



Fair Isle Bird Observatory Trust

Job Description – Head of Ornithology

Job Title: Head of Ornithology

Term: Full-time, fixed term 5 years (with the possibility of extension)

Probationary period: 1 year

Background

Fair Isle is a small (approx. 5 x 3 km), remote island that lies approximately halfway between Orkney and mainland Shetland in northern Scotland. The island is owned by the National Trust for Scotland (NTS) and is famous for its spectacular coastal scenery, internationally important seabird populations, diverse marine and archaeological heritage, and as a thriving centre for local arts and crafts. Fair Isle is also well known for its history of recording rare vagrant birds to the UK.

There is a vibrant local community of around 55 residents and the island has a primary school, a shop and a resident nurse. Fair Isle is served by regular transport links (six days per week in summer) to mainland Shetland, by sea and air.

Fair Isle Bird Observatory (FIBO) is owned and run by Fair Isle Bird Observatory Trust, an independent, non-profit-making charity. FIBO was established in 1948 by the eminent Scottish ornithologist George Waterston. Its original aims – to carry out ornithological studies and research, to provide accommodation, interpretation and education for visitors, and to assist the economic well-being of the island – remain among its core objectives today.

The Observatory has recently been completely rebuilt, and is due to be ready for re-opening in early 2025. The Observatory will provide full board en-suite accommodation and facilities for up to 35 visitors, primarily through the season of April to early November, in addition to seasonal staff and visiting researchers. Core staff comprise the Head of Ornithology and a Hospitality Manager. Seasonal staff comprise 1-2 ornithological staff and a ranger (with responsibility for providing visitor interpretation), and 4–5 hospitality staff (including a cook, an assistant cook and general domestic assistants) to provide a consistently high standard of food and accommodation.

The Head of Ornithology and the Hospitality Manager are jointly responsible for the successful day-to-day operation of all Observatory functions, including ornithological work, accommodation and other visitor services. The Head of Ornithology coordinates the ornithological work and related staff (including the ranger), while the Hospitality Manager oversees all visitor and accommodation matters, and staff employed in relation to these aspects. Both have major roles in engaging with staff, islanders and visitors. These are challenging and responsible posts, requiring considerable initiative, dedication and autonomy. They provide a unique opportunity to live and work in a setting of outstanding natural beauty, and exciting possibilities to spearhead the continuing development of a world-famous ornithological research station and visitor facility.

We are now accepting applications for the Head of Ornithology and Hospitality Manager positions, aiming to hire new personnel to run the new Fair Isle Bird Observatory for the 2025 season onwards.

We welcome applications from couples/partnerships who can jointly undertake the two roles, and also from individual applicants who can undertake one role or the other (the provided accommodation can be operated as one unit or two self-contained flats, and is family friendly). Appointments to each role will be made with consideration for appropriate skills and experience for each specific role, and also for compatibility with appointments to other roles.

Main duties of the Head of Ornithology:

1. To work alongside the Board of Directors to envision, implement, further develop and promote the work of Fair Isle Bird Observatory. To be creative and innovative, suggesting new ideas, processes and activities that extend the ornithological and visitor work of FIBO to enhance its international reputation and increase its success as a business.
2. To lead, inspire and motivate the ornithological team to ensure successful delivery of the agreed programme of scientific monitoring and research on birds, other taxa and the wider environment. This programme will include monitoring of breeding seabirds carried out under contract to the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC), surveys of other breeding bird species, long-term systematic daily monitoring of migrant birds, bird ringing, and documentation of rarities.
3. To engage with and assist all visitors to the Observatory, ensuring that they receive a warm welcome and that their stay is in all respects enjoyable and satisfying. To ensure that the ornithological staff and ranger do likewise.
4. To support all activities and working objectives of the Hospitality Manager, with joint responsibility to ensure that the Observatory is run on sound 'value-for-money' principles.
5. To contribute to making FIBO sustainable, maintaining and enhancing biodiversity and implementing actions towards net zero as far as is feasible within the constraints of the remote island location.
6. To maintain good relations with the islanders, and to be a committed and integral member of the island community including attendance at Fair Isle community (and similar) meetings to represent the views of FIBOT.
7. To be responsible for the timely appointment and relevant training of seasonal staff, and ensure the career development opportunities of the post-holders are maximised.
8. To oversee the Fair Isle Ranger Service (part-funded by NatureScot) and the Fair Isle Biosecurity Service (funded by NTS). To lead FIBOT's contribution to activities relating to the Fair Isle Research & Demonstration Marine Protected Area.
9. To oversee a volunteer programme that helps the functioning of the observatory and provides volunteers with a valuable and rewarding experience. This will include liaising with the responsible Director to ensure that available funds that help to bring young people to Fair Isle are operated effectively.
10. To liaise with visiting researchers, to assist with and facilitate their professional needs whilst ensuring they are fully aware of any local restrictions that may impact their work

(e.g. avoidance of disturbance to sensitive breeding birds, or local community considerations).

11. To ensure effective and timely communication of ornithological and wider work of FIBO, including relevant updates on the website and social media channels, timely production of the Annual Report and Seabird Report, and appropriate contributions to other publications including 'Friends of Fair Isle' newsletters.
12. To ensure timely and accurate ornithological record keeping, including computerisation of migration logs and ringing data, and timely preparation and submission of ornithological survey data and notable records (including rarity descriptions).
13. To enact habitat improvements on the island as detailed by the Directors, and to ensure that all traps and research equipment are in good, safe and functional condition.
14. To jointly ensure, with the Hospitality Manager, the implementation of FIBOT's Health, Safety and Environment policies as set out in the Safety Management System.
15. To effectively communicate and liaise with the Board of Directors on all relevant matters relating to the operations of the Observatory.
16. To work flexibly with a positive problem-solving attitude, adapting to undertake ornithological, maintenance, hospitality, communications, community and other activities that may unexpectedly arise and require rapid attention within the context of an isolated island location.

The Head of Ornithology will report to:

The Chairman of Fair Isle Bird Observatory Trust.

Reporting to the Head of Ornithology:

Seasonal ornithological staff, ranger and any ornithological volunteers.

Salary and terms of employment

The starting salary will be within the range £20,000 - £24,000 per annum, according to qualifications and experience. In addition to the salary, a generous package of benefits is included, consisting of pension contribution, newly built self-contained accommodation within the Observatory, food (a monthly food allowance will be paid November – March, when the Observatory is not open to visitors) and utilities.

Five weeks of paid holiday are due per year, of which not more than one week may be taken while the Observatory is open (April to October inclusive). The Head of Ornithology is expected to be resident on Fair Isle throughout the year, except for holidays, since Observatory work continues year-round.

Working hours must be flexible and, especially during the peak ornithology and visitor seasons, can be considerable and sometimes unpredictable. The post-holder should liaise with the Chairman to ensure sufficient and appropriate time off is taken within and outside the peak periods.

The contract is subject to a probationary period of one year, with the expectation that the ongoing appointment will be confirmed by both employer and employee following a successful performance review after nine months (or at another suitable timepoint as decided by the Board of Directors).

Person Specification – Head of Ornithology

	Essential	Desirable
Education/qualifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educated to degree level in a relevant subject, or equivalent experience. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Postgraduate degree in ecology or similar discipline, or equivalent experience.
Experience, training and abilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to conceptualise and enact a vision for the development of FIBO as an integrated, internationally respected centre for ornithological and environmental research and monitoring. • Ability to lead a team including recruitment and effective line and performance management of staff, motivation and development of team. • Ability and experience of undertaking year-round fieldwork, in all weathers in a challenging environment. • Sound up to date knowledge of the identification and ecology of West Palearctic birds, including rare species. • Bird ringing experience ideally with or willingness to qualify for A permit. • Experience of monitoring of breeding birds, population surveys and other standard monitoring techniques. • Experience of maintaining and utilising accurate biological records and databases, and of writing scientific and general reports for a variety of audiences. • Ability to lead, coordinate and support ornithological and ecological research delivered by FIBO and others. • Sufficient computer literacy to maintain transparent FIBO digital correspondence and archives including e-mail, word-processing and spreadsheets skills. • Good working knowledge of relevant health and safety regulations for field operations, such as risk assessments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experience of the processes involved in finding, describing, observing and reporting rare species. • BTO 'A' permit with seabird experience and ideally a training endorsement, and familiarity with IPMR/Demon. • Experience of working with cliff-nesting seabirds, including basic climbing and cliff work. • Experience of small boat (zodiac) handling and safety. • Some knowledge of or interest in relevant non-avian taxa, such as plants, moths, marine life etc. • Previous experience implementation of Safeguarding procedures or willingness to train. • Additional computing skills, including website maintenance. • Practical skills including experience of basic maintenance of buildings (including generators) and vehicles. • Qualified first aider, or willingness to train. • Full driving licence.

	<p>and willingness to lead delivery in a FIBO context.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to work effectively with the public, visitors and other customers, community and key service providers to maintain and develop excellent working relationships and ensure high quality customer service. 	
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<p>Essential personal qualities and abilities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to live and work harmoniously as part of a small community in a remote setting, and to contribute to the successful functioning of that community. • Outstanding sense of responsibility to self, staff, visitors and islanders. • Excellent communication skills, coupled with a willingness to interact with and inform visitors. • Ability and willingness to work harmoniously and collaboratively with Directors and close colleagues. • Ability to learn new skills (incorporating problem-solving and troubleshooting), and to work effectively in unpredictable circumstances. • Enthusiasm to learn about Fair Isle's social, cultural and natural history and convey knowledge to visitors. • Willingness to work long and variable hours between April and November, and to interact with staff and visitors frequently.
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Timetable for applications and appointments

Application deadline: 11th December 2024

Interviews: Week starting 8th January 2025 (dates to be confirmed)

Start date: Late winter / early spring 2025

Applicants should submit:

- 1) an up-to-date CV
- 2) a cover letter explaining their motivation for the job and their suitability for the essential and desirable criteria
- 3) the contact details (name, email address and ideally phone number) of at least three independent referees who can comment on professional and personal suitability for the role

If you have any queries or wish to discuss the post further prior to submitting an application, please contact: vacancies@fairislebirdobs.co.uk

Further information

The following websites may be helpful sources of further information:

Fair Isle Bird Observatory: www.fairislebirdobs.co.uk

The Fair Isle community: www.fairisle.org.uk

Living in Shetland: www.shetland.org

JNCC seabird monitoring programme: <https://jncc.gov.uk/our-work/seabird-monitoring-programme/>

British Birds Rarities Committee: www.bbrc.org.uk

British Trust for Ornithology: www.bto.org

NatureScot Ranger Service:

<https://www.nature.scot/naturescot-ranger-services-scotland-achievements-glance>

National Trust for Scotland: www.nts.org.uk