

Coasts and Islands: Unique Coasts - Liam McArthur MSP

Hello, my name is Liam McArthur, and I'm the Member of the Scottish Parliament for Orkney. I'm also the Nature Champion for the Scottish Primrose.

Scotland's coasts and islands are teeming with life. Islands, such as the Inner and Outer Hebrides, Shetland and my own Orkney constituency, are home to extraordinary beaches, dunes, peatlands, and fertile coastal grasslands known as 'machair'.

Machair is Gaelic for 'fertile' and refers to one of the rarest habitats in Europe. Occurring on the exposed west-facing shores of Scotland and Ireland, these grasslands offer a stronghold for wildlife and for coastal wildflowers.

The diversity of habitats on Scotland's islands mean that they are a haven for rare plants - there are around 500 different types of native plants on Orkney alone! And if you happen to look in the right places, you may also come across a very rare plant, found in Caithness, Sutherland, Orkney, and nowhere else in the world – the Scottish Primrose.

This tiny, elusive plant has elegant purple petals that form into a flower no bigger than a fingernail, and they grow less than 2km from the sea, on clifftops, in mosaics of heath and machair, and on rocky outcrops – a jewel of Scotland's coasts.