



WILDLIFE GUIDE

Scotland's Southern Coast

Where every
name tells a story

Solway Firth

Partnership



This wildlife guide is an introduction to the creatures and plants that have inspired place names on the long and varied coast of Dumfries and Galloway.

Habitats range from the vast tidal flats of the inner Solway Firth to the sea cliffs of the Rhins and provide many opportunities to get privileged views of wildlife.

Visit one of the coastal nature reserves to see wildlife and go to visitor centres to find out more about wildlife watching. Ask people who know the area where the good places are to go or get a detailed Ordnance Survey map and plan your own adventure.



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**Dumfries
& Galloway**



COASTAL WILDLIFE



All names begin by describing a place to another person or group of people, as a way of helping us find our way in the world. Some place names have existed for hundreds of years, while others are a modern phenomenon, but they all tell a story. Place names can provide clues about where to see wildlife but also reveal what people consider noteworthy. For example Hawk's Hole indicates the haunt of peregrines on the cliffs and Seals Cave a haul-out for grey seals.

Place names sometimes identify the locations where wildlife was found in the past. Wild cats, for example, have been extinct in Dumfries and Galloway since the early 1800s but feature in several place names suggesting that the rugged coast was once home to these handsome predators.

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Find out more about the connections between place names and social history, local customs and beliefs by visiting:
www.solwayfirthpartnership.co.uk/solway-coastwise



EVERY NAME TELLS A STORY



Enjoy your visit to the coast but remember to be careful.



Scottish weather can be unpredictable. Check weather forecasts and take appropriate clothing and footwear.



Scottish coasts can be rugged and remote, so tell a family member or friend where you are going and when you expect to be back.



The Solway coast has one of the biggest tidal ranges in the world. Remember to check tide times to avoid getting stranded on the vast sandflats or tidal bays.




The coast is bursting with life so try and avoid disturbing wildlife, particularly shore-nesting birds in spring.



The coast is beautiful and to keep it that way, take your litter home with you.


TAKE CARE





Juniper is a long lived, native tree with 'berries' that are used to flavour food and drink. It thrives in some of the harshest environments in Scotland and is found on remote crags in upland areas as well as on the coast where it grows flattened against exposed rock faces with a gnarled trunk.

This very slow growing plant forms a low growing carpet but can be over 200 years old. Juniper can be found on many west facing coasts, particularly on the Rhins, but you need a keen eye to spot it clinging onto high cliffs.

 Spot juniper when on cliff top walks



Juniper Rock NW960648


JUNIPER

1



The limpet with its conical shell of varying size and colour has radiating ridges and is one of the most distinct molluscs to be found on our rocky shores.

They are so numerous that their presence is unlikely to have inspired a place name, however, a rock marked on old maps north of Portpatrick is called Barnaugh, a name derived from *bàirnich* the Gaelic for limpet. The rock was probably given this name because of its cone shape rather than the limpets that cling to its surface.

 Spot common limpet on any rocky shore

2


LIMPET

Barnaugh NW993543
(not shown on modern maps)



Dove Cave is the most common wildlife place name found on the Dumfries and Galloway coast. The cave dwelling rock dove is the wild ancestor of domestic pigeons and would have been an important source of food in the past.

Today, even on the remote Galloway coast, rock doves have inter bred with their domestic cousins resulting in pigeons with a variety of colours and patterns. However many cliff dwelling pigeons still retain the markings of wild birds with a grey body, two dark wing bars, a blue head and white rump.

 Spot rock doves on any cliff top walk



Dove cave NX225515



ROCK DOVE / FERAL PIGEON

3



Foxes, badgers and otters are common on the coast, but tend to be secretive and so to see them is often a surprise. Inchshalloch, a name shown on old maps for a small promontory at the Mull of Galloway is a name derived from Gaelic *inis* and *sionnach* meaning island of the fox.

The nearby name Foxes Rattle is also no longer shown on modern maps but confirms this as a place where foxes live. Rattle describes a heap of loose stones used as a foxes den – a term that appears to be unique to this area.

i Spot foxes on any early morning or evening shoreline walk

4


FOX

Inchshannoch/Foxes Rattle NX154302
(not shown on modern maps)



Maidenhead Shell is a colloquial name for the cowrie shell on the Isle of Man, as well as in parts of Galloway. Although not at all spectacular in size, the glossy, finely ribbed cowrie shell is believed to bring good luck to the keeper.

It must have been such a prized find that it was worth naming locations where the pretty little shell could be gathered. In fact if you are fortunate and look for long enough you might find these beautifully formed shells on any sandy beach in Galloway.

 Spot cowrie shells washed up on sandy bays



Maidenhead Bay NX091412



COWRIE


5



The cormorant is a striking bird often seen roosting on favourite rocks and drying its feathers with a distinctive wing-spreading posture.

The bird has a number of different names; Scart is used on place names on the Rhins and is probably derived from *Skarfr* the Old Norse for cormorant, while on the rest of the Galloway coast Ducker is used in place names and refers to the Scots word Dooker meaning diver.

In Galloway, cormorants are sometimes nicknamed 'elders' after the church elders who dressed in black!

 Spot cormorants on all rocky shores



Pyot is a Scots name applied to birds with pied plumage with Shore or Sea Pyot being used to describe the oystercatcher. This large, stocky, black and white wading bird is common on all types of coast. It has a distinctive loud 'peeping' call and a long, orange-red bill which it uses to prize open or break into shellfish.

In the summer it nests above the strandline on rocks, shingle or sandy beaches and the speckled eggs are surprisingly hard to spot. In the winter they gather in large numbers on the mudflats of estuaries.

 Spot oystercatchers anywhere on the coast



Pyot Hole NX486454
(not shown on modern maps)



OYSTERCATCHER

7



Corby is a Scots name for the raven, the largest of the crow family, with a distinct shape and a heavy bill. Tumbling in the updrafts of a sea cliff the 'gronking' call of a raven is one of the most evocative sounds of our rugged shore line.

Ravens often return to the same spot each spring and bring new nest material so that the nests become large, untidy piles of sticks. These towers of sticks often remain as a land mark long after the nest has been abandoned.



Spot raven on remote coasts

8


RAVEN

Corbies Cove NX528522



Rock samphire is a succulent plant which can be found growing on the sun warmed cliffs of southwest Scotland, where it is at the furthest north of its range. The pungent leaves were once collected to make into a pickle.

The Scots name for samphire is Pasper, with Paspery meaning an area covered in samphire. Pasbuery Rock probably refers to the presence of samphire on the cliffs. Whilst the place name Sapphire, has nothing to do with precious gems, but is thought to come from the mispronunciation of samphire which is a common plant on this stretch of coastline.

 Spot rock samphire on cliff faces



Pasbuery Rock NW959641
Sapphire NX674447



ROCK SAMPHIRE

9



Crabs come in many guises with descriptive names such as velvet swimming crab and green shore crab. *Partan* is a Gaelic word for crab and is used more specifically in Lowland Scots to describe edible crabs.

These can be identified by the distinctive piecrust margin to a reddish shell. A place name with *partan* in it is likely to have been a traditional fishing spot to set creels for crabs. Today's commercial fishermen still catch crabs and lobsters from their small boats along the rocky shores of Dumfries and Galloway.




Spot young edible crabs under rocks on very low tides



The flounder is a common flatfish found on the seabed where they lie concealed in the sand in order to prey on passing worms and small crustaceans. It often ventures inshore, where it can get trapped in pools left by the receding tide.

The flounder in Scotland has never reached the top of the fine-dining flatfish hierarchy, like sole or plaice, but they can still make good eating. Known as a Fleuk or Fluke in Scots or *Leabag* in Gaelic. It is believed the rock named Craiglebbock is derived from the Gaelic *Creag leabag* meaning flounder rock.

 Spot flounder in shallow tidal pools



Fleuk Hole NX332447
Craiglebbock Rock NX990639


FLOUNDER

11



The mussel, misspelt muscle in this place name, has a blue / black oval shell and is a common sight on any rocky shore. They have adapted to withstand the pounding of waves and strong currents by anchoring themselves to rocks with threads called 'byssus'.

When they are submerged these bivalves draw in and filter particles from up to 45 litres of sea water a day. *Clachan* in the name Muscle Clachan is Gaelic for stones but in Scots has come to mean village. It describes a place where there are extensive beds of mussels and a good place to harvest shellfish.

 Spot mussels on any rocky shore



The study of place names can tell us about wildlife distribution in the past. It is useful to know where species that have become extinct were previously found so they can be considered for reintroduction. Gled, a Scots name for kite, occurs in the coastal place name Gleds Nest supporting the reintroduction of red kite in the area.

Keaw, a local Scots name used for the 'red legged jackdaw' or chough, features in a coastal cave called Keaw Cove. Although no longer breeding on our cliffs, this name identifies a haunt of choughs in the past, and perhaps a place where they will return.



LOST BUT NOT FORGOTTEN



COASTAL NATURE RESERVES

- A** RSPB MULL OF GALLOWAY
- B** RSPB CROOK OF BALDOON
- C** WIGTOWN BAY LOCAL NATURE RESERVE & VISITOR CENTRE

- D** NTS ROCKCLIFFE
- E** SWT SOUTHWICK
- F** RSPB MERSEHEAD

- G** SWT DRUMMAIGS
- H** SNH CAERLAVEROCK
- I** WWT CAERLAVEROCK RESERVE & VISITOR CENTRE

Solway Firth

Partnership

Design: Findlay Design
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 Grey seal, Raven, Rock dove, Fox
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 Tom Langlands: Oystercatcher
 Paul Newland: Flounder
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