Outline Itinerary

Day 1    Overnight ferry Aberdeen to Lerwick
Day 2/4  Mainland Shetland
Day 5    Transfer Mainland to Unst
Day 6-7  Unst and Fetlar
Day 8/9  Transfer to Lerwick and overnight ferry to Aberdeen

Departs
June

Focus
Birds and mammals

Grading
B

Dates and Prices
See website (tour code GBR24) or brochure

Highlights
- Sea-watching for cetaceans & seabirds on the ferry from Aberdeen to Lerwick
- Breeding Eider, Storm Petrel, Great & Arctic Skuas
  Arctic Tern, Puffin, Rock Dove, Twite and Raven
- Mammals including Grey & Common Seals & Otter
- Red-throated Diver & Common Scoter on Unst
- Shetland Mouse-ear Chickweed (*Cerastium nigrescens*)
- Ancient settlements of Jarlshof & the Great Broch of Mousa
- Breeding specialties such as Whimbrel on Fetlar
Introduction

The Shetland archipelago consists of about 100 islands which lie to the north-east of Orkney and 280 km from the Faroes. These remote and starkly beautiful islands between the Atlantic and the North Sea are one of Britain’s most exciting wildlife destinations, and in midsummer offer a feast of special breeding birds. Only 15 of the islands are inhabited and the capital, Lerwick, is situated on the largest island, known as ‘Mainland’. This 2-centre holiday (based in Scalloway and on Unst) is carefully timed so that we may have the best views of the many waders which breed in Shetland, in addition to the wealth of nesting seabirds.

We begin the holiday by taking the overnight ferry from Aberdeen to Lerwick, a trip which itself offers some potentially exciting sea-watching for cetaceans and seabirds. We will stay on the outskirts of the town for the first half of our stay. Among the breeding species we hope to see will be Red-throated Diver, Eider, Gannet, Storm Petrel, Golden Plover, Dunlin, Whimbrel, Great and Arctic Skuas, Kittiwake, Arctic Tern, Puffin, Black Guillemot, Rock Dove and Twite. Offshore, Grey and Common Seals plus Otter are among the mammals we’ll be hoping to see. Our interest is not confined to wildlife, however, with fascinating historical sites of interest such as Jarlshof and the Great Broch of Mousa. Weather permitting; we may visit the latter after dark to experience European Storm-petrels arriving at their nesting burrows in the Broch walls. Shetland also frequently hosts exciting rarities, and species such as Red-backed Shrike, Bluethroat and Marsh Warbler are seen annually.

Next we transfer to the Island of Unst, the most northerly inhabited isle in Great Britain, for the remainder of our stay. Boasting deep blue sea, cliffs and unspoilt beaches Unst is home to Red-throated Diver on its lochans, and the botanical curiosity *Cerastium nigrescens* (Shetland Mouse-ear Chickweed). On the neighbouring island of Fetlar we’ll look for such breeding specialities as Whimbrel and Red-necked Phalarope, as well as Great and Arctic Skuas – among the real highlights of a visit to Shetland for the southern birdwatcher! Fetlar is also renowned as one of the best places in Britain to see Otters and, though sightings can never be guaranteed, we have a very good chance of seeing them here. Shetland is a magical place and the experience of simply being in this remote, northerly outreach of the British Isles, among its rugged landscapes, huge skies and scattered reminders of ancient settlements, is hard to beat.

NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Day 1

Overnight ferry (Aberdeen to Lerwick)

We assemble at the ferry terminal at Aberdeen docks not later than 5pm for departure at 7pm on the overnight journey aboard a ferry operated by NorthLink to Shetland. A large, comfortable and well-appointed vessel, on which there are lounges, along with a cafeteria and a restaurant; most people
manage to divide their time up happily between these facilities and some sea-watching from the deck. Common seabirds including Fulmar and Kittiwake are with us most of the way and there is always the chance of spotting your first Arctic or Great Skua of the tour from the deck ... as well as Manx Shearwater, Storm Petrel and perhaps dolphin or porpoise.

Reclining seats are included in the price. *If you would like to upgrade to a cabin for that little bit extra comfort and privacy on this overnight journey, contact us and we will check availability and cost for you.*

**Day 2**

**Scalloway, Shetland**

Once again, for those of you up early this morning, some sea-watching on deck is likely to be rewarded with more seabirds. Arrival at Lerwick, capital of Shetland, is usually at about 7.30am. In the harbour, as the ship is docking, we can expect to see our first Black Guillemot and we will most likely have been seeing Great Skua since our first sight of land.

Once we have disembarked and collected our transport we will then head to our nearby hotel where, after depositing our luggage, we will set off to explore Shetland Mainland. We may make a visit to the Walls peninsula in the far west of the island where the spectacular scenery of lochans and voes provides a home to many moorland birds as well as seabirds and Grey and Common Seals. On a clear day the western horizon is dominated by the island of Foula, the remotest inhabited island in the UK. Alternatively, we may head east to the equally spectacular Nesting and Lunna Ness coast. In either case we will be keeping a sharp eye out for Otters, which are always a possibility in these locations.

**Day 3**

**Noss, Shetland**

Today we will return to Lerwick and make the 5 min ferry crossing to Bressay, the island just east of Lerwick, which shelters the town and makes it a safe haven. We cross Bressay and make the short boat trip to Noss, one of the most spectacular seabird colonies in the North Atlantic. A walk round the island should give us views of Eider, Arctic Tern and Black Guillemot as well as Great and Arctic Skuas, and the occasional Grey Seal sticking a pensive head above the water. As the cliffs rise, we should come across our first Fulmar nests, and then further round have good views of Razorbill. Cradle Holm offers superb views of Puffin while, a little further on, the Noup of Noss bursts on our senses. There are great numbers of Guillemot and Gannet here in addition to the species we have already observed. However, Kittiwakes have declined in recent years due to food shortage (sand eels) during the summer months, and the resulting mortality of chicks has had a knock-on effect on numbers. Noss is also a good location to find...
the Shetland Wren, recognised as a distinct subspecies. In some years Crossbills can be seen foraging in the seaweed here during irruptions from Scandinavia.

In the late evening of Day 3, it may be possible, if weather permits, to arrange an optional outing to view Storm Petrels arriving at their breeding colony on the Island of Mousa (£20 fee not included in tour cost).

**Day 4**

**Mainland, Shetland**

We will travel to the south of the Mainland to visit Sumburgh. Here we find the remarkable antiquity of Jarlshof where the remains of at least five civilisations from Bronze Age to Medieval times are found. Above this site – on Sumburgh Head – there are seabird cliffs, and there are often good views of Gannet flying past at eye-level, as well as very approachable Puffins. If the weather is fine, there are also good views of Fair Isle.

If time permits, we may cross the largest tombolo (sand bar joining two islands) in Britain to visit St. Ninian's Isle.

We may also spend a few hours in the town of Lerwick where we may wish to visit the museum amongst other attractions and we will be sure to check the harbour for any interesting birds which might be about. Occasional Glaucous and Iceland Gulls are drawn into the harbour when following returning fishing vessels.

**Day 5**

**Mainland & Unst, Shetland**

This morning we head north towards our second base on Unst. We may go for a walk through the Kergord woods – not a great forest but the largest in Shetland, and it should mean we can add Rook to our checklist! We’ll check the Loch of Tingwall for waterfowl and Red-throated Diver, and everywhere we go we will be watching out for Merlin and Peregrine.

In the afternoon we’ll leave the Mainland, crossing first to Yell and then on to the island of Unst. Unst is dominated by peat but in the lochans here Red-throated Diver are seen regularly.

Our accommodation in Unst locates us conveniently for the next 3 nights.
Day 6

Fetlar & Unst, Shetland

Crossing by inter-island ferry to Fetlar, we’ll spend the whole day on this fabulous island in the hope of seeing a feast of waders. Brought to fame by Bobby Tulloch’s discovery of Britain’s only record of breeding Snowy Owls (which last bred here in 1975), Fetlar has the greatest breeding number of Whimbrel in Britain; its larger cousin, the Curlew, is also found here, enabling us to make a direct comparison. The other wader we particularly hope for here is the engaging Red-necked Phalarope.

While these two rarities will be top of our list, we should also see breeding Redshank, Golden and Ringed Plovers, Dunlin, Lapwing, Oystercatcher and Snipe. Most of these waders have young at this time of year and this makes some usually skulking species – notably the Snipe – much easier to observe. We’ll look for Otter as well as Great and Arctic Skuas during our visit to the island as well.

Day 7

Unst, Shetland

Today we explore the most northerly inhabited island of the United Kingdom. Here we will look for Cerastium nigrescens, Edmondston’s Chickweed, a botanical curiosity and a "Native. Only on serpentine debris at 50ft on Unst, Shetland", as Clapham, Tutin & Warburg state tersely in their (pre-metric) ‘Flora of the British Isles’.

After inspecting the chickweed we continue to Hermaness National Nature Reserve. We will spend several hours walking here, taking in views of Muckle Flugga, the most northerly point of Shetland. Gannet breed here in great numbers, along with Puffin, Guillemot, Razorbill, Kittiwake, Fulmar, Shag, and other seabirds. The walk to the cliffs passes through one of the largest colonies of Great Skua in Britain and is an experience not to be missed.

Day 8

Overnight ferry (Lerwick to Aberdeen)

We leave Unst today and return to Mainland where we have time for more exploration, maybe of the wild rock scenery at Eshaness, before departure from Lerwick at 5.30pm.
Day 9

Arrive Aberdeen

Our tour ends at approximately 7am this morning, on our arrival in Aberdeen harbour. We recommend pre-booking a taxi if you require one.

Additional Information

Ferry Crossing

For our two nights on NorthLink ferry, reclining seats (similar to airline seats) are included in the price – please let us know if you wish to be upgraded at additional cost to either a sleeping pod (fully reclining seat with table and adjustable lighting) or a cabin (subject to availability).

Upgrades:

- Interior cabin (no windows):
  £Cost TBA

- Outer cabin (with port-hole windows):
  £Cost TBA

Although they are large vessels, designed to sail these North Sea waters the weather can be unpredictable and therefore you should be prepared that this may be a rough crossing. You may like to pack some travel-sickness tablets just in case it gets a bit choppy.

Please note: Please don’t forget to bring with you photo ID (driving license or passport) to travel on the NorthLink ferry.
Accommodation & meals

We will split our stay between comfortable hotels at Lerwick (3 nights) and Unst (3 nights). All rooms are en-suite. The first and last night will be spent onboard the overnight ferry from/to Aberdeen. Breakfast and evening meals are included in the tour price from the time of arrival in the Shetlands up until departure on Day 8. In practice, this means that meals are included from evening meal on Day 2 to breakfast on Day 8.

Please note: Lunches are not included in the tour cost. We usually stop at a nearby convenience store/bakery each morning where you can purchase sandwiches etc.

Joining the trip

ABERDEEN FERRY TERMINAL

Aberdeen can be reached by air or rail (www.nationalrail.co.uk). Please ensure you allow plenty of time to travel to Aberdeen Ferry Terminal, to ensure you meet up with the group in time (preferably 2 hours prior to the departure time). If you were to miss the ferry you will need to make your own way to Shetland to meet up with the group.

There are plenty of accommodation options in and around Aberdeen and www.tripadvisor.com can be a good place to research hotels.

Long-stay parking in Aberdeen is quite expensive but is available at NCP Ship Row (01224 594257). There is also the option to leave your car at Aberdeen airport which is cheaper and then take the 727 Jet Bus from the airport to the ferry terminal (cost £2.70) and the distance is 7 miles.

LERWICK /SUMBURGH

For anyone wishing to fly direct to Shetland, Loganair www.loganair.co.uk operate flights from major Scottish cities to Sumburgh airport on south Mainland. If taking this option you would need to arrange to meet the group either at Lerwick ferry terminal at 07.30 on Day 2 or at the Kveldsro Hotel when the group arrives there to deposit their bags around 0800 the same morning. At the end of the tour you will be dropped in Lerwick in the early afternoon of Day 8 so you will need to arrange your own transport back to Sumburgh airport and ensure you book a late afternoon or early evening flight. The distance from Lerwick to Sumburgh is about 25 miles. For this option the tour cost is £1,145 (excluding flights).

Clothing

Shetland, even in the summer, can be exposed, wet and windy and your clothing should reflect this. Stout footwear is essential for the several walks involved.

Warm, waterproof clothing will no doubt be needed on board the ferry too, if you intend to wildlife spot from the deck.
Transport

Transport by private minibus and the cost of all internal ferries within Shetland are included in our price. Also included is the return overnight ferry between Aberdeen and Lerwick, based on a reclining seat for the night.

Tour Grading

Grade B. Generally easy but with some moderately strenuous walking.

Extra expenses

Lunches (allow around £8 per day), and expenditure of a personal nature such as drinks, laundry etc. **Should the optional evening trip to Mousa go ahead the cost will be £20 per head.**

How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at [www.naturetrek.co.uk](http://www.naturetrek.co.uk), or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests, at the time of booking.