

FAIR ISLE BIRD OBSERVATORY NEWS RELEASE

NEW FAIR ISLE BIRD OBSERVATORY OFFICIAL OPENING

First chance to see the new building and meet the new warden and administrator.

Embargo Friday July 1st

Top ornithologists from across the UK are heading to Fair Isle for the official opening of the new bird observatory (**July 2nd**). The £4 million building has now been completed and is enjoying a busy season with a new warden and administrator looking after the visitors.

The observatory has accommodation for 20 guests and en-suite facilities in every bedroom – a far cry from the original observatory, which was a collection of ex-Naval huts. It was the brainchild of George Waterston and opened in 1948. He realised that attracting visitors to study the huge numbers of migrant birds that find shelter on Fair Isle was a way of securing an economic future for the island.

Fair Isle is Britain's most remote inhabited island with a population of around 70. The Observatory is run by a charitable trust who decided to replace the old 1960s building that was becoming increasingly difficult to maintain. The new building, on the site of the old, was made possible by many individual donations and money from charitable trusts as well as major funding from the Scottish Government, through its Rural Development Programme (£1, 807,175); Shetland Islands Council (£1, 090,766) and Highlands and Islands Enterprise (£359, 999).

Fair Isle is a mecca for birders and many leading ornithologists spent formative periods at the observatory. Among the ornithological heavyweights attending the opening are Ian Newton, an expert on bird migration, David Parkin, co-author of the definitive Status of

Birds in Britain and Ireland (2010), David Jardine, President of the Scottish Ornithologists' Club and Andy Clements, Director of the British Trust for Ornithology.

Former visitors will find big changes. The new Observatory is eco-friendly with a high tech energy system that features innovative 'breathing building' insulation and heat recovery. This means that any waste heat from, for example, the kitchen or laundry room, is captured and used to heat the accommodation, while filters in the walls deliver fresh air and keep heat loss to a minimum. There are also photovoltaic cells panels on the roof, which turn sunlight into electricity.

Although the observatory is still very much a working environment, geared to research, it's also full of new, original artwork, which helps to make it an attractive place to stay. There are bright wall hangings commissioned from Orkney artist Sheila Scott. Sheila has also helped design interpretation boards explaining the key bird life and natural heritage of Fair Isle, as well as 15 striking, metallic maps, showing the flyways of Fair Isle's best known migrants, and a mobile depicting a flock of Arctic Terns being chased by a couple of Arctic Skuas

The chairman of the Fair Isle Bird Observatory Trust, Shetland-based Roger Riddington, said: "Our aim is to continue the research work on our seabirds, migrants and breeding landbirds but in a setting where we can provide a welcoming environment for all visitors to Fair Isle."

The new warden, David Parnaby said: "As a birder, working on Fair Isle is just as amazing as I thought it was going to be, there are times when I have to remind myself that this really is what I am paid to do. We're in the middle of the breeding season and the island looks fantastic and full of life. The migrant birds have also been incredible, with an array of rarer species seen. It's not just the birds that make

the job special though, the range of people who have visited are what contribute to the atmosphere of the Observatory. We've had loads of positive comments about the new building and plenty of people are already planning their next visit."

Susannah Parnaby, the Observatory's administrator, said:

"Relocating to Fair Isle, to run the Observatory, felt quite daunting as our moving date approached, but we've been very lucky to move to such a welcoming and supportive place, making it much easier to cope with the inevitable challenges that come with running a large guesthouse on a remote island."

One of Scotland's best known conservationists and now Honorary President of FIBOT, Roy Dennis, will perform the official opening. Roy formerly chaired FIBOT and was a warden at the Observatory.

The building was supplied by Orkney contractors Andrew H Wilson, who went into receivership before its completion last year. The final work was carried out by Northmen, who are based on Fair Isle.

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