking litter home, and by not disturbing or damaging wildlife and historic places.
- Observe any restricted access, especially in relation to nesting sites, and contact the RSPB Warden if access is required.
- Know the [Scottish Outdoor Access Code](#).