

Fetlar2013

Whimbrel

Latin name: *Numenius phaeopus*

Family: *Scolopacidae*

In the UK, whimbrel grounds are restricted to the north mainland of Scotland and the Northern Isles. In Fetlar they breed inland on dry upland heath where they feed on insects, slugs and snails. They are migratory birds and the UK population overwinters on African coasts. On passage whimbrels can be seen in other coastal areas in the UK such as estuaries and mudflats where they feed by probing mud for small invertebrates, and by picking small crabs and similar prey off the ground surface.

It is a fairly large wading bird that is usually quite wary of being approached.

The whimbrel is a Schedule 1 breeding bird, and is protected by law.

Description

Size: 37-45 cm

Identification: It is similar to a curlew but smaller with shorter legs. It has a long, dark, curved bill (6-9cm) that is proportionately shorter, thicker and more hooked than a curlew's. Its head has a prominent dark eyestripe and crown-sides with contrasting pale supercilium and central crown stripe. These markings are more striking than the somewhat plain head of the curlew.

Arguably the most notable identification feature is its breeding call, which starts like a curlew's but breaks into a bubbling, long-drawn-out, straight trill. Its alarm call is a loud, repetitive, rippling whistle - all on the same note.

When and where?

Whimbrels arrive in Fetlar to breed in early May, and leave in mid-August for their southern wintering grounds.

The best way to catch sight or sound of whimbrel on Fetlar, without disturbing breeding birds, is to walk the road between Funzie and Aith. They sometimes feed near the Loch of Funzie and take their young into the tall vegetation of the Mires of Funzie or adjacent croft land.

From the car, keep an eye on roadside fence posts where they sometimes perch. It is important to remember that whimbrel in Fetlar are breeding, so they must not be approached or disturbed.

Contact

RSPB Warden

Tel: 01957 733 246

Email: fetlar@rspb.org.uk

Address: RSPB Fetlar Office, Baelans, Fetlar, ZE2 9DJ

More Information

[RSPB Scotland in Fetlar](#)

[The Scottish Outdoor Access Code, Schedule 1 protection and licensing](#)