



Fair Isle
Shetland
ZE29JU

warden@fairislebirdobs.co.uk

www.fairislebirdobs.co.uk

Thank you for your interest in applying for work at Fair Isle Bird Observatory (FIBO). This document aims to give you full details of the role you have applied for as well as a brief introduction to the island. It is recommended that you carry out some further research into Fair Isle to help you get a full feel for the unique setting that you are applying to work in. Although the work can be tough and you will be required to show great flexibility and patience at times, there is no doubt that the rewards can be fantastic and the experiences you will gain if you are the successful applicant will stay with you for the rest of your life.

Background and the work of FIBO

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.

The key ornithological work of the Observatory is the study of the breeding seabirds (currently undertaken as part of a JNCC/BTO contract) and the continued recording of migrant species (through daily census and ringing activities). FIBO staff also play an important part in ensuring visitors to the island are able to enjoy their visit to Fair Isle.

Fair Isle Bird Observatory
Assistant Warden
Job Description

Position:	Assistant Warden
Term of contract:	17th March to 31st October 2025
Salary:	£356 per week
Additional benefits:	Board and lodging (including laundry facilities and internet) provided free of charge, reasonable travel expenses paid to and from Fair Isle (travel by cheapest possible means, to be arranged in advance with Finance Director). A PPE allowance will also be provided.
Hours of work:	Workload is variable throughout the season. There will be some early starts and late finishes and the ability to be flexible is essential as the presence of birds, the weather and visitors all play a part in daily activities.
Holiday:	The holiday entitlement is 14 days. Dates must be arranged in advance with the Head of Ornithology.

Purpose of the Assistant Warden role

The wardening team consists of a Head of Ornithology and two Assistant Wardens. The Assistant Wardens' role is to be part of the team that carries out the main ornithological duties of the Observatory - primarily (i) census, (ii) ringing and (iii) seabird monitoring, and also (iv) biosecurity monitoring, and (v) delivering wildlife interpretation services, ensuring a friendly and welcoming atmosphere for visitors to the Isle. The Head of Ornithology also manages the Ranger, who delivers a range of visitor engagement and environmental interpretation activities.

Main Duties:

- **Daily census:** during the migration seasons the morning is taken up with the counting of all migrant birds on the island. This involves walking round a third of the island roughly following a set route, a distance of several miles that covers a variety of habitats, including high cliffs. Each member of the wardening team covers a section of the island every day to ensure thorough coverage.
- **Ringing:** the majority of ringing on Fair Isle is done using a series of Heligoland traps, which are run several times a day for the majority of the season. These trap rounds are normally

scheduled six times a day. Mist nets are also frequently used (particularly in the Obs garden and for Storm Petrel ringing sessions during the summer) and a variety of other catching techniques may be employed. Around 4,000 – 5,000 birds, usually of around 100 species, are ringed annually, with passerines now accounting for the bulk of these (sadly, the number of seabirds ringed in recent years has generally been low due to the decline in their breeding productivity). The Assistant Warden will be heavily involved in all the regular ringing activities as well as taking advantage of other ringing opportunities as they present themselves. There are several visiting ringers every year and the Assistant Warden will be expected to help them as required (in practice this means ‘sharing’ the birds that are caught).

- **Seabird monitoring:** in the summer months, a large part of the wardening team’s time is spent on seabirds, particularly the work that FIBO is contracted to carry out by JNCC/BTO. Seabird monitoring work includes: population counts (both entire population counts and monitoring plots); productivity studies; diet studies (through field observations and some trapping of adults at colonies) and ringing adults and chicks in colonies. Access to the seabird colonies is by rope and boat, so a head for heights, and a certain amount of sure-footedness and confidence working in these conditions is required.
- **Other monitoring and census work:** the Assistant Warden will also be involved in a variety of other monitoring, including Breeding Bird Survey, Beached Bird Survey, Fair Isle Wren census, wader monitoring etc. In addition, cetaceans, seal pups, butterflies and other wildlife are recorded by the whole wardening team.
- **Public engagement:** The Assistant Warden will be required to assist with wildlife interpretation duties, giving talks and leading walks to fulfil the conditions of any externally-funded ranger services FIBOT is contracted to deliver. These services may include guided walks for visiting cruise ship passengers, which will require liaison with the relevant islander coordinating cruise ship visits.
- **Documentation of delivery of public engagement events:** Ensure the accurate recording of participation in wildlife interpretation events and regular reporting on progress towards any targets set by funders.
- **Biosecurity monitoring:** Assist with biosecurity surveillance tasks according to the agreement with the National Trust for Scotland.
- **Practical work:** the Assistant Warden will be expected to undertake repairs of the traps, and some fencing and stile-building during the year (particularly early in the spring and late summer/early autumn). This will often be done with other members of the wardening team, but the Assistant Warden will also be expected to supervise volunteers on these tasks on occasion.
- **Data inputting:** inputting IPMR/DemOn and computerising the Log are tasks led by the Assistant Warden, along with other aspects of data inputting.
- **Assist in updating the FIBO website and FIBO social media accounts**
- **Magazine articles and descriptions:** e.g. rarity-finders accounts (hopefully!).
- **Working with volunteers:** several volunteers help with the work of FIBO during the course of the year and also gain valuable experience of the working life of a Bird Observatory. The Assistant Warden will be expected to work closely with these volunteers and at times to supervise and motivate them. Volunteers come from a variety of backgrounds and have a

wide range of experience and abilities and are expected to be encouraged to learn new skills.

- **Other duties:** the nature of life on Fair Isle means that everyone may occasionally have to help out with a wide variety of tasks, both involving the work of FIBO and helping the islanders during tasks that require the community to work together (e.g. during the round-up of the hill sheep or unloading of the island ferry, the Good Shepherd)

Requirements (essential):

The Assistant Warden must be a good birder, familiar with a wide range of avian species and plumages. A track record of finding their own birds and submitting records is expected. Ringing experience is also essential, preferably to at least a BTO 'C' permit (although trainee ringers will also be considered). The ability to accurately count and record birds is essential, so experience of survey work is very helpful, as is experience of monitoring breeding birds (preferably seabirds). They must also be knowledgeable about a wide range of other wildlife, particularly marine and coastal species, in a UK context.

Not everybody has been lucky enough to live somewhere like Fair Isle, but applicants must demonstrate that they have considered the challenges associated with living on a small island and show how they feel they will be able to deal with them.

The post-holder must be comfortable dealing with the public (from serious birders to those developing their interest) and must be friendly, outgoing and happy to help people enjoy their visit to Fair Isle.

The successful applicant will be well-motivated and able to work as part of a small team, whilst also being able to get on with jobs without constant supervision. A friendly personality is essential as is the ability to be flexible about your work. A good degree of physical fitness is necessary to undertake the tasks required.

The ability to use basic computer programs is essential and some degree of enthusiasm for practical tasks will be needed.

Requirements (desirable):

A full UK Driving licence, for manual vehicles
Experience of boat handling and cliff rope work
Experience of fencing and other similar practical tasks
Report writing skills
Experience of working in a people-focussed role

Being an Assistant Warden on Fair Isle is not a matter of just being paid to go birding! There may be times when it is necessary to complete certain tasks before going to see good birds that have been found elsewhere, although in practice there are very few times that anybody misses a rarity because of this. The role involves a lot of hard work, often seven days a week and you will have to demonstrate a flexible approach and be very committed to the work, whilst at the same time

remaining friendly and patient with other staff, islanders and visitors. In particular it is important that the Assistant Warden will be available to conduct duties associated with delivering any ranger services the Observatory is contracted to deliver.

There is no doubt however, that the job is an extremely rewarding one and staff who come into the role with the right attitude and approach will find their work on Fair Isle to be an enjoyable and memorable experience.

Working for the Observatory

Fair Isle Bird Observatory has been established for over 60 years, is a registered charity, and is administered by a board of Trustees. It is located on the small, remote island of Fair Isle, 24 miles south of Shetland.

1. Teamwork

Carrying out the work of the Observatory is a team effort. It is important to get on well with all staff, and every employee needs to be flexible in their approach. At certain times we may all have to turn our hands to tasks that are not part of our normal job.

2. Visitor relations

Tourism is very important to Fair Isle and FIBO operations are funded almost entirely by guests to the Bird Observatory. Visitor relations are therefore possibly the most important aspect of anything the FIBO team does. It is essential to be friendly and helpful to all visitors.

3. Relations with islanders

To carry out its work effectively, the Observatory is dependent on the goodwill of the islanders. They are friendly and easy to get to know, and it is absolutely crucial that all staff should continue to foster the existing goodwill. This is one of the reasons that the FIBO team help out in communal Isle events, such as baling and rounding up the hill sheep. Another reason is that they're good fun!

Accommodation (single room), three meals a day and use of a washing machine are provided for seasonal wardening staff at no cost. It is expected that all seasonal wardening staff will assist with any domestic duties as requested by the Head of Ornithology, and that they take the time to chat with Observatory guests at meal times, explaining the ornithological work of FIBO and answering any questions about the island.

All staff will be able to use the Observatory vehicles (provided they have a valid driving licence) for work, but personal use is not permitted.

Given the charitable status of the Observatory, travel expenses will be reimbursed on the assumption that staff travel by the cheapest means possible and are dependent on completion of the agreed contract. This will vary depending on where staff are travelling from in the UK, but travel from the mainland to Shetland and onwards to Fair Isle will be reimbursed according to the current price of a foot passenger travelling from Aberdeen to Lerwick on the Northlink ferry and the cost of the Good Shepherd ferry crossing to Fair Isle, irrespective of the means of transport actually chosen.

Please note: there is a no-smoking policy throughout all buildings owned and used by FIBO, including the use of e-cigarettes.

For more information on the Observatory and island you may want to look at the following websites: www.fairisle.org.uk and www.fairislebirdobs.co.uk