

Birding In Scotland

The Highlands and Islands of Scotland are a Birders paradise. (Birders are called “twitchers in Britain, by the way). There have been more than 450 bird species recorded in Scotland, many extremely rare, and there are over 80 ornithological nature reserves in Scotland.

There are huge concentrations of seabirds at Duncansby Head near John O’ Groats and on Cape Wrath. The islands are home to thousands of sea birds, as well as being a stopover for migrating birds. In the Hebrides, Islay is a wintering ground for huge flocks of grey lag and barnacle geese, and Druidbeg in South Uist and Balranald in North Uist have large populations of migrant waders. Orkney has huge populations of breeding seabirds and migratory birds.

Shetland is famous for varied birdlife: on Sumburgh Head are puffins, kittiwakes, fulmars, guillemots, razorbills and shags. Out of the 24 seabird species that nest in the British Isles, 21 are found in Shetland. June is the height of the breeding season, when all hell breaks loose around the isles. The bird population vastly outnumbers the human population of 24,000; there are said to be around 30,000 gannets, 140,000 guillemots, 250,000 puffins and 300,000 fulmars!

An excellent book for the novice and experienced Birder / Twitcher is: “Birds of Britain, Europe, with North America and the Middle East”. It’s published by Harper Collins in the Collins Pocket Guides series. (It does fit in a standard jacket pocket, by the way). The most recent edition is from 1998; authors are Heinzel, Fitter & Parslow. I purchased my copy for £14.00 in the UK, but it may be available through Amazon.com or www.abe.com (used books at excellent prices). ISBN: 0-00-219894-0

For specific birding locations in the Scottish Islands, a good resource (and also an excellent general guidebook) is “Scottish Islands: The Western Isles” by James and Douglas Penrith. Available through Vacation Work, at www.vacationwork.co.uk. ISBN is 1-85458-267-4. They also publish a second book, which is specifically for Orkney and Shetland.

Checklist for Scottish Islands

Gannet	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fulmar petrel	<input type="checkbox"/>
Puffin (Atlantic)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Storm petrel	<input type="checkbox"/>
Leach’s petrel	<input type="checkbox"/>
Kittiwake	<input type="checkbox"/>
Black Guillemot	<input type="checkbox"/>
Common Guillemot	<input type="checkbox"/>
Oystercatcher	<input type="checkbox"/>
Turnstone	<input type="checkbox"/>
Dunlin	<input type="checkbox"/>
Redshank	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sandpiper	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gull	<input type="checkbox"/>
Skua	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tern	<input type="checkbox"/>
Golden Eagle	<input type="checkbox"/>
Peregrine	<input type="checkbox"/>
Merlin	<input type="checkbox"/>
Red necked phalarope	<input type="checkbox"/>
Little Tern	<input type="checkbox"/>
Herons	<input type="checkbox"/>
Red-throated divers (Loons)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Arctic Skuas	<input type="checkbox"/>
Eider duck	<input type="checkbox"/>
Corncrake (North Uist only)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Warblers	
Willow	<input type="checkbox"/>
Chiffchaff	<input type="checkbox"/>
Garden	<input type="checkbox"/>
Wood	<input type="checkbox"/>
Swans	
Mute	<input type="checkbox"/>
Whooper Swan	<input type="checkbox"/>