



Thyme, adds colour and fragrance to grassy banks



Sea Pinks

Coastal Cliffs

Safe from grazing sheep and nourished by salt-spray, cliffs possess some of the most lush vegetation in the islands. Amongst the short turf, fine grasses, Sea Plantain, Buck’s-horn Plantain, Sea Pink and Spring Squill are prominent. The tiny blue



Spring Squill, a plant of short coastal heath and grassland

flowers of the squill provide an attractive display, combining with Sea Pink from late May through to early July. On sheltered cliffs, Roseroot, Sea Campion, Red Campion, Scurvy Grass, Bird’s-foot Trefoil, Sheep’s-bit and Thyme flourish. Scot’s Lovage, another plant frequenting ungrazed cliffs, adapts to the short Shetland summer by maximising growth early in the season.



Sea Pink, or Thrift, abundant on headlands

Wild Flowers and the Law

All plants are protected by law in the British Isles including more than 150 species which are afforded special protection.

It is an offence to destroy or uproot any wild plant without the permission of the owner or occupier of the land.

Wild flowers are best observed in their natural environment where they can grow, mature and reproduce. This allows others to come and enjoy their beauty.

Shetland names		
Shetland Name	Common Name	Approx Flowering
<i>Blugga</i>	Marsh Marigold	Apr-Jun
<i>Mayflooor</i>	Primrose	Apr - Jun
<i>Craa Tae</i>	Meadow Buttercup	Apr - Aug
<i>Kokkiloori</i>	Daisy	Apr - Sep
<i>Banksflooor</i>	Sea Pink (Thrift)	May-Jul
<i>Luckaminnie’s Oo</i>	Bog Cotton	May-Jul
<i>Kattikloo</i>	Bird’s-foot Trefoil	May-Aug
<i>Buggiflooor</i>	Sea Campion	May-Aug
<i>Curl-dodie</i>	Orchids	May - Aug
<i>Lady’s Fitstool</i>	Roseroot	May - Aug
<i>Penny Girse</i>	Butterwort	May - Aug
<i>Barkflooor</i>	Tormentil	May-Sep
<i>Lammas Flooor</i>	Eyebright	May - Sep
<i>Sweet William</i>	Red Campion	May-Sep
<i>Blue Girse</i>	Tufted Vetch	Jun - Aug
<i>Milspinda</i>	Alpine Lady’s Mantle	Jun-Aug
<i>Raggy-Willie</i>	Ragged-Robin	Jun-Aug
<i>Taegirse</i>	Wild Thyme	Jun-Sep
<i>Limrek</i>	Bog Asphodel	Jul-Aug
<i>Seggi-flooor</i>	Yellow Flag	Jul-Aug



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Wild Flowers

heritage  
Shetland  
culture

Shetland’s best kept secret



Introduction

Since the ice retreated from Shetland less than 10,000 years ago, the most significant impact on the flora of the islands has been that of human settlers. These people, arriving some 5,000 years ago, would have found a very different landscape to that we see today. The development of agriculture and introduction of livestock soon began to influence the vegetation.



Mayfloors (Primroses) - an early flowering plant of grassy places

Today, some habitats are rich in plant life as a direct result of the traditional crofting practices, whilst others are found where human influence has been minimal. Because of its northerly location, isolated nature and extreme climate, the flora of the islands is impoverished with just 400 species occurring. There are a few species of hawkweed and a chickweed that are endemic (found nowhere else) to Shetland. These rarities are the botanical stars but there are many habitats which provide a dazzling display of colour throughout Shetland; beautiful ‘hanging gardens’ along coastal cliffs, wet marshes and flower rich meadows. Even blanket bog can reveal hidden delights, or give a splash of autumnal colour when bog cottons and sedges turn russet.

Wild flowers at Clickimin Broch



Moorland

The cool, damp climate of Shetland has favoured peat formation – representing thousands of years of compressed dead plant material. Peat or blanket bog is a globally rare and threatened habitat yet it cloaks vast swathes of Shetland. Wet-loving plants dominate and include Cross-leaved Heath, Bog Asphodel, cotton grasses and Deer Grass. Hidden amongst taller plants are small herbs such as the blue or lilac-flowered Milkwort and the yellow Tormentil. Few plants are adapted to cope with the constant wet conditions and lack of available nutrients in peat, although some such as Sundew and Butterwort compensate for this by being carnivorous. They trap small insects on their sticky leaves and then digest them! Others such as Lousewort are semi-parasitic, tapping into the root systems of other plants for their nutrients.

Above left: Eyebright – once used as a remedy for poor eyesight

Above right: The large air-filled cells in the roots and leaf stems act as snorkels enabling Bog Cotton to breathe in the oxygen-poor soil

Right: Tiny insects come to a sticky end in the leaves of Butterwort



Croftland

Traditional crofting provides a range of habitats which are diverse botanically and particularly valuable for wildlife. Hayfields were once a common feature of Shetland croftland. Hay cutting and carefully managed grazing produces a rich floral assemblage including gentians and orchids. Drier meadows support many grasses including Sweet Vernal Grass. This is the grass which gives hay its smell when dried.

Amongst the grasses, Meadow Buttercup, Yellow Rattle, Devil’s-bit Scabious and Autumn Hawkbit dominate, accompanied by Red and White Clover, Eyebright and Common Mouse-ear. Eyebright is another semi-parasitic plant which takes advantage of the root systems of it’s host. Sedges, Marsh Cinquefoil, Ragged-Robin and Lady’s Smock favour wet meadows while tall herbs such as Meadowsweet and Angelica favour areas where there is minimal or no grazing. Burns and ditches support Marsh Marigold, Yellow Flag and the introduced but colourful Monkey Flower.



Lady’s Smock – one of the earliest flowering marsh flowers

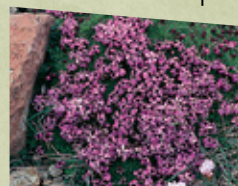
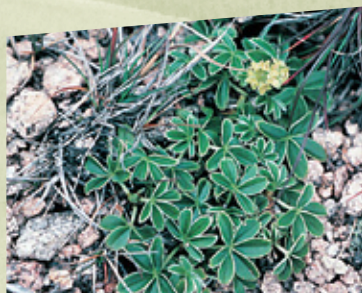
Monkey Flower can be seen July-September



# An explorer's guide to Shetland's wild flowers

## Alpine Lady's Mantle and Moss Campion

Shetland's highest point, Ronas Hill, rises to 450m where conditions can be as extreme as the top of the Cairngorms. Vegetation here is sparse and plants have



adapted by growing low, creeping or forming hummocks on bare, exposed granite debris. About 15 Arctic-Alpine species grow on the hill including Alpine Lady's Mantle (above) and Moss Campion (left).

## Bog Mosses

Bog Moss or Sphagnum is able to hold eight times its own weight in water – no wonder it is so important to the hydrology of bogs.



## Bell Heather and Heath Spotted Orchid

Drier heathland supports Bell Heather, with purple 'bell' shaped flowers in clusters at the ends of the stalk.



This is a small woody shrub flowering from July to August. Damper areas support Heath Spotted Orchid. Its short flowering spike is made up of a number of small pinkish-lilac flowers, each with a 'lip' marked with darker dots and lines. These dots and lines attract bees and flies which then pollinate the flower.



## Roseroot

Roseroot is a common plant of coastal cliff ledges and has yellow flowers. Cliff tops and slopes are often freely draining and very salty from wind and sea spray. In order to cope with this, plants have very succulent leaves in which they conserve water, similar to a cactus plant. Spring Squill, Sea Pink (Thrift), Sea Plantain and Roseroot have adapted in this way.



## Sundew

Sundew can often be found growing in hummocks of bog moss. Globules of sticky fluid are secreted from the tiny mauve coloured fronds around the edges of the leaves. These fronds curl into the centre of the leaf to digest any entrapped insects caught by the deadly glue.



## Marsh Marigold

The golden cups of Marsh Marigold brighten many a dull spring day. Yellow flowers are particularly attractive to insects which are important agents in the process of pollination. Pollination is important so that plants can form fertile seeds which scatter, germinate and grow into new plants.



## Tufted Vetch

'Links' occur where windblown sand with a high mineral content is found. They often support a striking show of flowers during the summer months, dominated by Tufted Vetch, Bird's-foot Trefoil and Yarrow. Other flowers found here include Daisy, buttercup species, Silverweed, Selfheal, Eyebright, Field and Autumn Gentian. Tufted Vetch is very competitive using tendrils on the ends of the leaf stalks to support itself as it climbs its way up above other plants.



## Spring Squill and Bird's-foot Trefoil

Spring Squill is a short growing plant with a cluster of lilac-blue flowers at the end of each stem. The seed pods of the yellow Bird's-foot Trefoil are grouped in a cluster which resembles the shape of a bird's foot.

## Red Campion and False-Oat Grass

Road verges are not fertilised and are often ungrazed, therefore they support a variety of flowers. Devil's-bit Scabious, Autumn Hawkbit and Red Campion are often found along with grasses. False-Oat Grass looks a little like



oats because of the shape and position of the flowers on the stalk. The flowers of grasses often look very pretty or decorative and are an important component of most habitats. As grasses rely on wind for pollination their flowers do not need to be brightly coloured to attract insects.



## Ragged-Robin

The flower of the Ragged-Robin gets its name from the ragged looking petals. This pretty flower can turn large areas of its damp meadow habitat a delicate pink hue.



## Field Gentian

Two species of gentian can be found in Shetland; the Field Gentian and the Autumn Gentian. They are similar in appearance, but the bluish-lilac flowers of the Field Gentian are more common and are found in areas of short dry grassland where there is little or no summer grazing. Autumn Gentian is restricted to sandy coastal grasslands.