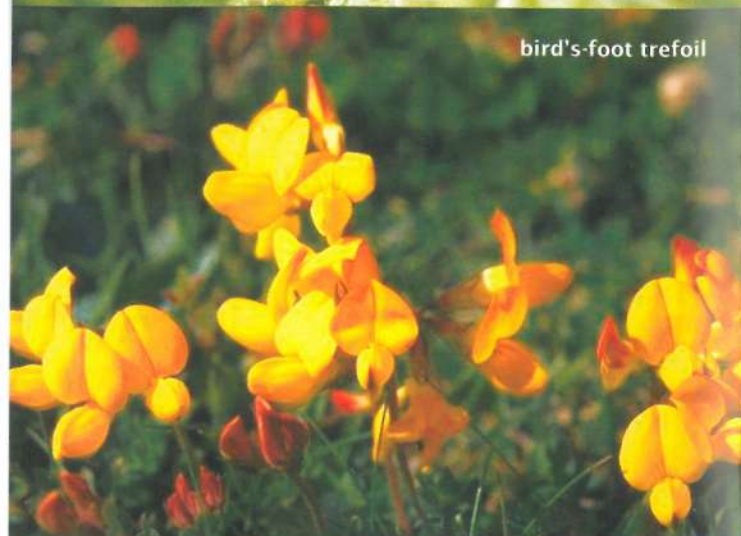


dark green fritillary butterfly



bird's-foot trefoil



green veined white butterfly



guidance for visitors

Please remember:

- To take care on the cliffs as they can be dangerous
- To avoid disturbing nesting birds
- To keep dogs under control at all times
- To take your litter home with you
- Not to pick wild flowers
- Respect private property

cover images: top round-leaved sundew bottom otter



Hidden Orkney



find out more about our rich and varied wildlife



VisitOrkney



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hidden Orkney

Bumblebee

Bumblebees are becoming scarcer in Britain, but there are still lots in Orkney. Find them feasting on the red clover in road verges, on the red campion and vetches of grassy banks by the sea, or the massed wildflowers on sandy links. Look carefully and you will see there are several different kinds, including the foxy red, heath carder bee and several kinds of striped, yellow-black-and-white ones. When the heather's in bloom, it may be buzzing with many of the tiny, acrobatic heath bumblebees. The different species have different shaped heads and long or short tongues, enabling the bee to feed on different kind of flowers. Only one, the garden bumblebee, can manage the deep flowers of honeysuckle.



white-tailed bumblebee

One is very special, the great yellow bumblebee, found only in the far north and west of Scotland, and uncommon here too. It's amber-coloured, with a single black band on the upper body. It may be seen anywhere in Orkney, with luck, and especially in late summer on lamb's lugs, or the spiny scots thistle.

Orkney vole

The Orkney vole is very similar to the common vole which is found throughout Europe. The Orkney vole is larger and heavier than the common vole and there are slight variations in size and colour between voles from the different islands within Orkney. This is most apparent in the voles of Westray, which are the smallest and darkest. Orkney voles can most commonly be found in the strips of uncultivated ground between fields but they can also be found on moorland and even peat bogs. The presence of voles is often given away by the runs that they make in long grass. Look for the telltale holes which are the entrances to their runs. They are an important part of the diet of the hen harrier and short-eared owl, birds of prey that are also resident in Orkney. Orkney voles can be found on the islands of Mainland, Eday, Rousay, Sanday, South Ronaldsay and Westray.



Orkney vole



mountain hare - summer and winter coats

mountain hare

In Orkney, the mountain hare is found only in Hoy, where they are relatively common on the hills in the northern part of the island. The coat of the hare turns white in winter (except for the black ear tips), a characteristic designed to camouflage the animal against the snowy slopes. During the summer months, the mountain hare can be distinguished from the brown hare by its shorter ears and white tail. The change to the hare's winter coat usually occurs in October, and back to summer colour in February.

Mountain hares are usually found at least 100m above sea level, but they have been seen right down at the coast. They are quite easy to get close to as they are less timid than the brown hare. A recent survey found that Hoy had a higher density of mountain hare than other Scottish islands and much of the Mainland of Scotland, so it is a good place to come to see these animals.



oblong-leaved sundew

sundew

Sundews are common throughout the British Isles and are found in wet places such as bogs and fens. Sundews are small carnivorous plants that grow close to the ground. They are covered in red hairs which secrete a sticky substance. This is to attract and catch unsuspecting insects which might land on the sticky hairs. When an insect is trapped, the sundew leaves will slowly fold over and digest the insect to obtain the nutrients contained within its body. Sundews live in bogs, in which there are very few nutrients available and have developed this unusual method of getting the nutrients they need.

They have very small flowers which will only open for a short time in the sunshine. They are easy to spot throughout the year in wet places.

scottish primrose

This tiny, jewel-like flower is endemic to Scotland (not found anywhere else in the world) and within Scotland is found only in Orkney, Caithness and Sutherland. Good places to find them in Orkney include the Yesnaby cliffs, the west coast of Rousay and North Hill on Papa Westray. The habitats favoured by the primrose are exposed areas of coast, buffeted by strong winds and possessing nutrient poor soils. These areas have short vegetation which suits the primrose well as it is a low growing plant. When the primroses are flowering, they are easy to spot by their vibrant magenta coloured flowers which sit on a single upright stalk. Most plants flower twice in each year, during May and June and again in August.



scottish primrose

verges

Some of Orkney's rarest and most unusual wild flowers can be found in the county's roadside verges. Like a linear meadow, a ten metre sward on one of Orkney's better verges may yield at least twenty species of flowering plant, including three species of orchid, ragged robin, violet, lady's smock, primrose, water avens, bird's-foot trefoil, tufted vetch, bush vetch, angelica, eyebright, yellow rattle, devil's-bit

scabious, yarrow and twayblade. These verges are extremely important for their biodiversity. In spring and early summer, they provide nesting sites for meadow pipits and skylarks while later on, the chicks of lapwing, curlew, redshank, oystercatcher and ringed plover are often seen sheltering in the verges. These verges include the food plants of butterflies such as the common blue and meadow brown and when left uncut, they provide a habitat for bees and other pollinating insects. The great yellow bumblebee, one of the rarest bees in Britain, can be seen in Orkney feeding on verges rich with lamb's-lugs and knapweed.



tufted vetch



ragged robin

Orkney's wildlife year

	january	february	march	april	may	june	july	august	september	october	november	december
mountain hare		winter coat				summer coat						
scottish primrose					first flowering			second flowering				
bumblebees												
damselflies												
butterflies												

best times of the year to see these species

hidden treasures

The seventy islands that form Orkney are spectacular in their natural beauty and diversity of their wildlife. The county is home to species ranging from the secretive otter to the colourful Scottish primrose. Many of these fascinating plants and animals can be difficult to observe and may require many hours of patient observation.

dragonflies & damselflies

Normally you need still, warm and sunny days to see dragonflies and damselflies at their best. What's the difference between the two? When they are resting, damselflies do so with their transparent wings laid alongside their body, while dragonflies rest with their wings at right angles.

Orkney has four resident dragonflies and three resident damselflies. There is also one record of a dragonfly, the lesser emperor which comes from the Mediterranean, and arrived on Sanday in June 2000.

The best place to see any of Orkney's dragonflies is in Hoy. During July and August you can see them 'hawking', darting and mating alongside the many pools and burns and even in open woodland.

The splendidly coloured common hawker is the most likely to be encountered, but also look out for the striking black and yellow golden-ringed dragonfly, the more sober-

looking black darter and the dashing 4-spotted chaser. The commonest and most widespread of the damselflies are the blue-tailed damselfly and the large red damsel which can be seen not only in Hoy but also the West and East Mainland, South Ronaldsay and Rousay.

butterflies

The northerly latitudes and the short summers mean that Orkney butterflies have to be a hardy lot. Places to see Orkney's butterflies include gardens, dunes, wet meadows, the hill and roadside verges – and of course just look for plants in flower to find feeding butterflies.

Fifteen species of butterfly have been recorded in the county - many of those are migrants such as red admirals and painted ladies that have been blown to Orkney on easterly or southerly winds.



small tortoiseshell butterfly



red admiral butterfly

Of the resident butterflies, hundreds of green-veined whites 'dancing' over a wet meadow on a sunny and still day in late May or early June is quite a magical sight. A little later on in the year, roadside verges and banks with abundant brilliant yellow bird's-foot trefoil are home to the common blue, while grassier banks and verges support meadow browns, a butterfly which will fly in the dullest of weather. Both of these species can also be found in Orkney's sand dunes, as can dark green fritillaries and small tortoiseshells which may be seen feeding on thistle and burdock flowers. One of the most restless of butterflies, the large heath, is found on the hill when heather and tormentil are in flower.

otters

Otters can be found throughout Orkney and use both maritime and freshwater habitats. They can be seen at any time of the day, but most frequently at dawn and dusk.

Otters feed mainly on fish and crabs. They have sharp claws and teeth to help them catch and eat their prey, and they also have webbed feet and a strong tail to help them swim. Look out for their five-clawed webbed footprints on sandy shores.

Otters live in holes called holts which are usually near to freshwater. This is where young otters (called cubs) are born and raised. The number of cubs can vary but two is the usual number in Orkney. Otter cubs cannot swim or find food for themselves when they are born, and don't reach full maturity until they are two years old.

trout

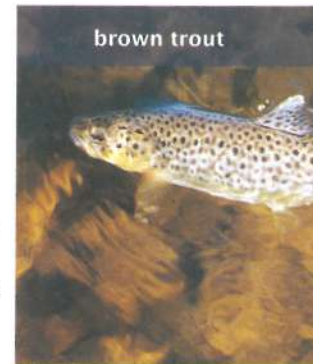
Brown trout and sea trout are widespread in Orkney. In order to sustain a viable population, the species needs good water quality, access to clean spawning grounds, and varied habitat for different life stages.

Although they are the same species, brown trout and sea trout have very different life cycles. Brown trout live their entire lives in freshwater, while sea trout migrate to the sea, before returning to freshwater to spawn. Most sea trout and brown trout will return to the same watercourse in which they were hatched in order to spawn.

Between October and December in Orkney, trout lay their eggs in gravel in many small streams and tributaries throughout the county. The eggs are deposited within a 'redd', which is a hollow in the gravel excavated by the female fish. After spending a year or more in these small burns, many of

these fish migrate downstream into larger waterbodies. It is not currently understood why some of the fish turn silver and migrate into the sea as sea trout.

The migration of sea trout to the sea occurs in early spring and early autumn. During these periods there is sufficient water in the burns to encourage the fish to swim to the sea. While some trout spend several winters at sea, others return to freshwater after up to a year in the marine environment.



brown trout

golden-ringed dragonfly