

Fetlar2013

Key Facts & Figures

Welcome to Fetlar, known as the Garden of Shetland and renowned for being the greenest of all the Shetland Islands! Fetlar boasts beautiful natural scenery, a diverse range of flora, fauna and marine wildlife, and interesting geological formations. Fetlar is an island steeped in folklore and myth, and its early history is interwoven with fact and legend.

We welcome any inquiries you may have, and look forward to hearing from any interested parties.

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Above:
Wildflowers in Fetlar, with Tresta Beach, Papil Water,
Fetlar Kirk and Lamb Hoga in the background.
© Martha Devine

- Fetlar is the fourth largest island in the Shetland Isles, and is one of the most easterly. The Shetland Islands lie to the northeast of mainland Scotland.
- Collectively, Fetlar and the neighbouring islands of Yell and Unst are known as the North Isles.
- The highest point on the island is Vord Hill, which stands at 158 metres high (518 feet). This makes the hill a Marilyn, one of 19 in Shetland.
- The area of the island is 4,078 hectares, or 15.75 square miles. Fetlar is approximately 7 miles by 4 miles.
- In the lead up to each equinox, Fetlar gains or loses up to 15 minutes of light each week.
- There have been people living on the island for at least 5,000 years.
- In the early 19th Century, almost 900 people made the island their home – but in 2009, Fetlar's population had reached an all-time low of 48.
- As of May 2013, the population was 81, and continues to grow.
- Fetlar Developments Ltd, Fetlar's development trust, was established in 2008 with the aim of countering the depopulation of the island.
- Fetlar has its own airstrip, and can be used by chartered private planes and for general aviation.
- Fetlar School provides free education for local children of primary and nursery age, and is currently attended by 9 pupils.
- Fetlar has a great number of archaeologically interesting sites – including Finnigert Dyke, an ancient structure that once divided the island into two.
- The island is home to some of the UK's rarest birds, including the red-necked phalarope, whimbrel, and red-throated diver.
- Folklore is a very important aspect of Fetlar life, and is inexorably intertwined with the island's history.

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Community

Most of Fetlar's population is spread between the three main settlements on the island: Houbie, Funzie, and Tresta. Houbie, which is centrally located on the island, has the largest concentration of houses and is where most local services can be found.

The community of Fetlar is small but thriving with regularly held events taking place at Fetlar Community Hall, which is the central hub of activity for the island's residents. Originally established as a kirk in the 1840s, the building was converted to a community hall to provide the island with a focal point for socialisation and community events.

Crofting plays a big part in the Fetlar Community. For a few it is their main source of income, however most crofters have a number of jobs with crofting forming part of the mix. This has led to a diverse range of skills, abilities, and interests being represented on the island.

Organisations

There are a number of local groups based on Fetlar that meet on a regular basis. Three of the main organisations are:

Fetlar Developments Ltd: Established in 2008, FDL aims to counter the depopulation of the island, and build a sustainable future. The office is based at Fetlar Community Hall. FDL is a company limited by guarantee and a registered charity.

Fetlar Museum Trust: The Trust run Fetlar Interpretive Centre, the island's heritage and craft centre. The trustees, staff, and volunteers work to preserve, record, interpret and display the social and natural heritage of Fetlar for the benefit of the future. Fetlar Museum Trust is a registered charity.

Fetlar Community Association: Officially established in 1974, the Community Association runs Fetlar Community Hall, and is responsible for organising many of the events that take place through the year. The Association has charitable status.

Other groups on the island include:

- Fetlar Makers' Group
- Fetlar Hnefatafl Panel
- The Boating and Recreation Club
- Brough Lodge Trust
- Fetlar Book Group
- Badminton Club

Events

Many events take place throughout the year, including the Annual Sheepdog Trials, which take place each summer. There are also a number of regular events, including:

- Weekly Club Night
- Film nights
- Fish & chip suppers
- Bingo night

Local Businesses

A number of Fetlar's residents are self-employed, and there is a range of professions present on the island. These include:

- Crofting & farming
- Ferry staff
- Tourism
- Craft and jewellery creation

Top:
Front Exterior of
Fetlar
Community Hall

Image provided
courtesy of
fetlar.org



Bottom:
The islanders
gather for the
premiere of the
school play.

Image © Katy
Jackson



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Community

Education

Education has always been of paramount importance to the island's residents. An example of early education on Fetlar was the 19th Century school at Urie.

Today, Shetland Islands Council offers primary and nursery education on Fetlar, both provided at the school. As of the 2012-2013 academic year, seven children attend the primary school and two attend nursery. It is hoped that Fetlar will be able to maintain and increase these numbers in the future.

Secondary education is available by default through Anderson High School in Lerwick on the mainland, although placements at Baltasound Junior High School on Unst are available.

Pupils attending Anderson High School board in halls of residence throughout the week. Those attending Baltasound commute each day by ferry.

Emergency Services

Fetlar's community nurse is the first point of call for health services required by residents. The nurse works in partnership with the Yell & Fetlar Medical Practice.

The island also has a retained firefighter service. These firefighters have other occupations, but respond immediately to any fire-related emergencies on Fetlar.



Above:
Volunteers participate in the annual Voar Redd Up at Tresta Beach.
Image provided courtesy of fetlar.org

Religion

Religion has always played an important role in the community life on Fetlar. This is demonstrated not only through the numerous ruins of churches and chapels that can be identified on the island, but also through the presence of a number of active religious institutions.

Fetlar Kirk, built in 1790 on the same site as numerous other kirks, holds services on a fortnightly basis, with the minister coming in to Fetlar from the neighbouring Isle of Yell.

SOLI, Britain's most northerly Episcopalian order, was established on Fetlar in 1988. Services are held on a regular basis.

St Sunniva Skete, an Orthodox monastic house, also holds services on a regular basis.

Visitors to Fetlar are welcome to any and all services that take place throughout the week.

Eco-Friendly Island

Fetlar's community strives to keep the island beautiful, eco-friendly, and welcoming, and in particular is very proud of Tresta Beach, which has received a Seaside Award each year since 2008. Additionally, each spring most of the island's residents attend the annual Voar Redd Up, an award winning Shetland-wide initiative to help keep the islands clean and litter-free.

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History & Archaeology

Fetlar has a wealth of archaeological sites covering thousands of years of history. People have lived on the island for at least 5,000 years, although the exact date of the first settlement is not known.

One of the more enigmatic structures on the island is Finnigert Dyke, an ancient wall that stretches from the north of the island to the south and once cut the island into two. Sources differ as to a precise date of construction, but it is Fetlar's oldest surviving man-made structure, having been built some time prior to the 1st millennium BC, and still standing whole when the first Viking families settled on the island.

During the 19th Century, Fetlar's population was drastically cut due to the Clearances. Instigated by the laird Sir Arthur Nicolson, much of the island was enclosed and turned over to grazing sheep, and the crofting tenants that had been living there were forcefully evicted. During this period of time, Fetlar – and the Shetland Islands as a whole – underwent mass emigration. In 1886, the Crofters Holding Act was passed, which protected the rights of crofters based on fixity of tenure, free sale and fair rent.

There were a number of reasons that the population of Fetlar continued to fall even after the implementation of the Act. The most important of these was the lack of a fishing pier, something only remedied in December 2012. Without a pier, it meant that the tenants could not supplement their income with fishing, as happened on other islands.

Fetlar is home to two grand houses, both listed buildings: Brough Lodge, built in c.1825 to serve as home for the Nicolson family, and Leagarth House, built in c.1900 by Sir William Watson Cheyne and which remains in the possession of the family to this day. Both buildings boast beautiful and interesting architectural designs.

In 2002, the island was featured in an episode of Channel 4's *Time Team*. With just three days at their disposal, the team's archaeological experts were tasked with the feat of excavating two separate Viking sites on Fetlar – one a boat burial, the other a homestead. The results of the dig, among them a bronze tortoise-shaped brooch, are now on display at the [Shetland Museum and Archives](#), Lerwick.

Over its many years of inhabitation, Fetlar's past history has become intertwined with folklore. Well-known local storyteller Jeemsie Laurenson left a rich recorded history of the many stories from Fetlar.

Fetlar Interpretive Centre

The centre offers displays and interactive multi-media on the island's cultural history, folklore, natural heritage and geology. A range of recordings, both visual and audio, brings the history of Fetlar to life for visitors.

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Above:

The entrance of Brough Lodge.

© Kevin Serginson

Below:

Decorated soapstone discovered at Gord. © Fetlar Museum Trust



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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

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Top right:
Otters rest among
the seaweed.

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

© Brydon
Thomason

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Wildlife & Nature

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](#).

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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](#).