

# Northern Lights

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# Welcome

## A warm welcome to NorthLink Ferries and to *Northern Lights* - our on board magazine.

A brilliant late autumn helped visitors enjoy the Northern Isles in their splendour, with some lucky enough to catch wonderful displays of the Aurora Borealis on their journeys north with us. Likewise we had some great cetacean sightings during the 2016 season with Killer whales, Common dolphins and Minke whales included in our vessel reports, indeed there were a tremendous 122 recorded sightings for ORCA Ocean Watch in a nine day reference period last July!

Looking forward to 2017, we will be supporting Visit Scotland's Year of History, Heritage and Archaeology. You can join their conversation under the dedicated #HHA2017 hashtag or look out for #ScotSpirit to experience all that Scotland has to offer in the North East and Northern Isles, with stories, hidden gems and top tips available.

My Marine Manager colleague, Captain Stuart McCallum, recently awarded the Merchant Navy Medal for Meritorious Service over a lifetime career in the industry, looks after all aspects of our safety obligations and it is fitting that Stuart has been recognised by the industry for his detailed approach and contribution to this critical aspect of business planning. With this in mind, on board and ashore we are ready for the winter months – all pre winter season preparedness activity has been completed. Our haulier customers and key port stakeholders are firmly focussed on delivery of a safe operation with co-operation from all parties.

It's great to see our 'Magnus' logo getting out there and thanks for all the contributions to date from our far travelled Viking. Keep these coming in and sign up for our newsletter to catch the latest in his travel adventures.

Dry dock 2017 beckons, perhaps even past by the time you read Issue 5, however we are planning for M.V. Hjaltland to dock in January followed by M.V. Hrossey in March. No docking for M.V. Hamnavoe scheduled of course for 2017. Final dates will be communicated as soon as tenders have been concluded.

As ever, enjoy your time with us and please, if you need assistance or require any specific help whilst on board speak to one of my colleagues.



**Stuart Garrett**  
Managing Director  
Serco NorthLink Ferries

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### Contact Stuart

I would welcome your feedback at any time. If you have any questions, then please contact me at [speaktostuart@northlinkferries.co.uk](mailto:speaktostuart@northlinkferries.co.uk)



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# Guide Dog Puppy Partnership

As part of the company's continuing commitment to supporting disabled people's organisations (DPOs), NorthLink Ferries has partnered with the Royal National Institute of Blind People.

Working closely with the organisation's training centre in Forfar, Angus, groups of guide dog puppies and their volunteer walkers have been welcomed on board passenger vessels MV Hrossey and MV Hjaltland earlier this year, along with puppy training supervisor David Mackay.

Familiarising the guide dog puppies with the Aberdeen passenger terminal and vessels is helping to strengthen the puppies' characters and making sure they become successful working guide dogs.

Puppies make visits to the terminal and NorthLink Ferries' passenger vessels on a regular basis to help familiarise them with the sights and sounds of ferry travel.

Ultimately this will provide an invaluable service to passengers who are blind or partially sighted when travelling.

For further information about the Royal Institute of Blind People, visit [www.rnib.org.uk](http://www.rnib.org.uk)



# Sponsorship highlights

Designed to support community groups, the NorthLink Ferries sponsorship programme awards ferry travel to island sporting teams, schools and individuals travelling between the Northern Isles and the Scottish mainland for competitions and events.

Working closely with local island communities, the most recent programme has allowed NorthLink Ferries to help individuals, clubs, charities and events in Orkney and Shetland by way of discounted fares and travel vouchers.

We hear from some of the groups and individuals who have benefitted from the programme and their recent successes.

## **Netball Orkney**

Catherine Johnson, Netball Orkney Chairperson and Coach: "As an organisation which travels frequently to the mainland to take part in tournaments, our players have really benefitted from the NorthLink Ferries sponsorship programme.

"Our players range from primary school age to seniors and it's great to offer people of all ages the experience of competing in tournaments and matches at a national level. Not only has this boosted the players' confidence but representation of the club at higher level competitions also gives us better links with other clubs, coaches and our National Governing Bodies. This in turn has raised the standard of netball locally which has led to a number of players being selected for national honours."

## **Lerwick Amateur Swimming Club**

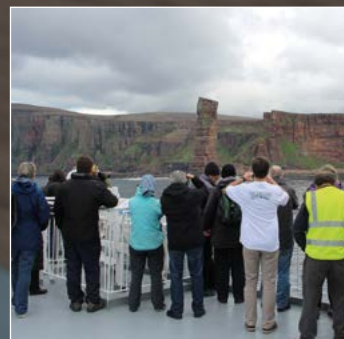
Lesley Hutchison, Treasurer of Lerwick Amateur Swimming Club: "The Lerwick Amateur Swimming Club and its members heavily rely on travelling to mainland Scotland and other parts of the UK to take part in competitions and to develop its athletes.

"Without the support of the sponsorship programme we wouldn't be able to attend the 12 swimming competitions we compete at each year which encourage different levels of swimmers to progress and enter new categories.

"We have been very lucky to receive travel sponsorship from NorthLink Ferries for as long as the programme has been in place and the funding makes a huge difference to the affordability of the club."

## **Marshall Wishart**

Marshall Wishart, motor sport driver: "Motor sport is a six-round championship in Scotland which aims to find the fastest drivers in the country. As a competitor, travel to the mainland is essential - after competing in all of the championships this year I came second in a class of 16 cars which is a great result for my first year. I couldn't have done this without the support from NorthLink Ferries.



“The sponsorship programme application is really straightforward and the website is full of useful information. I’ve found the process really easy – everyone at NorthLink Ferries has been very approachable and helpful.”

### Local Events

A number of local events both on the Northern Isles and Scottish mainland have benefited from NorthLink Ferries sponsorship.

A unique wildlife cruise hosted in association with RSPB Scotland as part of 2016’s Orkney Nature Festival offered nature lovers an experience of a lifetime on board MV Hamnavoe.

Sailing from Stromness, the cruise was attended by more than 400 people who enjoyed views of the scenic island of Hoy, the opportunity to spot birds and marine life, local island produce and live music. More than £2,700 was raised from the event which is now supporting the wildlife charity’s education programme which is offered free of charge to schools in Orkney.

Another event which was supported by NorthLink Ferries was the annual Scottish Traditional Boat Festival at Portsoy.

Bringing some of the Northern Isles’ rich history to the local area, the company contributed to the Festival’s Viking-theme by sponsoring Shetland’s Jarl Squad with ferry travel as well as a harbour side marquee which brought the islands’ fascinating past to life with a glimpse of how people once lived and worked at sea.

NorthLink Ferries is continually developing its sponsorship programme to be more inclusive. As requests for sponsorship are always extremely high, the company has two structured tranche periods – 1 April to 30 September and 1 October to 31 March – helping maintain a streamlined award and allocation process.

NorthLink Ferries appreciate that not all travel and fundraising events are known or planned far in advance, so please get in touch if you wish to discuss a particular requirement.

**Visit [www.northlinkferries.co.uk/sponsorship](http://www.northlinkferries.co.uk/sponsorship) for further details.**

# North Ronaldsay

## A towering light

With striking horizontal nautical stripes and unrivalled in height, North Ronaldsay's lighthouse holds the title of tallest land-based lighthouse in the UK.

At 138 ft the lighthouse towers over the most northerly point of the Orkney's island of North Ronaldsay, taking in spectacular views of Shetland's Fair Isle to the north and the vast Orcadian landscape to the south.

Built in 1852 at a site known as Dennis Head, the lighthouse was a replacement to an earlier lighthouse erected just along the coast. It was at the recommendation of Alan Stevenson, of the famous Stevenson engineering family, that Edinburgh-based William Kinghorn was appointed to build the structure.

Now automated, visitors can book a tour of the lighthouse and journey up its 176 steps to the top of the building. Children in particular enjoy having a blast of the site's foghorn – the last working foghorn station in Scotland.

A café is located in the nearby lighthouse keepers' accommodation, with a gift shop and bike hire also available on site. Outwith the summer season, visitors can check opening times and book ahead by calling 01857 633 297 or 07526 629 654.

**For more information visit:**  
[www.northronaldsay.co.uk](http://www.northronaldsay.co.uk)

## Sleep in a lighthouse-keeper's cottage

Two of North Ronaldsay's lighthouse keepers' cottages are now available as self-catering holiday rentals through The National Trust for Scotland. Perfect for those looking for a rural windswept island retreat, each offers an open roaring fire and both are adjacent to the celebrated striped lighthouse.

With weekly self-catering rates available for these two-bedroom cosy cottages, it is easy to imagine the history contained within their walls, helping make these houses truly unique lighthouse retreats.

**To check availability visit**  
[www.nts.org.uk/holidays](http://www.nts.org.uk/holidays)



## Seaweed-eating sheep

While North Ronaldsay is well known for its towering lighthouse, many people are more taken aback by the island's seaweed-eating sheep.

The island's main industries are crofting and sheep-farming. In the past, locals built dry-stone dykes along the coast to stop the community of island sheep from eating grass from the fertile land. The lack of grass meant that the sheep began swapping grass for seaweed and have prospered with their unusual dining habits.

The sheep's diet means that their meat is often considered a delicacy and is rich in minerals. North Ronaldsay's sheep are among the last species of native British sheep in the UK.

**Find out more at [www.northlinkferries.co.uk/orkney-blog/north-ronaldsay-in-focus](http://www.northlinkferries.co.uk/orkney-blog/north-ronaldsay-in-focus)**

## Glimpse rare migrating birds

As birds migrate across the North Sea they often find sanctuary on North Ronaldsay.

Such an exposed position makes the island a well-deserved and much-appreciated resting point for migrating birds to stop as they journey north or south.

A great opportunity to catch a glimpse of some of the rarer travelling birds, and with a fantastic range of existing native species, wildlife fans have been travelling to the island for years to witness some of these spectacular feathered visitors.

Established in 1987, the North Ronaldsay Bird Observatory offers comfortable accommodation with a guesthouse, hostel and camping area suitable for every budget.

For the opportunity to make the most of the island's bird guests, visit in spring and autumn when swathes of birds arrive to rest and feed.

**Visit [www.nrbo.co.uk](http://www.nrbo.co.uk) for further information.**



# Caithness Horizons Museum

A melting pot that tells the tale of life in the Scottish Highlands, Caithness Horizons is one of north Scotland's most fascinating finds.



Featuring archaeology, nuclear history, botany and geology, this Thurso-based museum blends the best of the area's history with a sprinkling of the finest local arts and crafts.

As the most northerly town in mainland Scotland, Thurso has a long history and is named after Thor, the Norse god of thunder. Northern Lights caught up with Joanne Howdle, the museum's Curator and Deputy Director, to find out more.

## Fossils, runes and nuclear history

The museum brings to life the story of Caithness, starting from the fossilised fish of the Devonian period 380 million years ago to the present day. The museum has three fascinating and unique exhibition areas that display artefacts, many of which are of national importance.

Early Medieval Pictish symbol stones and Viking rune-inscribed memorial stones are

particular highlights amongst visitors. The Pictish symbol stones from Skinnet and Ulbster carved with enigmatic symbols including the Pictish beast have been causing quite a stir with people travelling from all over the world to see them.

Specimens from the herbarium of renowned Victorian botanist Robert Dick are now on display and accessible to the public for the first time in many years. The exhibition devoted to Robert Dick contains many of his personal items and geological specimens. A unique Portable Museum of Curiosity telling the story of his life designed for the museum by Caithness artist Joanne B. Kaar is also on display.

To a very different type of history, the third exhibition tells the story of the area's famous Dounreay Nuclear Research Establishment. The exhibition highlights the socio-economic impact of the nuclear reactors at Dounreay and their decommissioning. The star artefact is the control desk and panels from the Dounreay Materials Testing Reactor (DMTR).





### Family fun

The most popular exhibits to date have been Dounreay's master slave manipulator arm, DMTR and the Pictish symbol stones, all of which have proved a hit with our youngest visitors!

Many of the exhibitions at Caithness Horizons have interpretation panels designed by children who are members of the museum's Peter's Pals: Young Curators Club. The replica Viking longship is also massively popular and helps bring the Viking Age heritage of Caithness to life for our younger visitors. The museum provides a Family Pack with activities to guide children around its exhibitions.

### Art and exhibits

Caithness Horizons has an annual programme of temporary exhibitions which are of local and national interest. In the past the museum has hosted the Douglas Gordon exhibition from Artist Rooms, an exhibition from the British Museum of Surfing and another from the National Maritime

Museum in Greenwich. The museum also exhibits local art and design, and it has been lucky enough to host exhibitions by Caithness artists such as Hazel Cashmore and Joanne B. Kaar.

### More than just a museum

As well as fascinating discoveries in the museum itself, Caithness Horizons is also home to a café and gift shop, along with special events that take place throughout the year. The VisitScotland Visitor Information Centre is located in the building and is open from April to October and in December Santa takes up residence at the museum.

As a hub for history, culture and technology, Caithness Horizons is open for visitors Monday to Saturday 10am to 5pm. It is also open on Sundays between April and September.

**Visit [www.caithnesshorizons.co.uk](http://www.caithnesshorizons.co.uk) for more information or call 01847 896 508.**

# Year of History, Heritage and Archaeology 2017

Showcasing the very best of Scotland, this landmark cultural year will celebrate the country's heritage sites, ancient monuments, listed buildings and historic battlefields. And with the Northern Isles boasting a plethora of historic assets and cultural icons, NorthLink Ferries has shone a spotlight on some of Orkney and Shetland's highlights.

## Viking Heritage

With a Viking invasion history dating back to 800AD, Shetland is steeped in Norse heritage.

Thought to be the first footfall of Vikings in the North Atlantic, the island of Unst is the perfect place to gain a better understanding of Shetland's past. Haroldswick, a sheltered bay on the east side of the island, is a great place to start due to the area's 50 settlement sites which have been discovered under hundreds of years of windswept sand.

A replica of a ninth century Viking longship, named Skidbladner, is situated here and provides an insight into what life was like during this bloody time. Located next to a replica Viking longhouse and reconstructed using traditional Norse techniques, the ship is a focal point for visitors keen to explore Shetland's heritage and understand how the island's culture has evolved.

The nearby Unst Heritage Centre and Unst Boat Haven also provide exhibitions displaying a vast range of items and information.

For further information about the island of Unst and its heritage, visit [www.shetlandamenity.org](http://www.shetlandamenity.org)

## Orkney's First Chambered Cairn

A must see for any visitor to Orkney is the prehistoric chambered cairn of Maeshowe.

Located on Orkney's mainland and built in 2700BC, the cairn is one of Scotland's greatest and oldest architectural achievements as well as one of the island's monuments which forms the Heart of Neolithic Orkney World Heritage Site.

Appearing as a large grassy mound visible for miles, the site was first excavated in 1861 by archaeologist James Farrer who discovered the tomb's centre chamber and its carved graffiti runes, originally created by visiting Viking crusaders.



Thought to be a particularly special time of year for the people that once used Maeshowe, midwinter's sunset becomes carefully aligned to the site's gently sloping passage three weeks before and after the shortest day of the year.

The light of the setting sun shines down the entry passage and illuminates the back of the central chamber making it an ideal place to visit during the winter months.

Visits to Maeshowe are by guided tour only. Tickets can be booked at Skara Brae visitor centre on the same day of the tour.

### Horrible History

Located next to Tingwall just two miles from Scalloway in Shetland, the Murder Stone is a two-metre high standing stone connected to the island's rich history.

Nearby on the Loch of Tingwall, a small islet named Tingaholm was once the gathering place for officials who sat around a stone table to create Shetland's earliest parliament.

It is believed that a battle between Malise Sperra, the Lord of Skaldale, and his cousin Henry Sinclair, the 1st Earl of Orkney, took place here in 1389 following an argument at parliament around the control and power of Shetland.

After losing the battle and falling to his death, the Murder Stone was erected to commemorate Malise Sperra and his seven supporters who fought with him during the battle.



**HISTORY  
HERITAGE &  
ARCHAEOLOGY**

• 2017 •

# Charles Tait - a life in pictures

Holding a PhD in biochemistry and as the author of several acclaimed local guide books, Orcadian Charles Tait is a man of many talents.



Photography, however, is his passion. Taking creative inspiration from a long line of artistic family members, it was his aunt in particular, the film-maker Margaret Tait, who sparked his interest in nature and photography.

Here, Charles shares his story along with some tips for budding photographers keen to capture the drama of the Northern Isles.

## **From France to Orkney**

I've always been interested in photography since I was quite little because my dad, various cousins and my Aunt Margaret, the film-maker, were very keen and it rubbed off on me.

After I finished my PhD I worked in a lab in France for a year and a half. I was supposed to be going to the States thereafter, with a brief stop in Orkney. However when I came back home I managed to pick up some professional photography jobs and that was when it started. I never went to America and have been in Orkney ever since!

## **A photographic career**

I didn't plan on photography being a permanent career. Photography was just something I was passionate about and at that point I thought I could get a bit of experience in it and make some money while I was staying in Orkney.

I started to take photos of people's special occasions. This was at a time when cameras were good but it required a bit more time and patience to capture really good pictures.

There came a time later, in the late 80's, when you could buy a really good little camera and everyone started taking their own photos. This was the point at which I moved into publishing and tourism with my series of guide books.

## **In search of inspiration**

The Northern Isles are a blessing for photographers, however there are things I still hope to capture. I'm sure you can live your whole life in Orkney and Shetland and never get everything - especially along the shore.



I would love to get in a boat in the right weather and explore the coastline of the West Mainland, Westray or Hoy, or in the Shetland sea caves of Papa Stour.

I love my work but there are one or two shots in particular that I am most proud of. There are some obvious family ones, especially of loved ones who are no longer with us. Some of my nature shots have also been particularly difficult to get. But perhaps the shot I'm proudest of is my coverage of the Ba', a traditional football game in Orkney, as it can be a challenge to get something different each year.

#### **Future plans**

I'm currently writing a North Coast 500 book for next year and another about Scapa Flow, the area of water between many of Orkney's islands. I'm also considering a guide book about an Orkney and Shetland trail which might start in Stromness and end up in the north end of Unst. I think an Orkney and Shetland trail would be a great add-on for the North Coast 500 route which is going down a storm in the Highlands with visitors.

#### **Top tips and advice:**

1. Be familiar with your camera equipment. It doesn't matter what kind of camera, lenses or accessories you have but you need to know how it works so you don't miss capturing the moment.
2. You need to know your subject. No matter whether it's the behaviour of children, nature, tide or sunrise times; knowing the subject is really important to get the best photo.
3. Develop your eye when you are out and about. Inspiration comes from opening all your senses. You don't want anything to come between you and the subject you're trying to photograph.
4. Dedication, perseverance and being in the right place at the right time is crucial – again it's all part of knowing your subject.

*The Vikings are going into battle!*



Can you think of a new design for the Vikings shield? Decorate the shield above with a logo or pattern and hand it in to NorthLink staff. Your drawing may be displayed on our Facebook page and website for our passengers to enjoy.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Age \_\_\_\_\_

*Happy drawing!*



# Meet our marketing officer Cheryl Kelday



Since joining NorthLink Ferries in 2007, Cheryl Kelday has quickly become one of the company's most recognisable employees through her community engagement and sponsorship work in Orkney, Shetland and beyond.

Born and bred in Orkney and based in NorthLink Ferries' Stromness office, Cheryl knows the Northern Isles inside-out.

Here, Cheryl talks about what drew her to the role and her interests outside of work.

## **What attracted you to working in the travel and tourism sector?**

Growing up in Orkney I have always liked the idea of working with people.

I started working at visitor attraction Skaill House as a tour guide at just 14 years old and instantly loved being able to help visitors have a great experience. Every day was different and I was always fascinated hearing about where visitors were from and what had drawn them to the Northern Isles.

Over 13 years later, my passion for travel and tourism has continued. I'm very keen to showcase the best of our beautiful islands to our passengers and that's something my role really lends itself to.

## **How did you know a marketing role was right for you?**

I completed a business HNC at Orkney College and after studying modules in marketing I quickly realised that it was my favourite element of the course.

I remember a local marketing representative from VisitOrkney coming to speak to the students. Their role sounded really interesting, and partnered with my love for tourism, I thought it would be the perfect career opportunity.

After the first year of my course I applied for a job with NorthLink Ferries and was delighted to be accepted. The role is perfect for me.

## **What do your day-to-day responsibilities include?**

My job is very varied. I work on a lot of different aspects of the business including advertising, public relations, social media, events and partnerships. One of my main roles is the promotion and administration of NorthLink Ferries' sponsorship and community engagement programme. This supports local groups and individuals with travel between the islands and the Scottish mainland.

The support which we give to local communities through the programme is very rewarding on a personal level, particularly when groups and individuals take the time to give us their feedback and show what they are achieving in their chosen fields.

One of my career highlights has been the rebrand of the company in 2014. Incorporating the new Viking Magnus logo was a huge task but it was great to have the opportunity to work closely with my colleagues and the management team to create a new brand.

## **How do you spend your free time?**

I play the tenor drum in the Kirkwall City Pipe Band and also play netball in our local league. Both take up quite a lot of my free time but I also support my parents with their wedding business.

It's great to have such a wide range of interests and hobbies to keep me busy outside of work.

# The draw of the Granite City

The cooler months give us an opportunity to wrap up warm and make the most of the crisp, frost-tinted beauty which Scotland glimmers in as the temperatures fall.



VisitAberdeenshire

Aberdeen City and Shire, nestled in the north eastern tip of the Scottish mainland, provides the ideal combination of outdoor pursuits and cosy indoor venues to warm up in after the coastal breeze blows away the cobwebs.

With myths and legends a plenty, the region boasts over 300 haunting castles as part of the Aberdeenshire Castle Trail. For those considering alternative ways to warm themselves up, there are a vast number of Aberdeenshire distilleries with tours and tastings for visitors to sample the best local whiskies. The nearby Speyside Malt Whisky Trail is also a delight for fans of Scotland's 'water of life'.

Here are a selection of wintry retreats in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire to visit this season:

## Outdoor pursuits

### Castle-bagging

From Dracula-spectaculars to fairy-tale structures, the selection of castles in the region is so vast that no matter your preference, the Aberdeenshire Castle Trail has something to for every history-buff.

Close to the city is Dunnottar Castle. Famed for its awe-inspiring effect on visitors, the castle sits on the edge of the challenging North Sea. The cliff-top fortress is located on a rocky headland, with the surviving buildings dating from the 15th and 16th centuries.

Another highlight located just an hour along the coast is the ruins of Slains Castle. It is reported that author Bram Stoker was inspired to pen Dracula after staying nearby in the village of Cruden Bay in 1895.



## Indoor alternatives

### Whisky warmer

Some of the world's most renowned whiskies, as well as a selection of Scotland's lesser-known malts, can be found in and around Aberdeen City and Shire. Relatively small distilleries such as Fettercairn, Knockdhu and Royal Lochnagar are sparkling gems hidden in the rolling hills of the countryside.

Further afield the Speyside Malt Whisky Trail, north west of Aberdeen, includes nine distilleries which all offer visitors the opportunity to sample their wares. Included are some more well-known names including Glenlivet, Glen Grant, Strathisla and Glen Moray.

Many of these distilleries provide regular guided tours or else these can be arranged by appointment. It is recommended that those keen to visit take a look at the distilleries' websites in advance for further details and call to check opening hours.

A 'Secret Malts of Aberdeenshire' guide can be downloaded from Visit Aberdeen City and Shire website: [www.visitabdn.com/attractions-and-activities/whisky-distilleries-in-aberdeenshire/](http://www.visitabdn.com/attractions-and-activities/whisky-distilleries-in-aberdeenshire/).

A suggested itinerary for the Speyside Malt Whisky Trail can be viewed on VisitScotland's main website: [www.visitscotland.com/see-do/food-drink/whisky/speyside-malt-whisky-trail-itinerary/](http://www.visitscotland.com/see-do/food-drink/whisky/speyside-malt-whisky-trail-itinerary/)

### Fine dining

City centre restaurants and countryside retreats in the north east serve some of the UK's finest seafood and the best of the renowned Aberdeen Angus beef produced in the region.

In the city, Café 52 doesn't just feed and water its devoted fans but acts as a launch pad for aspiring local artists. Located on The Green in the city centre, the restaurant offers good value, simple and wholesome local dishes as well as a separate tapas menu and a list of delicious desserts.

For a modern take on Aberdeenshire dining, the Cowshed in Banchory is known for offering local, seasonal ingredients cooked as simply as possible. A welcoming and relaxed environment, the restaurant has views across rolling hills and countryside. For cooking enthusiasts, visitors can also book a session at the restaurant's cook school if they are so inclined.

For further food and drink suggestions, visit [www.visitabdn.com/food-and-drink](http://www.visitabdn.com/food-and-drink)

**To find out more and to download and print the guide, visit the Visit Aberdeen City and Shire website [www.visitabdn.com/attractions-and-activities/castles/](http://www.visitabdn.com/attractions-and-activities/castles/)**

### Golf your troubles away

As the driest region in Scotland, golfers teeing off at one of the area's popular courses won't be restricted by the same volume of rain found elsewhere in the country.

Holding a prominent spot high on Europe's list of golfing locations, Aberdeen City and Shire boasts the championship courses of Cruden Bay and Royal Aberdeen. Golfers can also enjoy fantastic views at Scotland's highest course at Braemar and scenes of the River Dee from Peterculter's course.

**To find out more about the region's golf courses and for contact details, visit Golf Aberdeen City and Shire on [www.golfaberdeen.com](http://www.golfaberdeen.com).**

# Discovering Shetland's Baltasound

Northern Lights heard from qualified scuba diver and underwater photographer **Simon Brown** about his recent dive into **Orkney's Scapa Flow**.

In this issue he tells of his return visit to the Northern Isles where he discovered Shetland's **Baltasound** and the historic wreck that lies beneath.

Situated halfway along the east coast of the Shetland island of Unst, the sheltered bay of Baltasound is home to an abundance of wrecks and one of the richest marine environments around the British Isles.

Shetland's coastline extends over 2,700 kilometres and boasts more than 400 coves, 350 caves and 190 sea stacks. The calm and clear waters of Baltasound make it the perfect spot for exploring.

As I took my first dive, I quickly saw a submarine wreck lying on the seabed of almost pure white sand. This wreck is HMS E49, an E-class submarine built by Swan Hunter for the Royal Navy in 1915.

Stretching a length of 55 metres, HMS E49 struck a German minefield on 12 March 1917 resulting in the death of all crew on board. Lying at 30 metres below the surface, she now remains with her bows blown off in a ghostly form.

The wreck site can be seen just 10 metres into the dive and although it is difficult to make out all of her remaining features, the stark contrast of the exterior paints a clear picture of what once was.

Hovering above the hull, I reflected on those still entombed inside what has now become a place of silence and peace quite unlike any other.

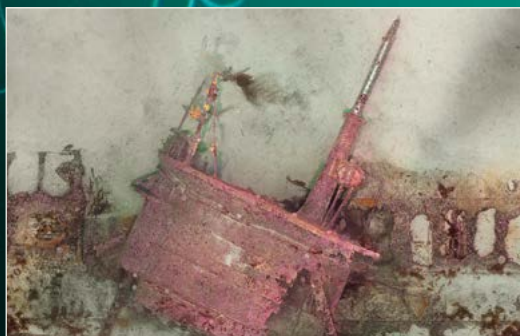


Hiding beneath and amongst the wreck are a number of well-camouflaged marine species who have made this site their home.

Keeping their distance from larger nearby predators and human intruders, octopi can often be seen by divers keen to get a glimpse of these intelligent and curious creatures.

Other marine species that brighten up the cold North Sea waters include purple starfish, orange sponges, blue lobsters and yellow corals, all adding to the dramatic and mysterious site of Shetland's Baltasound.

**To find out more about diving in Shetland, visit [www.shetland.org/things/outdoor/diving](http://www.shetland.org/things/outdoor/diving)**



*The wreck of HMS E49 lies 30 metres below the surface.*

*Main image: Colourful jellyfish can often be seen in the waters of Baltasound*

# Otters - Shetland Nature

Fascinated with wildlife and with an intimate knowledge of Shetland and its natural history, local Shetlander and wildlife tour guide **Brydon Thomason** knows a thing or two about the islands' most sought after species.

It was this knowledge and love of all things 'wild' that led Brydon to set up Shetland Nature. The only VisitScotland accredited Five Star Wildlife Experience in Shetland, his day tours and holidays are a popular choice with visitors to the UK's most northerly outpost seeking the best of Shetland's wildlife.

Brydon has worked on and featured in several Shetland TV documentaries and programmes covering Shetland's natural heritage including BBC's Countryfile and Springwatch, Grand Tours of Scottish Islands, Alison Steadman's Shetland and many others. He is also co-author of the recently published book 'Otters in Shetland - the tale of the draatsi'.

## **For the love of otters**

Shetland has the highest density of otters in Europe and the islands are an ideal place to study and enjoy these beautiful mammals. Brydon's love for them began around the age of eight years old and the fascination has continued throughout his life.

Otters have evolved in Shetland to be at home in the salt-water coastal environment and while extremely shy, these cheeky creatures seem to thrive on the long hours of daylight that the Northern Isles celebrates during the warmer summer months.

## **Otter behaviour**

Brydon tells Northern Lights more about how to spot his favourite Shetland resident and what it's like working these creatures.

## **Q. When did you first learn about otters?**

A. I'm sometimes referred to as Shetland's 'otter man', 'expert', 'whisperer' or 'guru'. I'm always wary of these names but 'addict' is probably closest to the mark!

I've pretty much been watching otters all my life. I'm in my 40s now and was already learning to track them at the age of eight.

I have never been very academic and was always more at home doing hands-on learning which made the outdoors perfect for me. I could follow,



watch and learn how otters behaved through the seasons and track them each year. I also read research by the likes of zoologist Hans Kruuk and other top experts.

**Q. What's your favourite thing about otters?**

A. There are several obvious ones, particularly their mastery of both aquatic and onshore environments is fascinating.

However what excites me now, just as much as when I was a young boy, is the way the otters seem to hold power over me. When I'm photographing them especially, it is as if nothing else exists but them and me.

Plus the most beautiful thing about it all is that if you position your camera well the otters never even know you are there! It's the hunt. The excitement and adrenaline buzz in the tracking, stalking and then that final moment when I press the shutter - I can rate this above any wildlife encounter I've had anywhere in the world.

**Q. Can you give us any tips for spotting otters?**

A. Without at least some knowledge of where, when and especially how to look it is notoriously difficult to find otters. For those keen to try, I'd recommend a three to four hour window either side of low tide. In general, otters tend to favour the lower coastlines with relatively shallow waters. There needs to be plenty of reefs and kelp beds for them to forage.

Another tip is always check the wind direction and never look for them along a shore where the wind is blowing in the direction you are walking – they will have smelt you and vanished long before you ever know they are there. Blend into the environment as much as possible, no bright clothes, keep a low profile and keep quiet. That should get you started!

Otter tours are a speciality of Brydon's wildlife tour company. **To book a tour to see these adorable creatures yourself call Shetland Nature on 01957 710 000 or visit [www.shetlandnature.net](http://www.shetlandnature.net)**

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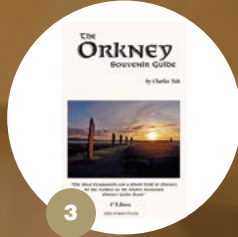
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**In our last edition of Northern Lights we offered one lucky reader the chance to win a wooden, handcrafted Orkney Chair created by local craftsman Robert H. Towers.**

Allan Heron from Paisley is the winner of a unique sapele chair and we hope that he and his family will enjoy featuring it in their home.

Pictured is our E-Marketing Executive, Magnus Dixon, taking delivery of this beautiful chair from its maker, Robert H. Towers.