

FAIR ISLE TIMES

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Fair Isle Primary School News

This week, we have been lucky enough to have Lucy joining us from Tuesday through to Friday. Lucy comes twice a year or so to do some supply work in the school (for which Jonathan's pile of paperwork is very grateful). She travels all the way from the Isle of Skye and the children enjoy having her as their teacher for a few days. Thank you for your hard work Lucy and have a safe journey back next week. Here is some fascinating lighthouse writing she has done with the children on The Bell Rock Lighthouse and the work of Robert Stevenson.



Written by Hetty (6)

Dear Mother,

I am building a lighthouse on the Bell Rock. All the ships crash into it. It is hard to build because of the waves.
From Robert.

Written by Khalicee (6)

Dear friend,

I am working on Bell Rock because lots of ships crash into it. I sleep in a wooden hut in the middle of the ocean.

From Robert.

Written by Ander (8)

Dear Friend,

I'm constructing a lighthouse on the treacherous reef off Bell Rock. I am using granite for the lighthouse. A stonemason is cutting the rock near Aberdeen. We have just finished the bottom of the lighthouse. How are you? I am sleeping in a wooden structure on stilts, so we do not have to row out all the time. I am feeling hopeful about the lighthouse.

Yours sincerely,

Robert.

Written by Luca (11)

Dear people who found this bottle,

I have been given the challenge of my life in building a lighthouse on Bell Rock. It is extremely difficult because the rock we are building on is only out of the water for four hours each day making it very hard to build on. We are constructing a structure for people to sleep in so they do not have to row all the way from the shore. The lighthouse will be made out of granite and when it is done it will hopefully stop shipwrecks and the reef will be safer.

Thank you for finding this bottle

Robert Stevenson.

Written by Teddy (11)

Dear Peggy,

I am working on the treacherous, infamous, reef of wrecks, Bell Rock. I have made and constructed a giant wooden tower where the many builders' living quarters are located. The lighthouse we're building is a challenge due to the fact the rocky reef is a battle to navigate. The elements of weather are atrocious when we have to get our supplies for construction. We use a small crane to lift up our granite which is a volcanic substance cut up by stonemasons near Aberdeen. I am happy with the progress so far and I look forward to the day I see it working properly.

Hope to see you soon,

Robert Stevenson

A lesson in patience

It's fair to say that this September will not be fondly remembered in the isle's birding history. The unrelenting westerly winds have made for quiet census after quiet census for the Obs team, with the sum total of migrant birds outnumbered by the number of weary birders on some particularly poor days. Consequently then, the prospect of an upcoming spell of south-easterly winds had the team's attention, and after a few days spent trying not to check the forecast too often (in case we scared them away), on Tuesday 29th they finally arrived. All too often a promising forecast can turn out to be somewhat of a damp squib, but on this occasion, the winds fully lived up to the hype...

The day began rather quietly, with nothing new seen or trapped on the early trap round, and subsequently spirits were somewhat dampened over breakfast, particularly when news broke of an Eyebrowed Thrush being trapped and ringed at Spurn on the Yorkshire coast - had everything arrived too far south for us?

As the team headed out around their census routes and our host of visiting birders began covering the isle, messages began to ping on the news groups, and hope and expectations began to build once more. It was apparent that birds were arriving all the time, with most quickly making their way to the shelter of the west and north of the isle, out of the freshening SE breeze. Reports of Yellow-browed Warblers gradually gathered pace, a Richard's Pipit made its way noisily over Ward Hill, and the first few Redwings of the autumn were uncovered in sheltered spots. The winds were delivering, and excitement built with each new notification that buzzed through. What would be next?

Upon reaching the towering cliffs of Guidicum and rounding the corner of Lerness, I flushed a couple of small brown thrushes from just below the clifftops, with one bird calling and revealing itself to be a Song Thrush. Both headed back onto the cliffs further into the geo, and I assumed that'd be the last I'd see of what were presumably, two Song Thrushes.

I walked a few metres further and scanned back along the cliffs, hoping to pick up any migrants that I'd missed on a first pass. With the naked eye, I saw some movement near the clifftop, as a bird hopped its way upwards. Raising binoculars, the sight of a small, pale thrush with a bright unmarked breast and belly, distinct dark lateral throat stripes and a bright white supercilium (eyebrow) took me a second to fully process. My mind immediately raced through what this could mean - but all the options surely couldn't be true?!!

Acutely aware that thrushes on cliffs have a tendency to flush and vanish without trace, I raised my camera and fired off some panicked record shots, pointing the lens vaguely at the area I knew the bird was sat, unable to actually see the bird through the viewfinder as I battled the blustery wind and hands unsteady with adrenaline. A check of the photos revealed the ridiculous truth - an EYEBROWED THRUSH was really perched on Fair Isle's west cliffs, just a handful of metres away from me. This species breeds eastwards from Siberia, with precious few to be found any nearer to Fair Isle than Mongolia, before migrating south to winter in south-east Asia. Really, this bird had no business at all sitting on a cliff face of a windswept Atlantic island 4,000 miles from home.



Shaky evidence photos secured, I shared the news and focused on trying to work my way closer to the bird for some better views, knowing it would take others quite a while to join me all the way up here. It had continued working its way up the cliff and was now almost at the top, and allowed me to approach closer using the undulations of the clifftop for some cover. As I lay on the cropped turf, alternating between taking photos and just watching this mega-rare thrush as it hopped around in the complex of rocky outcrops, a Song Thrush suddenly appeared beside it, materialising from a crevice in the rock. This was not good. Song Thrushes are nervous and restless, and sure enough it quickly hopped past the Eyebrowed Thrush and flew around the corner into the main geo, triggering the Eyebrowed to follow, disappearing out of sight.

Though it didn't look to have flown far, the cliffs of Guidicum are a vast expanse of crevices, scars and hidey-holes that a thrush could disappear into. Relocating it in the next hour or so proved impossible, despite the best efforts of the would-be twitchers that slowly assembled. Brief glimpses and possible sightings followed, before the bird finally showed once again in the mid-afternoon, allowing Tom, Luke and Andy Close to connect with this eastern mega. After this brief reappearance, it wasn't until the early evening that it deigned to reveal itself once more, rewarding the perseverance of Steve Arlow and several of the isle's resident birders. All in all, fewer than 10 people managed to lay eyes on this remarkable visitor - the third record for the isle, after birds in 1987 and 1992. Special commiserations must go to the two birders visiting from Spurn, who missed not one but two Eyebrowed Thrushes that day by being here on Fair Isle (rather than home at Spurn), and 'dipping' the bird at Guidicum. Sometimes birding is a testing hobby.

This account has gone on too long already, but it would be imprudent not to mention the supporting cast of birds that made this such a standout day, including a smart Red-flanked Bluetail briefly on Ward Hill, a showy Red-breasted Flycatcher around the clifftops of Guidicum, two Little Buntings 'ticking' away, a Bluethroat skulking in the ditches around Pund and more Yellow-browed Warblers than you could shake a stick at.

This brilliant day in the field was toasted in a busy Obs bar in the evening, with a Log awash with birds going a long way to forgive what had otherwise been an often drearily slow September - reminding us that patience is often rewarded, and Fair Isle will always deliver.

Alex, FIBO



HARVEST 2026 – a thank you

Thanks to all who donated wonderful home-grown and home-made produce, arts and crafts galore and super prizes for the Harvest Festival on Sunday, and again to those who donated very generously at the afternoon teas in the Hall. A rather wet and windy afternoon was brightened with excellent company, home-bakes and a good cuppa, with the community spirit palpable in the Hall. With record raffle ticket sales, entertaining games (big shout out to Jonathan and the school bairns who raised almost £100 alone with their colossal cabbage games!) and a splendid sales table we raised over £1400, which must be one of the most successful harvest fundraisers we have ever hosted.

Thanks to each and every one of you, we have been able to donate over £700 each to our nominated charities of the Goodwill Children's Village in India and Scotland Charity Air Ambulance

NO CHAPEL THIS SUNDAY, BACK NEXT WEEK

Da week dat's awa...

It was indeed a privilege to contribute to this week's FIT, a weekend in fact, when a former much loved member of our community passed away, when we met to pass on our good wishes to a family leaving the Isle, and finally, on the Sunday, in our worship, to give thanks for our harvest – and through our proceeds, give a little help to those who are less fortunate.

So, in that order, Margo Murray passed away on the 25th having been 90 years of age two months previous. Margo and Bill, her husband, with their infant twins, Roddy and Ailsa, came to the Isle in 1974, to become our neighbours at the Haa. They came not knowing the future, but Bill soon became one of the two local assistants at the two lighthouse stations here, and Margo soon demonstrated her skills as an artistic and imaginative knitter, helping to set up Fair Isle Crafts in 1978. Bill, with the late Jerry Eunson, built their new house, which Margo named Koolin, into which they moved in 1982, after which they completely renovated Springfield which they then rented out - more important with the de-manning and automation of the lighthouse stations. To be closer to their family, now living in Scotland, Bill and Margo left the Isle in 2018. We were always good friends, and many happy evenings were spent together and so at this time of her death, many will have nostalgic but happy memories. Death, like nothing else, is always sad, even at the end of a long life, and so our sincere condolences and love go to Bill and Ailsa and Roddy and his family.

Nothing so sad, but nostalgia and a few tears as well, as after 25 years, we are saying a sort of farewell to Hollie and Deryk and their family as they prepare to depart the Isle for life on Mainland Shetland. They leave for reasons similar to the Murray's, to be in easier and better contact with their grown up family, who now seek their future in the bigger world. We shall miss you for all the many parts you played, not only in your jobs, but

as part of that which makes a small community function. You also leave with the hope, and I know that this is your hope also, that, as has already transpired, when the stone is turned, new growth can flourish!

And so to Sunday, where, as I have said, in the Chapel, humble praise and thanks for that which is produced with the effort of hand and mind, even in this smallest and often isolated place, and through that effort, to give something back to those less fortunate. This we also physically did when we all, locals and visitors, came together in the Hall for a time of laughter and fun, and raise, through various means, a grand total of £1400.

There will be other happenings for different people, but these are my thoughts only: the lambs have been sold, and prices have not been bad, but costs are escalating for all. Slipway work is progressing, but so are the gales and shorter days; lessons learnt at Grutness seem to have had no lasting effect, and I see the repair work there is still in progress, if that be the correct term, but I see disruption for the short term, at least.

And so, finally, from me, for our friend Margo, who, in her younger life loved the wild mountains of Scotland, and then on Fair Isle, marvelled at the beauty of a sunset, and the power of the wild ocean, in equal measure, good Christian that she was, let me end with a poem from her favourite... Norman MacCaig, as a humble eulogy:

Jimmy at Skerryholm

Landscape and I by Norman MacCaig

Landscape and I get on together well.
Though I'm the talkative one, still he can tell
His symptoms of being to me, the way a shell
Murmurs of oceans.

Loch Rannoch lapses dimpling in the sun.
Its hieroglyphs of light fade one by one
But re-create themselves, their message done,
For ever and ever.

That sprinkling lark jerked upward in the blue
Will daze to nowhere but leave himself in true
Translation - hear his song cascading through
His disappearance.

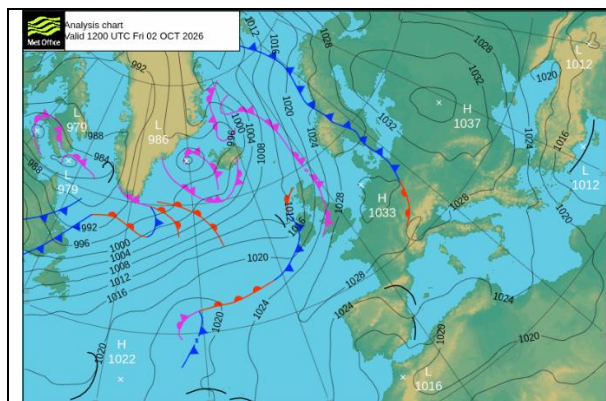
The hawk knows all about it, shaking there
An empty glove on steep chutes of the air
Till his yellow foot cramps on a squeal, to tear
Smooth fur, smooth feather.

This means, of course, Schiehallion in my mind
Is more than mountain. In it he leaves behind
A meaning, an idea, like a hind
Couched in a corrie.

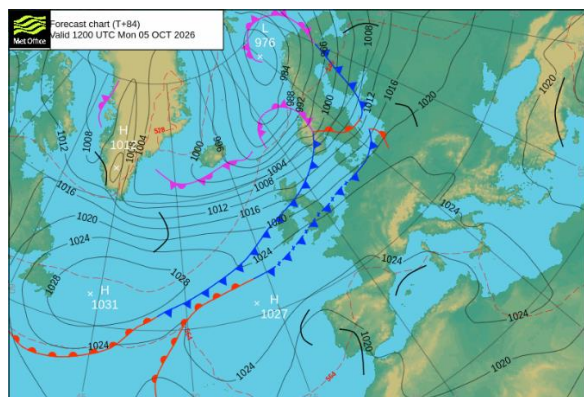
So then I'll woo the mountain till I know
The meaning of the meaning, no less. Oh,
There's a Schiehallion anywhere you go.
The thing is, climb it.

Margo Murray – sadly missed by her friends in Fair Isle and all at the F I Times. We send all our love to Bill, Ailsa and Roddy and family at this time. Margo was a special person who will be missed by all who knew her.

FAIR ISLE WEATHER FORECAST



Analysis Chart 1200 UTC
Friday 2nd October 2026



Forecast Chart 1200 UTC
Monday 5th October 2026

GENERAL SITUATION Friday 2nd October 2026

Low pressure over Iceland is currently feeding Atlantic weather systems in an unsettled and strong south-westerly airflow across the British Isles. During the weekend, as high pressure pushes in over the south of the UK this turns more westerly. With low pressure maintained in the Iceland area, across Scotland a changeable mainly westerly airflow is maintained across Scotland until midweek. Then, as the centre of low pressure edges east and pressure builds north across Scotland the week probably ends less unsettled with lighter winds.

OUTLOOK FOR TODAY AND THE WEEKEND Temperatures around 14° by day, 8° or 9° overnight.

FRIDAY 2nd: Mainly dry. cloudy at first then sunny. Clouding over later with rain late evening and overnight. F5 SSW winds backing SSE. **Sea State:** Moderate or rough at SSW 2 to 3 metre.

SATURDAY 3rd: Sunny spells and showers with F5 WSW winds. Scattered showers overnight with F5 SW winds. **Sea State:** Moderate or rough at SW 2 to 3 metre.

SUNDAY 4th: Cloudy with rain or drizzle. Misty at times with hill fog. F5 W winds. **Sea State:** Rough at W 3 metre.

FORECAST FOR NEXT WEEK Temperatures around 12° by day, 9° or 10° overnight. **MONDAY 5th:** Cloudy and misty with outbreaks of rain or drizzle. Strong WSW winds. **Sea State:** Mostly moderate at W 2 metre. **TUESDAY 6th:** Rather cloudy with a few showers and fresh W winds, occasionally strong. **Sea State:** Rough at W 3 to 4 metre. **WEDNESDAY 7th –**

SUNDAY 11th: Wednesday cloudy with showers and fresh WSW winds, occasionally strong, veering WNW. Thursday and Friday drier and brighter with lighter winds. **Sea State Wednesday:** Rough at W 3 metre. **Dave Wheeler**

