CASE STUDY

Hermaness Boardwalk

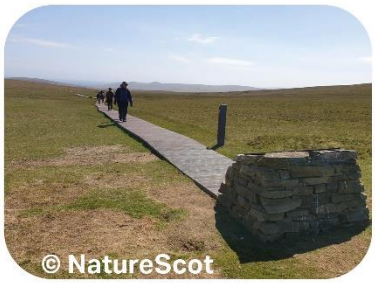
Project Lead: NatureScot

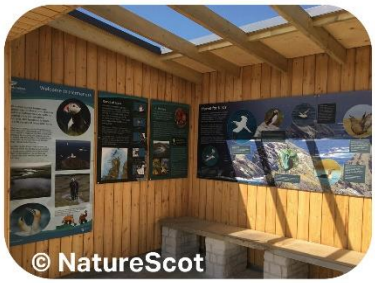
Project Partners: Visit Scotland & Shetland Islands Council

Funding: Natural and Cultural Heritage Fund, Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund, and NatureScot

Aims:

- Protect sensitive peatland habitat from further erosion
- Protect nesting seabirds by re-routing visitors away from sensitive areas
- Enhance the visitor experience through new infrastructure, and increase awareness and understanding of the natural and cultural heritage





Background

Hermaness National Nature Reserve is located at the northern tip of Unst. The reserve is known for its spectacular cliff scenery, internationally important seabird populations, and rich cultural heritage.

Increasing visitor numbers were causing erosion to the fragile peatland habitat and potential disturbance to nesting birds, which led to NatureScot (site manager) closing the path to the historic Muckle Flugga lighthouse signalling station.

Approach

After a meeting with stakeholders, including NatureScot, Burrafirth Common Grazings Committee, Shetland Islands Council Access Officer, and Shetland Amenity Trust Peatland Action Officer it was identified that the installation of an upgraded boardwalk would be the ideal solution. The project utilised a recycled plastic boardwalk, offering a low maintenance, non-slip, long-lasting and recyclable solution suited to the boggy environment.

The project also included additional improvements; an information shelter for visitors, toilets and improved parking at the reserve entrance, enhanced trail signage to provide clear guidance for visitors.

Outcome

The project was completed successfully with nearly 2km of new boardwalk installed. The path to Muckle Flugga lighthouse was reopened, allowing visitors to enjoy a circular route around the reserve while protecting the peatland and bird nest sites. The new interpretation and signage have also enhanced the visitor experience and provided opportunities to demonstrate the threats to marine ecosystems, such as climate change.

Since its opening in May 2022, the new facilities have attracted record numbers of visitors and ensuring the long-term preservation of the reserve's sensitive habitats and wildlife.

This case study was co-written with NatureScot and forms part of a wider document produced by UHI Shetland, co-developed with the Shetland community and funded by the Marine Fund Scotland.

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