

# SHETLAND ISLANDS

## MAIN BIRDING SITES & POTENTIAL SPECIES

### South Mainland

Large parts of the South Mainland are cultivated and there are consequently several excellent birdwatching areas. The gardens around Sandwick, Bigton, Toab, Sumburgh, the overgrown burn at Geosetter and the Sumburgh Hotel garden are all prime sites for migrant passerines although areas such as the small quarries at Sumburgh head and around the Sumburgh lighthouse have all had their fair share of good birds. The whole area has turned up many rarities in the past.

Access to the Geosetter Burn, the areas around Sumburgh Head and the Sumburgh Hotel garden are all unrestricted but care should be taken around gardens. The Lochs of Spiggie and Hillwell and surrounding marshland just north of Sumburgh Airport are shallow and mainly freshwater and are one of the most important areas for wildfowl in Shetland, especially for Whooper Swans where up to 400 may gather on Loch of Spiggie in late autumn. Access is not permitted to either of the lochs but the entire area can be viewed from the surrounding roads. Pool of Virkie adjoining Sumburgh Airport, is a small sandy bay completely uncovered at low tide and the best area for watching waders in Shetland. The island of Mousa opposite Sandwick is an important area for breeding Storm Petrels and excursions to see them in the late summer evenings are regularly organised by local boatmen. Large colonies of easily viewable Puffins, Guillemots and Fulmar, along with Razorbill, Black Guillemot and Kittiwake nest on the cliffs of the Sumburgh Head RSPB Reserve where access is again unrestricted although cars should be left at the car park provided.

**Sumburgh Head and surrounding area** at the southern tip of Shetland Mainland: follow the minor road from the A970 at Grutness and continue to the car park near the lighthouse. **Scatness** is reached by taking a minor road off the A970 just beyond Toab. During the summer months thousands of seabirds breed on the cliffs at Sumburgh Head including Black Guillemot, Puffin, Shag, Guillemot, Razorbill, Kittiwake and Fulmar. Arctic Terns breed at Grutness and Scatness. This area is noted for migrants and rarities and if you're really lucky, you could see a pod of Orca.

**Pool of Virkie** half a mile north of Sumburgh Airport: turn onto minor road signposted Eastshore from A970. Likely passage waders in spring and autumn include Ruff, Greenshank, Spotted Redshank, Little Stint, Dunlin, Ringed Plover, Black and Bar-tailed Godwit. Skuas and Gulls patrol the area in summer while in winter, Long-tailed Duck, Eider, Goldeneye, Red-breasted Merganser, Iceland Gull and Glaucous Gull are regularly seen. The bushes around the pool are also worth a good look during migration.

**Loch of Spiggie** situated south west of Scousburgh: Spiggie is signposted off the B9122 a quarter of a mile south of Scousburgh village. The loch is best viewed from various vantage points along the road which skirts the loch. In spring and summer, Snipe, Redshank and

Lapwing amongst others, breed here. Large numbers of Great Skua bathe in the loch along with smaller numbers of Arctic Skua and Arctic Tern. In autumn and winter, the loch supports large numbers of Whooper Swan and ducks, including Scaup, Goldeneye, Long-tailed Duck and Wigeon.

## **Central Mainland, Lerwick, Bressay and Noss**

This area, encompassing the main town of Lerwick comprises mainly low lying heather and peat moorland with more vegetated areas and small plantations around the towns. Several species of moorland wader, Arctic and Great Skuas and Red Grouse breed in the area, although the only major seabird colonies are found on the island of Noss 5km to the east of Lerwick.

On the east side of Noss there are large seabird cliffs made up of eroded horizontal sandstone, which support 38,000 Guillemot, 10,000 pairs of Kittiwake, 6,000 pairs of Fulmar, 5,000 pairs of Gannet, along with Puffin, Black Guillemot and Razorbill. Noss is separated from the island of Bressay by a narrow sound but the Scottish Natural Heritage operate a Zodiac inflatable ferry service across the sound between mid-May and the end of August.

Good places for migrants are the South Nesting area, the Strand plantation, the Lerwick gardens - especially the areas around Helendale and the Loch of Clickimin, the Scalloway gardens, and on the Isle of Noss.

**Lerwick** is the main commercial centre of the islands and the arrival point of ferry passengers from mainland Scotland. The town is situated 25 miles north of Sumburgh. The A970 runs through Lerwick. The harbour is situated to the east of the town. Clickimin Loch and Seafield lie on the western outskirts. In spring and summer the harbour is an excellent place to see Great and Arctic Skua, Black Guillemot and Arctic Tern. In winter it holds good numbers of Glaucous and Iceland Gulls, Long-tailed Duck and potentially a few Little Auk. The trees at Seafield are attractive to migrant passerines, especially warblers. Clickimin Loch holds good numbers of diving ducks during the winter.

## **West Mainland**

Similar to the north, west Mainland is dotted with small lochs supporting Red-throated Divers and many species of moorland waders, although lacking any high cliffs. Probably the best spot for seawatching in Shetland is found here at Wats Ness, where large numbers of both Pomarine and Long-tailed Skua have been recorded. Migrant passerines may turn up anywhere in the 'west side' as there are no particular hot spots except for Dale of Walls and the Weisdale valley which encompasses the large (in Shetland terms) Kergord plantations. The plantations encompass 8 or 9 acres in small groups of trees and are one of the main birdwatching sites. Access to the trees is largely unrestricted, except around the main garden. The trees support the only rookery in Shetland (established in 1952) and other occasional breeding species have included Jackdaw, Goldcrest, Chaffinch and Siskin.

**Tresta Voe and Reawick** are both situated in the west Mainland: Tresta Voe can be viewed from the A971 which skirts the northern shore. For Reawick, take the B9071 off the A971 a mile west of Bixter and continue for about three miles until the voe appears. The area is important during the winter months when it holds numbers of Great Northern Diver, Red-throated Diver, Slavonian Grebe, Red-breasted Merganser, Long-tailed Duck and Eider. Small numbers of Great Northern Diver often summer, as do Long-tailed Duck.

## North Mainland

The most rugged part of the main island also encompasses Ronas Hill at 450m, Shetland's highest hill, around which is remote moorland, with numerous small lochs supporting breeding Red-throated Diver, several species of moorland waders and Arctic and Great Skuas. On the west side are high cliffs with several species of breeding seabird, especially at Eshaness. Good places to visit for migrant passerines are the plantation at Sullom village (across the voe from the Sullom Voe Oil Terminal), the plantations at Voe and at Vidlin.

## The Islands

The island of **Fetlar** is situated to the south of Unst and is reached by taking the roll-on roll-off ferry from Gutcher (Yell) or Belmont (Unst), which in turn are accessed from Toft on north-east Mainland. Fetlar boasts almost all of Britain's breeding Red-necked Phalarope which are best seen at the Loch of Funzie in the south of the Island where they often feed or from the nearby RSPB reserve hide overlooking the marshy pools. Breeding waders include Whimbrel and large numbers of breeding seabirds include Skuas, Storm Petrel and Manx Shearwater; the latter duo are best seen at night on the peninsula of Lambhoga.

**Unst** is the most northerly of the islands: part of the island is quite tundra-like with slopes covered in thin turf and stony outcrops and screes whilst much of the island consists of permeable serpentine rock. The north and west are the best vegetated areas and hold the majority of the breeding birds. Rarities are quite common on the island during migration.

**Yell** is almost completely covered in peat and heather and is quite different from the other northerly islands. The island is notable for the number of moorland species breeding there. The Lumbister reserve in central Yell comprises 4,000 acres of heather moorland and blanket bog and supports breeding Red-throated Diver, Arctic and Great Skuas, Merlin, Golden Plover, Curlew, Snipe, Dunlin, Twite and a few Whimbrel. Access to the reserve is unrestricted.