



AROUND THE WORLD PUFFINS ARE IN DECLINE BUT THIS IS ONE PLACE WHERE THEY ARE ON THE INCREASE. IT DETAILS HOW TO VISIT THE ISLAND.

THE PUFFINS OF SKOMER ISLAND

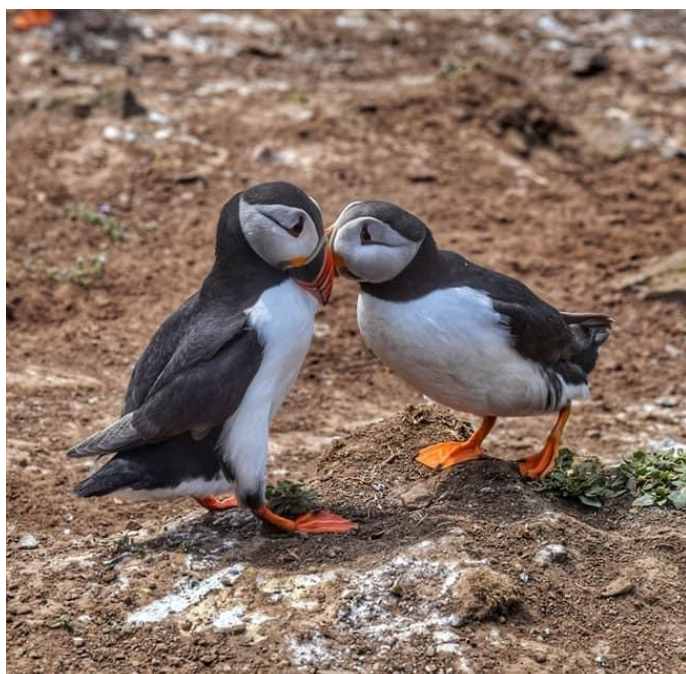
Arguably the most famous of Pembrokeshire's sea-birds



Now that the days of summer are here thoughts turn to the coast. Pembrokeshire is easily accessible and should you wish to see puffins before they return to the sea now is the time to visit. Most of these birds are in decline around the British coastline but Skomer Island off the Pembrokeshire coast has a breeding colony of around 30,000 and these are thought to be on the increase.

They belong to the Auk family and the males and females are difficult to tell apart. They live in excess of twenty years and although ungainly on land they are agile in the water. They use their feet for steering and their wings become flippers which can propel them to considerable depths. Although in decline worldwide 30,000 birds return to their burrows on Skommer each year. The numbers of visitors to the island are carefully managed to prevent erosion and to control the impact of people on the wildlife so only 250 visitors a day can visit the island when weather conditions are favourable. They belong to the Auk family and the males and females are difficult to tell apart. They live in excess of twenty years and although ungainly on land they are agile in the water. They use their feet for steering and their wings become flippers which

They are one of the country's favourite birds but they only leave the sea to breed. It is also at this time that they acquire their beautiful brightly coloured bills and as they waddle to their burrows with beaks full of sand eels to feed their single puffling they are an endearing sight. Even in flight they create a comical shape with their round bodies, whirling wings and bright orange feet stretched out behind them.



Waiting for the boat to the island

Bringing a catch back for a puffling

A stand off

can propel them to considerable depths. Although in decline worldwide 30,000 birds return to their burrows on Skommer each year. The numbers of visitors to the island are carefully managed to prevent erosion and to control the impact of people on the wildlife so only 250 visitors a day can visit the island when weather conditions are favourable.

It takes just 15 minutes by boat. It is therefore no surprise to learn that with no pre booking queuing starts early. On the day we visited it began at 5.30 am! Visitors have about five hours to explore. There are no facilities and with thousands of burrows belonging to other birds, rabbits and voles it is important to keep to the paths and not to hinder these little birds scurrying to their burrows. Seagulls are always around looking to steal their catch of sand eels so visitors are reminded not to get too engrossed in their picture taking.

Should you wish to spend more than a single day on Skomer overnight stays and short breaks are possible in a restored building but accommodation is basic. Demand however is still high. For those who do not manage to secure a ticket to land on the island other boats cruise the waters off shore and they also offer a chance to see these endearing birds.

No one goes away disappointed with time spent here and all

extol the work of the Wild Life Trust for their conservation work and are glad to assist them in any way they can. Should you wish to see the puffins for yourself remember that the breeding season is only a few weeks long.

Important information

Bad weather or high seas may delay the boats or interfere with sailing altogether. You can keep an eye on the our Boat Twitter Feed which can be viewed on the Day Visit page

Pre-booking of tickets is now permitted but to avoid disappointment it is recommended you book as early as you can as numbers per day are strictly regulated

Images:

Puffin returning to its burrow

Determining a route

The cliff top

Puffling, now almost fully grown, peeps out from the burrow

