

Wildlife and plants

Raasay has a diverse geology, climate and history which combine to create a variety of habitats for plants and animals. There are acid moors, limestone cliffs, coastal areas, freshwater lochs and bogs. This, and the warming effect of the Gulf Stream, is reflected in the diversity of life to be found in a small area so far north.

Raasay's heather-clad moorland, forests and sea cliffs are home to some 60 species of birds including golden eagle, sea eagle, sparrow hawk, tawny owl, spotted and pied flycatcher and redstart. The seas around the island are also teeming with life. In summer the sheltered bays, sandy inlets and foreshore are alive to the call of nesting waders, oystercatchers, sand pipers and curlews. Golden eagles nest on the island and white-tailed eagles are frequent visitors. Red-throated divers nest by several lochs and great northern divers visit during the winter - though in recent years they have stayed into spring and early summer. On the moors you will very likely see (and especially hear) golden plovers. Ring ouzels are also regular visitors.

The inshore waters with their abundance of shellfish and the freshwater streams and lochs provide an island 'playground' for otters.

Red deer are also plentiful on Raasay.

Basking sharks are often seen in the waters around the island, as are Minke whales and Orca. There are regular sightings of schools of dolphins and porpoises just offshore, and grey seals breed and raise their pups in the inner and outer sounds, the stretches of water between the islands and the Scottish mainland.

The island is extremely rich in flora too with over 800 species of flowering plants and ferns recorded in recent years. There are plants of highly contrasting geographical distribution within Europe, and several nationally rare, scarce, or threatened species.

There are about 40 different native ferns and fern allies found on Raasay, from the aptly named small adder's-tongue to bracken, great horsetail and royal fern.

Many different orchids grow and, in some cases hybridise. Bird's-nest orchid has not been seen for many years but the rare Lapland marsh orchid has a strong presence in one area.

The limestone cliffs on the east side of the island are home to many ferns and flowering plants such as holly fern, dark-red helleborine and mountain avens as well as many more common plants such as wild thyme, wall-rue and fairy flax.



Flowers and plants produce a pageant of colour throughout the year, from violets, primroses and bluebells in early spring, through to the rich colours of the rhododendrons and fragile wild orchids, to purple heather and the golden and red blaze of montbrecia, fuchsia and rowan berries in the late autumn.

Different species of dragonflies and damselflies are widespread; emperor and northern eggar (large day-flying moths with spectacular caterpillars) are often found on the moor.

Beetles are present in many varieties and one visitor comes every year to study them!

