



Ymddiriedolaeth Natur  
**De a Gorllewin Cymru**  
Wildlife Trust of  
**South & West Wales**

## SKOMER ISLAND NNR

# ANNUAL REPORT 2023



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## Data Usage Policy

Skomer seabird demographic data is submitted to the SMP database each year. WTSWW remain committed to making seabird data from Skomer available free of charge for individual interest and academic requests and datasets can be downloaded from the SMP Online Portal. Our annual reports can also be found on the WTSWW website.

**Requests for data for commercial (development) purposes are chargeable and commercial users must contact WTSWW before proceeding to download or interrogate any Skomer data. The modest fees charged for data release contribute towards the fieldwork costs (including the experienced staff and specialist equipment) involved in collection, verification and management of data and help to ensure the security of future monitoring.**



### **Recommended citation for this report:**

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 WEATHER

Weather data is collected from two sources. The first is the nightly island bird log where the day's weather is recorded in brief. The second is from the NRW weather station on Wooltack Point on the Marloes Peninsula (51.7367, -5.2474) which records a number of measurements every ten minutes.

Where figures are compared to an average, they are compared to the nearest weather station run by the Met Office which is in Milford Haven (51.708, -5.055) a distance of 8.48 miles from Wooltack Point, so some differences may occur.

There were a number of storms in the season with seven days with gusts above F7 in April, five days in May, one in June, 20 in July and 13 in August. The maximum wind speed recorded during the seabird season was 96mph on 12<sup>th</sup> April. It was a dry year with 345mm less rain than the historical average, and most months' rainfall records falling below this benchmark.

**March** – The month started with light variable winds, swinging from east through to west north west with no significant storms noted. The first storm of the month hit on the 21<sup>st</sup> with winds hitting F8, subsiding the following day to F7. The end of the month saw mixed weather with some calmer periods of wind surrounded by days of winds frequently hitting F5-6. From 7<sup>th</sup> March onwards, rainfall was recorded on every day bar three until the end of the month. Mean temperatures were below average for the month and rainfall was average for the month. Wind speeds were almost double the ten-year average.

**April** – The first ten days of the month saw variable wind directions with strengths up to F6 but averaging at F4. The middle of the month saw the strongest winds and wettest weather with wind gusts peaking at 96mph on the 12<sup>th</sup>. Winds from the 18<sup>th</sup> onwards were dominated by those from an easterly direction with only a few days of drizzle recorded. Temperatures for the month were average, wind was 50% above average and rainfall was just below average.

**May** – Winds started the month in an easterly direction reaching F6 on the 4<sup>th</sup>. Winds then swung to the south for a few days, coinciding with some rainfall, before switching to the north – with these winds dominating the rest of the month. The maximum wind speed recorded was 50.3mph on 4<sup>th</sup> May. Temperatures were average, wind was slightly above average, and rainfall was less than half the average.

**June** – Variable and light winds dominated the whole month. There were three days of rain until the 23<sup>rd</sup> when the winds swung to the south, bringing showers and more unsettled weather for the rest of the month. This also brought with it the peak month's wind speed of 43.8mph on the final day of June. Temperatures were 1.5 degrees above average, wind was just above average, and rainfall was half the average.

**July** – A windy month with the return of the prevailing south westerly winds. Apart from four days where the wind speed reached F3, the rest of the month averaged at least a F4 or above. Maximum wind speeds were 56.8mph on 15<sup>th</sup> July. Temperatures struggled to top 20°C with only two days doing so: 23°C on 7<sup>th</sup> and 21°C on 9<sup>th</sup>. Temperatures on the whole were one degree above the average, wind was double the average and rainfall was just below average.

**August** – Another windy month with winds at F4 or above for most of the month, except small, settled periods of 7<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup>. The maximum wind speed was 73.6mph on 5<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> August. With the wind came drizzle, showers and fog meaning rainfall was recorded on 20 days. The highest temperature of the month was 21°C recorded on the 10<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>. Temperatures were average, wind was almost double the average and rainfall was just below average.

**September** – A mainly dry and settled start to the month. No one wind direction was dominant until 18<sup>th</sup> September when the wind changed to west / south westerly, rainfall increased, and wind speeds picked up.

The maximum wind speed was 74.6mph, recorded on 27<sup>th</sup> September. A very warm period from 3<sup>rd</sup>–11<sup>th</sup> accounted for the highest temperatures of the month with maximum temperatures averaging 24°C during this period and peaking at 27°C on 9<sup>th</sup>. Temperatures were almost four degrees above average, wind was nearly twice the average and rainfall was just below average. The maximum wind speed was 74.6mph, recorded on 27<sup>th</sup> September.

**October** – Winds were variable through the month with no one direction dominant. There were 10 days of winds above F4, peaking at F7 on the 18<sup>th</sup>. Temperatures were below average, and rainfall was above average (151mm vs 118mm).

**November** – Westerly wind dominated up until the team’s departure on 17<sup>th</sup>. Wind peaked at F7 on the 4<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup>; there were six days at or below F4 until the 17<sup>th</sup>. Temperatures were 1.5 degrees below average and rainfall was just over a third of the average.

Beaufort	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Miles per hour	<1	1-3	4-7	8-12	13-18	19-24	25-31	32-38	39-46	47-54	55-63	64-72	>72

Table 1 Beaufort scale



## 1.2 MAP OF SKOMER

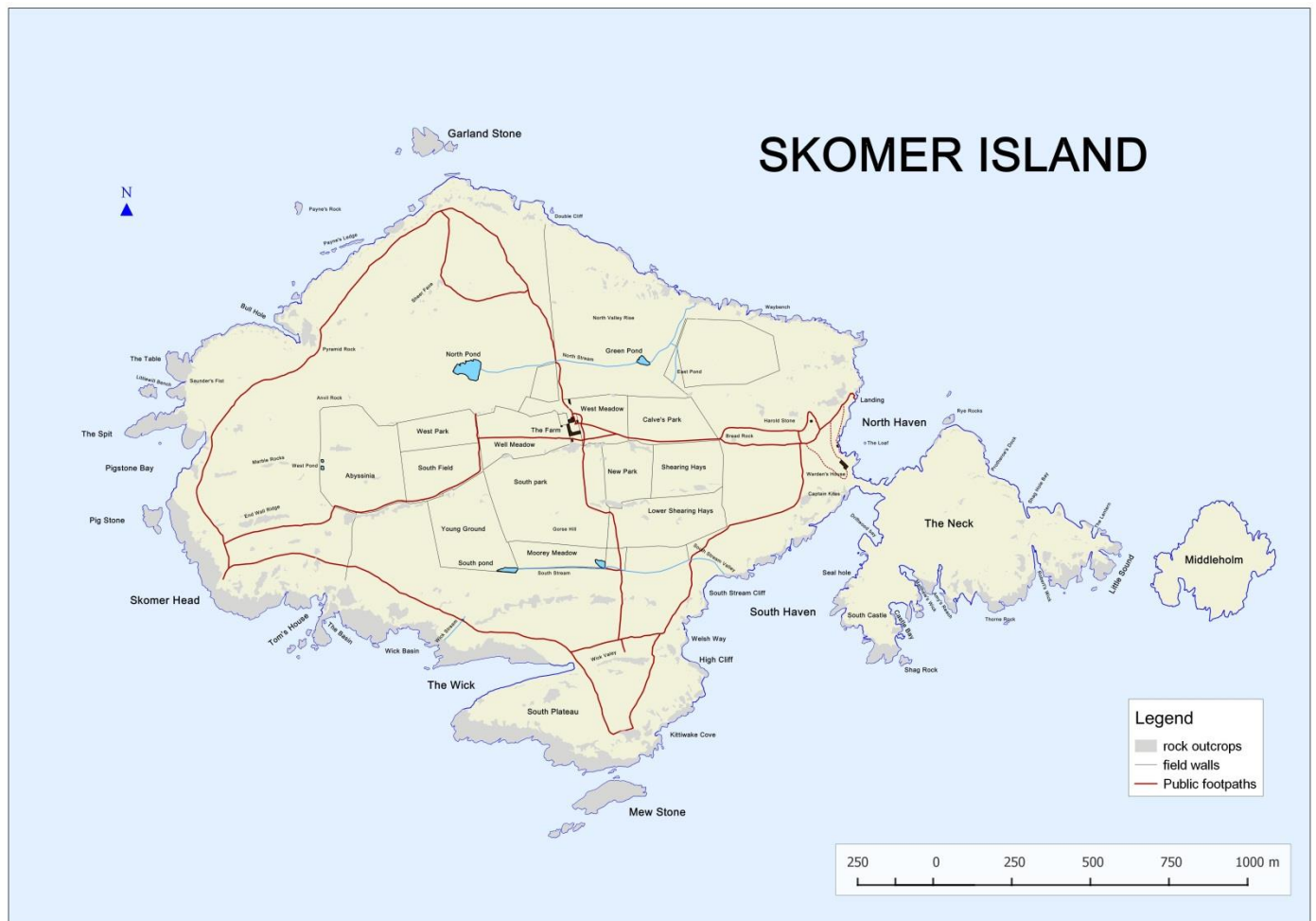


Figure 1 Map of Skomer



## 2 Monitoring and Recording

N.B – The codes referred to during this section, and section eight are codes used directly in the Skomer management plan. The management plan is approved by Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and the Island Conservation Advisory Committee (ICAC). These codes follow a standardised system which is:

First letter

R – Recording project

M – Management project

Second letter – Further denotes the element withing recording – for example RA is the recording of fauna, where RF is the recording vegetation. The number codes which follow are unique to that group, species and project.

### 2.1 BIRDS

#### *Feature: Seabirds*

#### **RA 10/09 Record any significant seabird burrow collapse**

No significant seabird burrow collapse was recorded in the seabird season in 2023. Burrow collapse was noted as being a regular occurrence on the Neck seal round in 2023. It is estimated that up to 50 burrows were collapsed as part of routine monitoring – this was exacerbated by a lack of vegetation and the resulting fragility of the paths on the Neck. Six of these burrows had birds in them and none were injured.

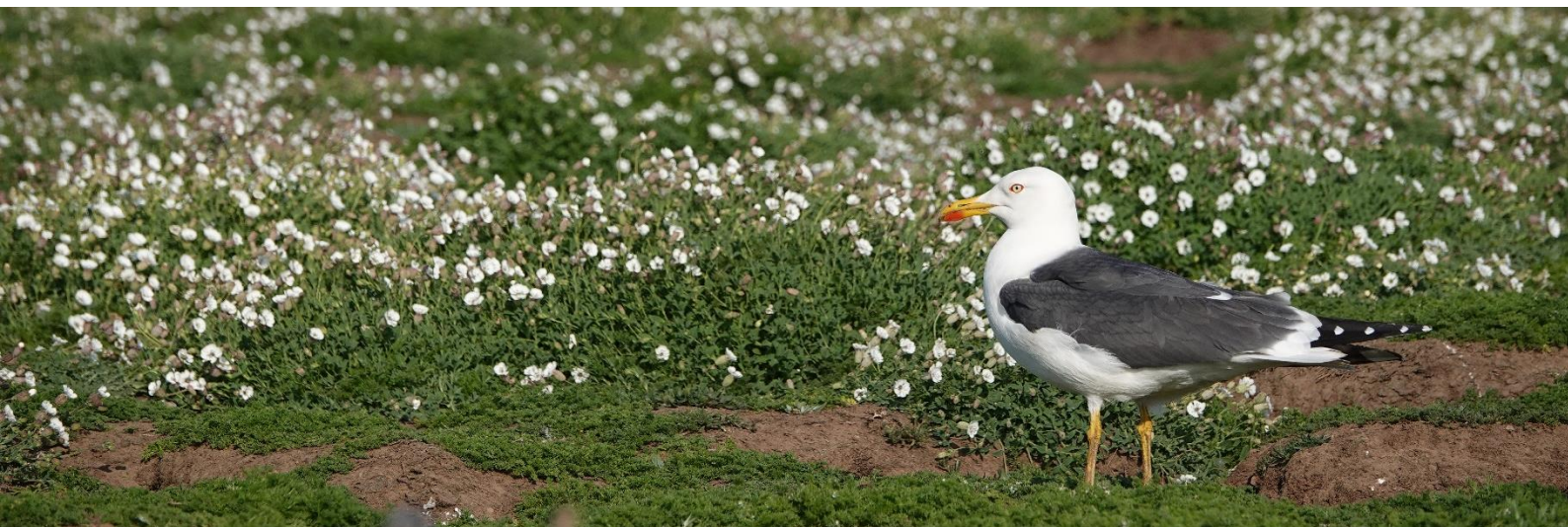
#### **Seabird Summary**

The following is a summary of results from the seabird season on Skomer in 2023. The objectives reported here were completed by the Skomer team. A more detailed account, including results of adult survival studies carried out by others, can be found in the Skomer SMP Key Site seabird report to JNCC and BTO (Newman, L. et al. 2023).

**Northern Fulmar:** The whole island population was 472 AOS. This is 66 fewer AOS than 2022. Productivity in 2023 was 0.22 which is a decrease on 2022 (0.39) and the lowest value on record.

**Manx Shearwater:** Within the standard annual census plots, the number of responses (1,080) was 167 fewer than 2022 (1,247) and the fewest responses since 2010.

**Lesser Black-backed Gull:** The whole island population estimate was 5,912 AON which is 11.38% lower than 2022.



**Herring Gull:** This year's whole island count of 278 AON is an increase of 12 AON compared to 2022. Productivity was 1.18 which is the highest since 1997.

**Great Black-backed Gull:** 121 AON were counted in 2023 which is seven more than 2022. Productivity was 1.6, which is below the five-year average of 1.73.

**Black-legged Kittiwake:** 1,291 AON were counted in 2023, which is a decrease on the previous year's 1,544. Productivity was 0.37, a decrease compared to the previous year (0.63), and below the average productivity for the last five years (0.67).

**Common Guillemot:** 29,141 individuals were counted in 2023, which is an 8.33% decrease on 2022. Productivity was 0.70 which is a decrease of 0.03 when compared to 2022 and below the five-year average productivity of 0.72.

**Razorbill:** 10,080 individuals were counted in 2023; this represents a decrease of 1.1% compared to 2022. Productivity was 0.44 fledglings per active and regular nest site which is a decrease on 2022 (0.47) and below the previous five-year average of 0.53.

**Atlantic Puffin:** A total of 42,513 individual Puffins were counted in April. This represents an increase of 9.30% on 2022 (38,896).

**Cormorant:**

RA11/32 No Cormorants bred on Skomer this year.

RA11/33 No productivity data available.

**Shag:**

RA11/34 Five pairs bred on Skomer in 2023, three at Double Cliff, one on the Garland Stone and one on the Mew Stone.

RA11/35 Eight large chicks were seen to fledge from the Double Cliff and Garland Stone nests.

**RP/01 Record severe storm effects which affect seabirds**

There were multiple wind events during the seabird season which had the potential to impact seabirds. The first came on 12<sup>th</sup> April where gusts reached 96mph. July was also exceptionally windy with maximum winds reaching 57mph. Winds during July reached F6 on four dates and reached F7 on a further two dates.

**Feature: Short-eared Owl**

**RA 11/43 Monitor Short-eared Owl population and distribution of nests**

In 2023, three pairs nested on Skomer. Although it is unclear how many chicks fledged, a minimum of two were seen flying on 2<sup>nd</sup> July. Chicks were heard at both North Valley Rise and Bull Hole nests sites earlier in the season.



**Feature: Chough**

**RA 11/44 Monitor Chough population and location of nests**

Seven territories were held with pairs attempting to breed at: Amy’s Reach (three chicks), The Wick (one chick), Welsh Way (one chick), South Castle (one chick), the Amos (failed), The Lantern (failed) and Payne’s Ledge (failed).

**RA 11/45 Monitor Chough relationship with national trends**

The following data is taken from the report ‘Annual surveillance of chough populations in the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park-2023’ Hodges, J.E. & Haycock, R. J. 2024.

Status	Skomer Island	Skokholm Island	SPA	% National Park total
No. occupied territories	8	5	13	14
No. pairs attempting to breed	7	5	12	13
No. nests with eggs	6	5	11	13
No. nests with young	6	5	11	14
No. successful pairs	4	2	6	8
No. young known to have fledged	6	3	9	5
No. non-breeding choughs <sup>1</sup>	7	0	7	7-8

**Notes**

<sup>1</sup>Estimate based on the numbers observed during the co-ordinated survey of non-breeding choughs around 22<sup>nd</sup>/23<sup>rd</sup> April 2023

Table 2 General summary of data on the Chough population in the SPA – 2023

Productivity expressed as:	Skomer Island	Skokholm Island	SPA	National Park
Mean no. young fledged/confirmed territory-holding pair	0.8	1.6	1.4	1.8
Mean no. young fledged/pair attempting to breed	0.9	1.6	1.3	1.9
Mean no. young fledged/successful pair	1.5	1.5	1.5	2.5

Table 3 Productivity in the SPA and National Park



**Feature: Peregrine**

**RA 11/46 Monitor Peregrine population and distribution of nests**

Four territories were held at the Garland Stone, Protheroe’s Dock, High Cliff and Bull Hole. The first breeding behaviour was seen on 9<sup>th</sup> April with a food drop and display seen at Garland Stone. The first chicks (two) were seen at Bull Hole on 7<sup>th</sup> June with a single chick seen at High Cliff on 15<sup>th</sup> June. The first fledged chick was seen on 26<sup>th</sup> June, at High Cliff. No chicks were seen at Protheroe’s Dock or Garland Stone.

**RA11/47 Relationship with national trends**

When compared to the Pembrokeshire population, the poor productivity and slight drop in the number of pairs correlates. Summarised figures for Pembrokeshire are as follows:

Minimum no. of occupied territories	Minimum no. of pairs attempting to breed	Minimum no. of young fledged
30 (33)	20 (25)	16 (21)

Table 4 Peregrine breeding summary (2022 figures in parentheses) – Pembrokeshire Bird Report 2023

Further information from the Pembrokeshire bird report states that the local population of Peregrines is declining.

**Feature: Bird assemblage not-qualifying**

**RA 10/05 Record bird populations which are not qualifying features**

The annual Breeding Bird Survey was conducted in 2023. Bird migration is followed by the staff, volunteers, researchers, overnight guests and anyone with an interest in the subject and recorded in the daily bird log. Please see the bird report for a full systematic breakdown of every species recorded on Skomer in 2023.

**Annual census of breeding Oystercatcher**

In 2023, 59 pairs bred on Skomer.

**Annual census of breeding Curlew**

In 2023, three pairs were noted as breeding. One chick fledged.



**Feature: Little Owl**

**RA10/06 Record/annual census**

A single Little Owl was seen sporadically through the summer. First seen at the Farm on 2<sup>nd</sup> June, it then re-located to End Wall Ridge / Skomer Head through August and September. No sign of breeding behaviour was seen.

**Feature: Canada Goose**

**RA 10/07 Annual census of breeding Canada Goose**

A total of 11 pairs nested on the island in 2023.

**RA 10/08 Record Canada Goose in winter/non-breeding population**

Canada Geese were recorded in the daily bird log throughout the season.

Month	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov
Max count	24	23	37	27	19	32	96	78	7

Table 5 Monthly maximum Canada Goose counts

## 2.2 BIOSECURITY

A network of biosecurity monitoring stations was established in 2021 to actively monitor for incursions of invasive non-native species (INNS) (Figure 2). Together with this, a biosecurity plan was set up which will be integrated into the management plan.

Every month, surveillance stations are loaded with two wax chew blocks, an ink pad, and peanut butter as a lure. They are then left for a week and checked for presence of INNS. Checks were started in March and ended in November when the team moved off the island. In total, 324 wax blocks and 144 ink pads were deployed. No signs of INNS were seen with all droppings, tracks and bite marks being attributed to Wood Mice, Skomer Voles, snails, and slugs.

A routine check of the island by Biosecurity for Wales conservation detection dog, Jinx, was carried out on 10<sup>th</sup> October. This involved checks of North Haven buildings and the Farm complex.

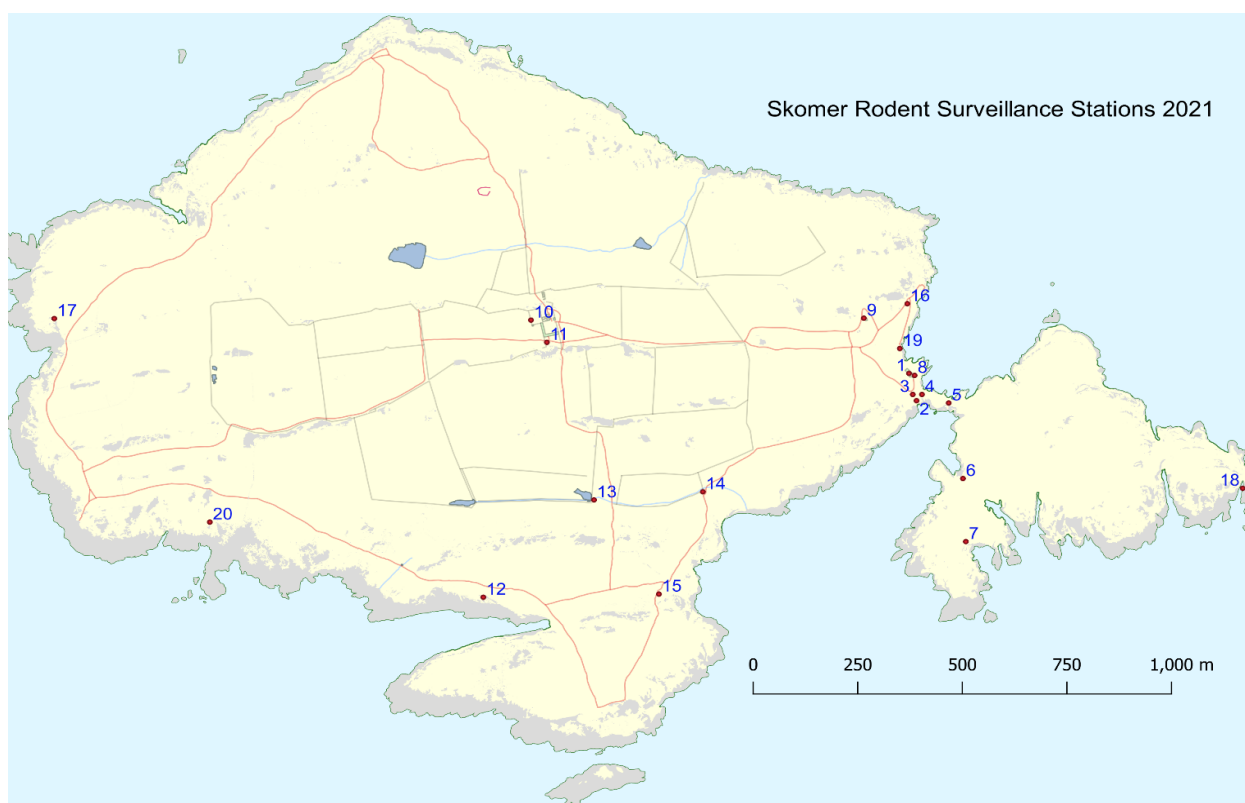


Figure 2 Map of rodent surveillance stations in 2021

Station number	Station Name	NGR	Station number	Station Name	NGR
1 (box 18)	NHV	SM7350709398	11 (box 8)	The Hut	SM7264109478
2 (box 12)	SHV – no longer operational	SM7352509328	12(new box 15)	The Wick (moved in 2021)	New grid ref: SM 72497 08812
3 (box 5)	NHV Track – no longer operational	SM7351609344	13 (new box 10)	Moorey Mere	SM7275609068
4 (box 2)	Isthmus West	SM7353809344	14(new box 11)	South Stream	SM7301409094
5 (box 19)	Isthmus	SM7360209322	15 (new box 14)	Wick Valley Ridge/High Cliff	New grid ref: SM 72909 08831
6 (box 7)	Driftwood Bay	SM7363609128	16 (New box 20)	Landing Lime Kiln	SM7350309577
7 (box 16)	Castle Bay	SM7364308966	17 (New box 13)	Pigstone Bay	SM 71463 09539
8 (box 4)	NHV - Balcony	SM7351409394	18 (New box 6)	Lantern	SM 74305 09103
9 (box 17)	Lime Kiln	SM7339909540	19 (New box 1)	Boat Shed	SM 73485 09462
10 (box 3)	Compost Bin	SM7260309535	20 (New box 9)	Tom's House	SM 71835 09016

Table 6 Locations of surveillance boxes on Skomer



### 2.2.1 Incursion response

Following an incursion response in December 2022, there have been no further signs of any incursion. Winter checks were followed up by Jinx and the team in January.

## 2.3 MAMMALS

### ***Feature: Skomer Vole***

#### **RA 00/04 Record population of Skomer Voles in study plot**

Monitoring of the established Vole plots (North Valley and West of the Farm) was recommenced in 2023 by Dr Claire Risley from Aberystwyth University.

### ***Feature: Grey Seal***

Grey Seal productivity was monitored by WTSWW under NRW contract as a Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ) project. B. Büeche carried out this work, assisted by S. Bond who acted as Seal Assistant in September. Furthermore, E. Stubbings, C. Aston, R. Knott and long-term volunteers helped collect the data. The report was submitted to NRW.

The following summary is taken from the seal report; a comprehensive report can be found here. To find the full seal report, please see: Büche, B. & Bond, S. 2023. Grey Seal Breeding Census Skomer Island 2023. NRW Evidence Report number 750 The Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales.

250 pups were born on Skomer in 2023, which is five less than in 2022. On the Marloes Peninsula 175 pups were born, giving a total of 425 pups for the Skomer MCZ as a whole, which is 22 fewer pups than in the previous year.

2023 was an early pupping season, with the first pups born on North Haven beach and at Driftwood Bay on 28<sup>th</sup> July. The peak of pupping was in weeks 36 and 37. The most productive beaches were North Haven (50 pups) and Matthew's Wick (50 pups).

172 pups are known, or assumed, to have survived on Skomer. The fate of 15 pups is unknown, giving a survival rate of 73%. On the mainland 155 pups are known or assumed to have survived, giving a survival rate of 89%. The overall survival rate for the whole of the Skomer MCZ is 80%.

In 2023 the maximum haul-out (on the main haul-out sites) was 504 seals. North Haven had its peak haul-out count of 198 seals on 14<sup>th</sup> November. Driftwood Bay had 89 seals on 7<sup>th</sup> November, Matthew's Wick had 123 seals on 3<sup>rd</sup> November and Castle Bay had 146 seals on 7<sup>th</sup> October.

135 seals with scars or tags were photographed in 2023, of which 61 (52 cows, one seal with unknown sex and eight bulls) were re-identified from previous photos.

The oldest returning cow was HD-014. This animal was rescued from Penberth, Cornwall and treated for an ulcerated left eye in February 2002. The oldest bulls to have returned to Skomer in 2023 were 12.NHV.B06, NK.065 and NK.068. All three animals were seen for the first time on Skomer in 2012.

In 2023 ten tagged seals were observed, of which five were known from previous years. One immature cow which was seen in 2022 was identified in 2023. She came from southern France.

Of the 250 cows which pupped on Skomer in 2023, 40 had scars and 48% of identifiable breeding cows were returning cows. The oldest breeding female was LS.017. She was seen on Skomer in 2009 for the first time.

29 individual seals were photographed with obvious signs of being entangled in nets at some time in their lives. Between August and November 2023, the percentage of hauled-out seals with entanglement fluctuated day to day, the average for the season was 2.1%.



## Cetaceans

Standardised hour-long cetacean watches were conducted from the Garland Stone and Skomer Head. These were carried out to CBMWC methodology by weekly volunteers. The 2023 data was sent to CBMWC and the Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ) staff.

All cetacean sightings were also recorded in the daily wildlife log.

## Rabbits

### RA 00/05 Annual Rabbit census

Monthly Rabbit counts were carried out in the study plots on the central fields, the Wick grasslands and South Plateau. In 2023, the total number of Rabbits counted was 357. This is around half of the number recorded in the same period in 2022. It should be noted that as Bracken encroaches on the study plots year on year, the view of each area becomes increasingly obscured so that there could easily be many more Rabbits than counted.

	March	April	May	June	July	September	October
<b>Plot</b>							
Plot 1+2+3	14	24	16	8	10	3	1
Plot 4	3	7	3	1	0	1	1
Wick Grassland	34	31	7	11	22	18	17
South Plateau	20	29	8	10	11	16	31

Table 7 Rabbit numbers

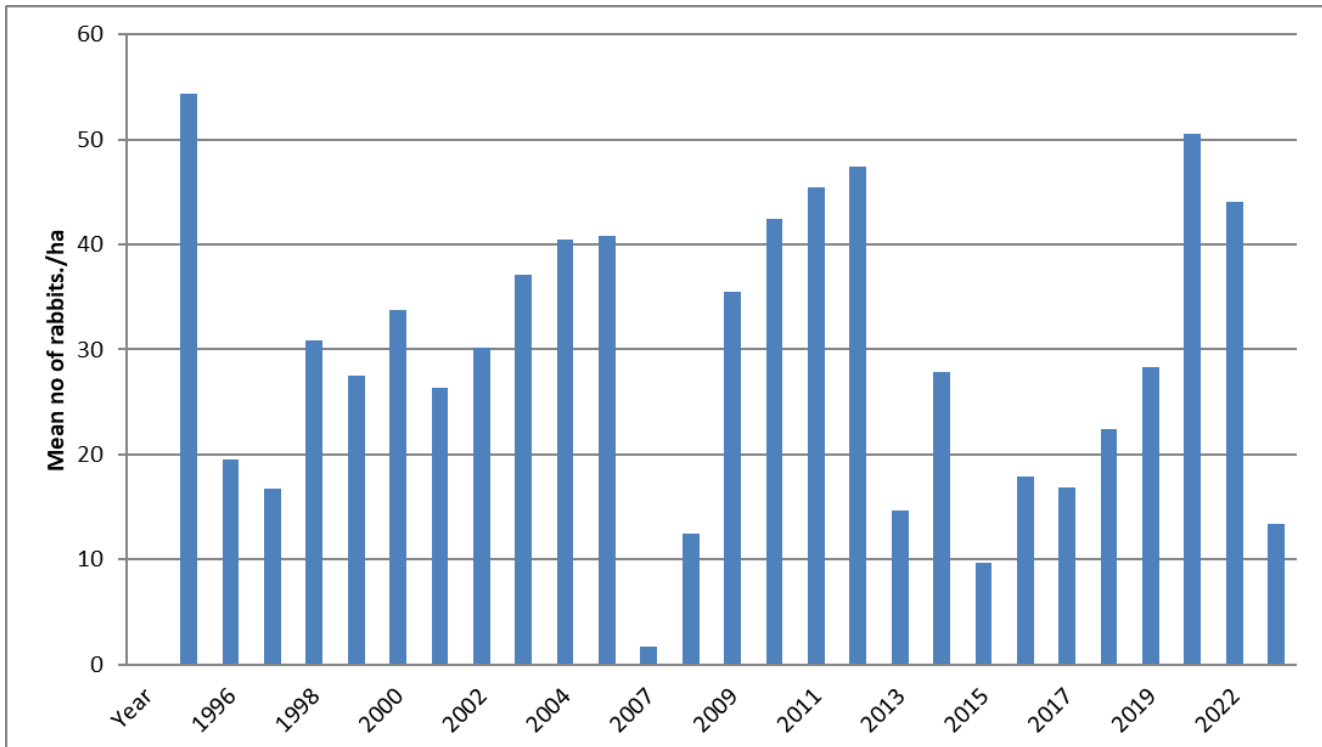


Figure 3 Mean number of Rabbits per hectare. Not counted in 2020

## 2.4 INVERTEBRATES

### *Feature: Lepidoptera*

#### **RA40/01 Annual butterfly transect**

The island butterfly transect was carried out once a week when conditions were suitable between April and September. The butterfly transect data were submitted online to the UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme. In total, 11 transects were carried out between 15<sup>th</sup> April and 3<sup>rd</sup> September, with 144 individual butterflies of eight species being recorded.

#### **Moths**

Moth trapping was carried out at the Farm throughout the season. All moth records were saved on the Skomer Warden computer under Natural History/Invertebrates and were also sent to the county moth recorder. Highlights included a total of six *Convolvulus* Hawk-moths seen between August and October and several Vestal moths throughout the season.

## 2.5 HERPTILES



Slow Worms, Common Lizards, Common Frogs, Common Toads and Palmate Newts, as well as any small mammals found under the refugia, were recorded on two set transects throughout the season. The Farm transect has been going for many years and the wider island transect was set up in 2013 and has been continued since. LTVs Erin Gold and Lotti Budd-Thiemann worked with the Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (ARC) Trust to bring island surveys in line with their new methodology. Transects were carried out by weekly volunteers and the data sent to ARC.

## 2.6 LICHENS

### *Feature: Lichen assemblage*

#### **RF50/01 Record rare lichens**

The population of *Teloschistes flavicans* was present on the rocks at the top of the Amos.

## **2.7 VEGETATION**

### **RF00/01 Commission low-level, high resolution aerial photography**

Not required until 2027.

### **RF00/02 Record permanent vegetation quadrats**

Not required until 2026.

### **RF00/03 Photographic vegetation surveillance**

Not required until 2026.

### **RF00/04 Record of significant damage to vegetation**

No significant damage to vegetation was recorded.

### **RF20/01 Map distribution of species**

Tied to RF00/01 – Not required until 2027.

### **RF20/02 New potential invasive species**

No new potential invasive species were identified in 2023.

### **RF20/03 Surveillance – Rare higher plants and ferns (SSSI)**

Not completed in 2023

### **RF20/04 Surveillance – Rare higher plants and ferns not SSSI features**

Not completed in 2023.

### **RF20/03 Bracken invading colonies**

Not fully completed in 2023 although no vulnerable areas were identified.

### **RF 20/04 Map Ragwort**

Not completed in 2023.

### **RF20/05 Bramble**

Bramble was removed from walls and buildings around the Farm to stop the encroachment onto the buildings, damaging historic features of the island. It was also removed within the Rabbit ex-closure at the back of the hostel to improve the habitat for the vegetation within this area. Control was carried out through a combination of scything, brush cutting and hand-pulling by staff and volunteers.

### 3 Research

In 2023, Tim Birkhead's long term study (40+ years) on the breeding success and adult survival of Guillemots on Skomer was continued, with fieldworker Tanith Hackney taking up the reins. The following is a summary of the Guillemot season on the Amos written by Tim Birkhead.

'For reasons we do not yet understand, the 2023 guillemot breeding season was two weeks later than expected. In contrast to other years, the late breeding this year seemed to have had some detrimental effects. Briefly, it seems that the timing of the guillemot's breeding season was out of kilter with seasonal pattern of fish abundance, possibly because the North Atlantic was warmer this year than at any time since 1960.

Our observations revealed chicks being fed mainly on sprats, as normal, but also on some herring and mackerel, neither of which we had ever recorded in the previous fifty years. When we ringed chicks (a key part of study), we found them underweight. This turn may have a knock-on effect on their subsequent survival, but we won't know that for another few years when we see how many of our ringed individuals return to the colony.

The second reason 2023 was different was bird flu. The outbreak last year that saw the deaths of thousands of seabirds seemed to miss Skomer. Until the end of this breeding season, we thought it was the case again, until dead guillemots started to be washed up on Welsh beaches. Increasing numbers (hundreds) of dead seabirds, mainly adult guillemots, have continued to be reported. It will take time to assess the full impact of the bird flu outbreak, but it is immensely sad that a population we have nurtured and watched grow back towards its original size, should be knocked back.'

OxNav also continued their research which is summarised below:

The 2023 seabird season saw the return of OxNav's researchers as part of their ongoing project which aims to monitor and track Skomer's population of Manx Shearwaters. As in previous years, the bulk of this work was concentrated into two tracking campaigns, during the Shearwater's incubation and chick-rearing periods (May and July respectively). This tracking occurred simultaneously with other colonies around the UK isles, incubation tracking was carried out alongside a team on Copeland Island, in Northern Ireland, whilst the chick-rearing campaign saw birds simultaneously GPS tracked from the colonies on Skomer, the neighbouring isles of Skokholm and Ramsey, and again on Copeland, as a continuation to the multi-island tracking study that was started in 2022.

Outside of the routine tracking, this year brought several experimental and observational studies led by PhD and Master's students from Oxford University. Using small-scale translocations of adult Shearwaters from their breeding colony at North Haven to coastal release sites around Skomer itself, OxNav PhD student Lewis Fisher-Reeves explored the cognitive decision-making processes that may be occurring during short-distance navigational tasks, assessing whether birds were able to anticipate the small discrepancies in distance in the island circumnavigation task that they were presented with when released from various sites around Skomer's coast.

Emma Thornton (an MBIol student) deployed high frequency GPS devices (recording a location every second) on Shearwaters during periods of high wind to investigate the mechanics of their dynamic soaring flight patterns.

Meanwhile, Barbara Francik (another MBIol student) deployed a combination of audio recorders and leg-mounted GLS, coupled with daily chick biometric measurements, to investigate the relationships between chick body condition, begging behaviour, and parental provisioning. All aspects of these projects throughout the season were supported by OxNav's amazing field assistant, and friend of Skomer, Sarah Bond, who used her experience to facilitate a very smooth field season.

OxNav also welcomed Melany de Boer, a Master's student from the University of Groningen, Netherlands, who carried out an observational study which aimed to map how weather and at-sea conditions across time scales may influence evening Puffin colony attendance. Melany also led the routine monitoring of the study burrows. 2023 marked the closing year of Annette Fayet's long-term carry-over effect experiment, which

meant both the changing GLS where the battery life was too low to record this year's season, and the beginning of the recovery of these GLS, with the bulk of these set to be retrieved at the beginning of next year's season.

OxNav's Puffin monitoring was reduced this year, but breeding success was still assessed where possible, and some of the GLS were changed in early April. The team were pleased to see this year that there were no observations or limitations of Avian Flu within the colony, and all work was able to proceed as planned.

## 4 Visitors



*The Visitor Officer leads a guided walk as part of Young Birders' week 2023*

### 4.1 DAY VISITORS

Skomer opened to the public on Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 but due to inclement weather, the first 163 day visitors of the year arrived on Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> April.

From 1<sup>st</sup> April–31<sup>st</sup> July we once again ran five day boats from Tuesday–Sunday with up to 250 visitors a day. In August and September, we ran a reduced number of boats (see section 4.1.3).

During the season, we welcomed 23,216 day visitors on Dale Sailing boats. This is a record year for the island and presents a 13% increase on the 20,504 visitors in 2022, another record-breaking year.

Additionally, we had 163 private landers visiting in their own boats in 2023. This is the highest number since 2018 and far surpasses the 99 we had in 2022.

79 people visited us on guided walks: 76 on a birdwatching walk with Dave Astins from West Coast Birdwatching and three on our Welsh learner guided walk in August. This presents a big drop from last year, however both events were affected by weather. Only five of nine guided walks went ahead (all at full capacity) and a fully booked Welsh walk in July was also cancelled as a result of bad weather.

The total number of day visitors to Skomer in 2023 was 23,458 which was a 13% increase on 2022. 943 hostel guests (section 4.3) brought the total number of visitors overall to a record 24,401.

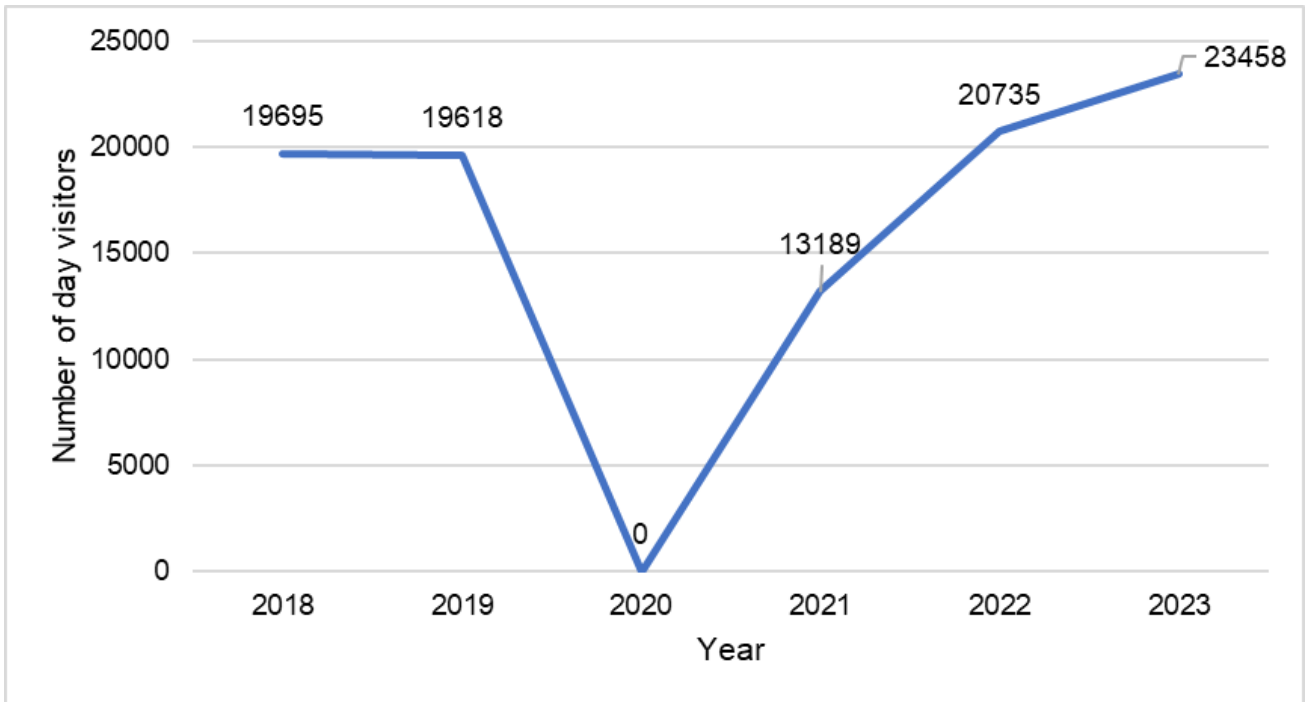


Figure 4 Total day visitor numbers 2018–2023

In previous years, hostel numbers have been calculated by number of beds sold (the total number of beds each night over the season being used). In 2023, this was 2,554 people which gives a total of 26,012 visitors in 2023. This is a 12% increase on 2022 and a record year for visitors.

As the number of maximum ticket sales have changed each year, the number of day tickets sold (23,216) was calculated as a percentage of the maximum number of tickets available (26,650). This shows that 87% of all day tickets were bought, an increase from 81% in 2022.

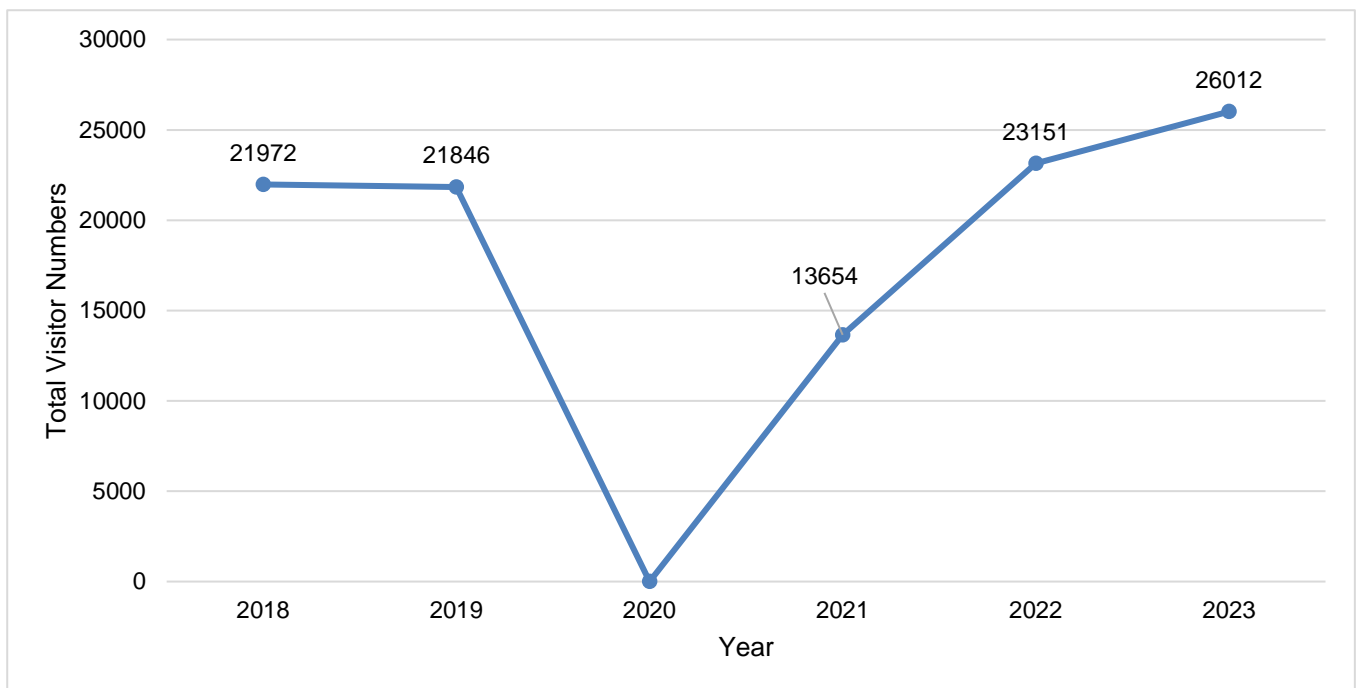


Figure 5 Total visitor numbers to Skomer from 2018 to 2023

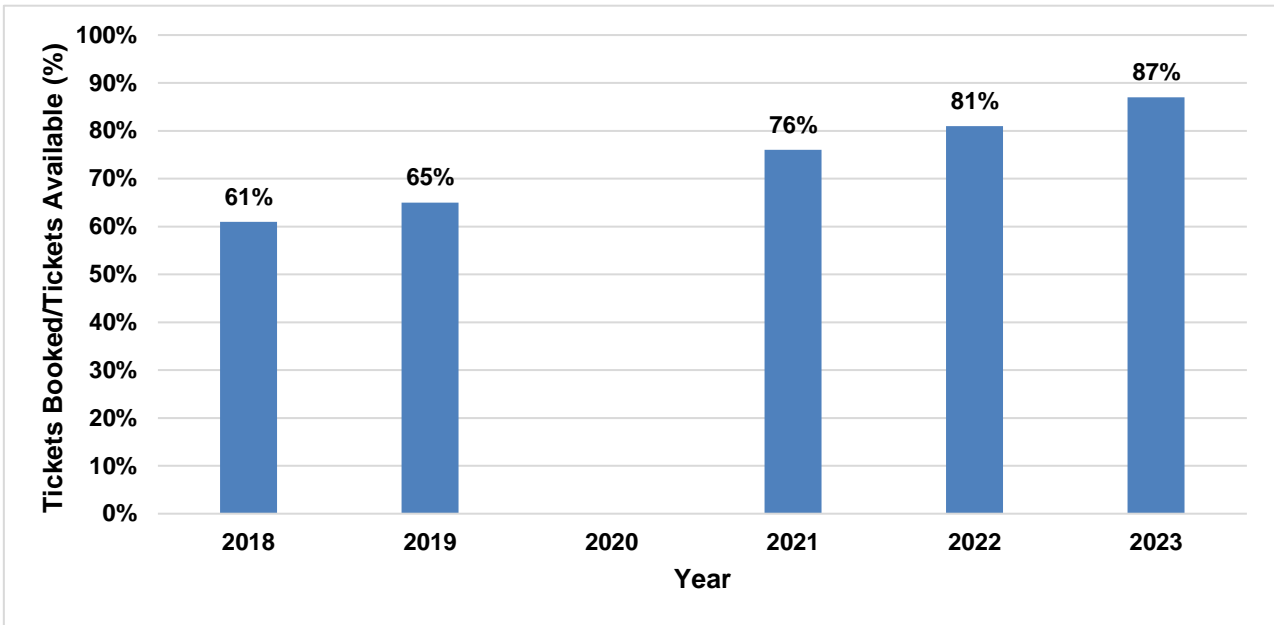


Figure 5 A percentage of day tickets booked compared to the number of available tickets from 2018 to 2023.

### 4.1.1 Cancellations

Inclement weather conditions in 2023 caused us to cancel day boats on 26 days in 2023, the lowest figure since at least 2006. We saw the most closures in September (nine) when the weather is worst. Five of these days occurred after Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> September, which meant this was the last day we welcomed day visitors in 2023. We had surprisingly few closures in April (three) and June was the first month with no cancellations for several years.

Year	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Number of day boat cancellations	36	39	NA	32	35	26

Table 8 Day boat cancellations 2018 - 2023

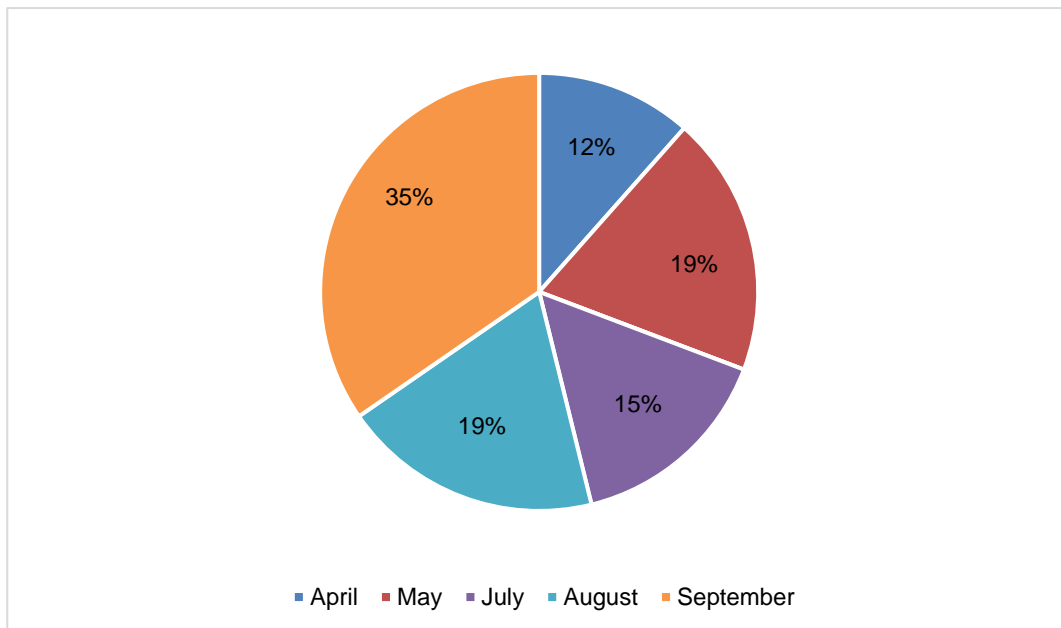


Figure 6 The proportion of the total no boat days which occurred each month in 2023. June has been omitted as there were no cancelled boats.



### 4.1.2 Shoulder Season

In 2023, we reduced the number of day boats in the shoulder season. From 1<sup>st</sup> August–10<sup>th</sup> August, we ran three day boats (maximum of 150 visitors a day) and from 11<sup>th</sup> August–3<sup>rd</sup> September, we ran two day boats (maximum of 100 visitors a day). From 4<sup>th</sup> September until the close of the season on Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> October, we ran one boat a day (maximum of 50 visitors a day) daily except Mondays and Fridays. New for 2023, we made the decision to close on Fridays in September. This gave staff more time for island maintenance and has a lower environmental impact of fewer boats running. As visitor numbers are low in September, this is a good time to do this.

We saw an increase in the number of August day visitors to 1,739 from 1,583 in 2022. This figure sits alongside numbers from 2018 and 2019. The large increase in 2021 was perhaps due to the number of people still holidaying in the UK in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

September figures were down and the lowest since 2015. As we were closed on 17/30 days in September (Mondays, Fridays and closed days) this is perhaps to be expected. Visitor numbers on open days were largely low, with the lowest visitor count being four on 21<sup>st</sup> September.

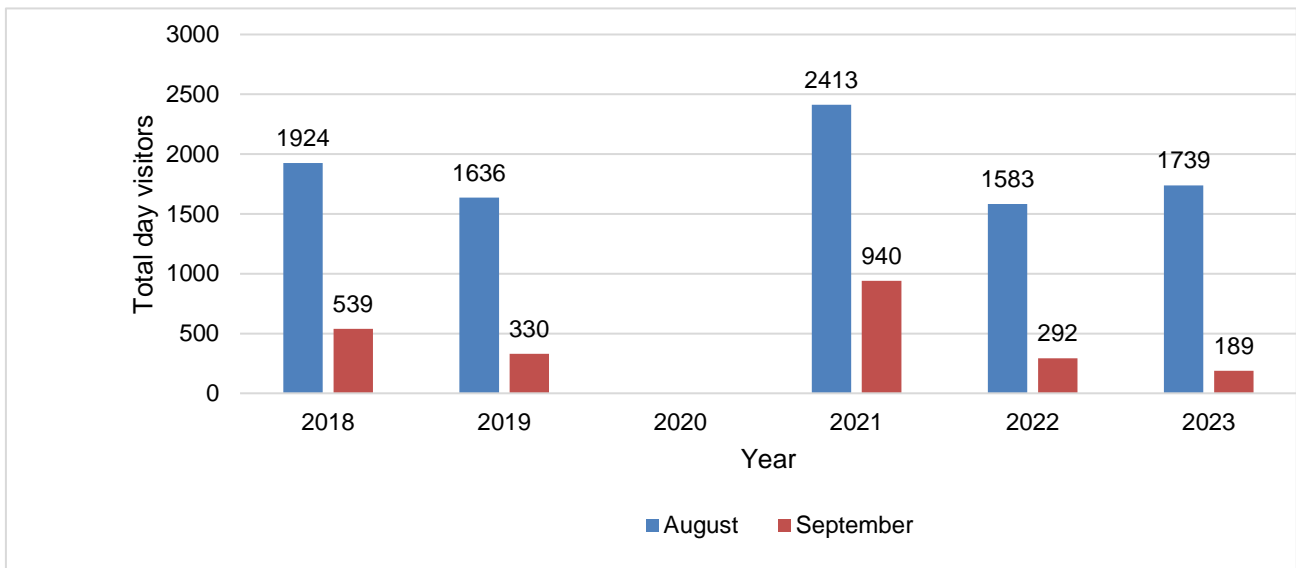


Figure 7 Total day visitors in August and September between 2018 and 2023.

By comparing the number of tickets sold against the number of available tickets in August and September 2023, the numbers are near identical to 2021 figures. This shows that although fewer tickets were available and sold in 2023, proportionally sales were still maintained. A large increase in the proportion of tickets sold in August between 2022 and 2023 suggests that interest in visiting in the shoulder season is high despite the reduced number of boats. The drop in September is likely due to the number of closed days.

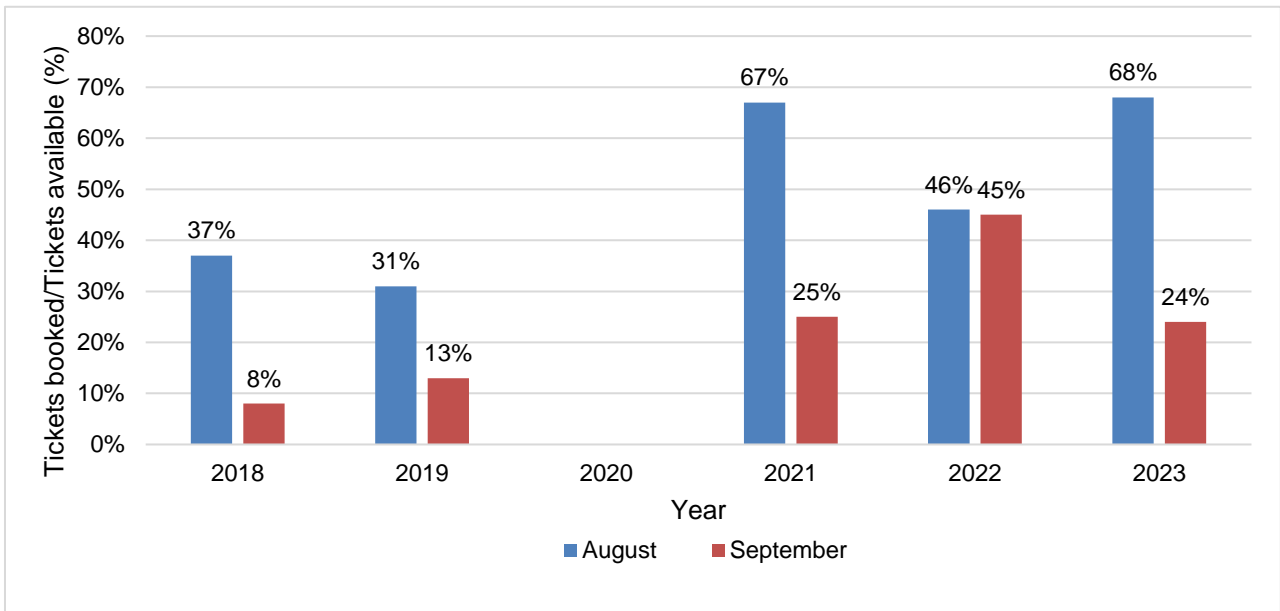


Figure 8 The number of tickets booked as a percentage of tickets available in August and September between 2018 and 2023.

## 4.2 EDUCATIONAL VISITS

Education boats are available twice weekly on Thursdays and Sundays, except for the three-week period over Whitsun. They run at a discounted rate for school and university groups to make education groups more affordable (see section 4.6).

442 students visited the island in 2023, a 25% reduction on 2022. This is the lowest number to date, however it should be noted that prior to 2020, five education boats a week were run.

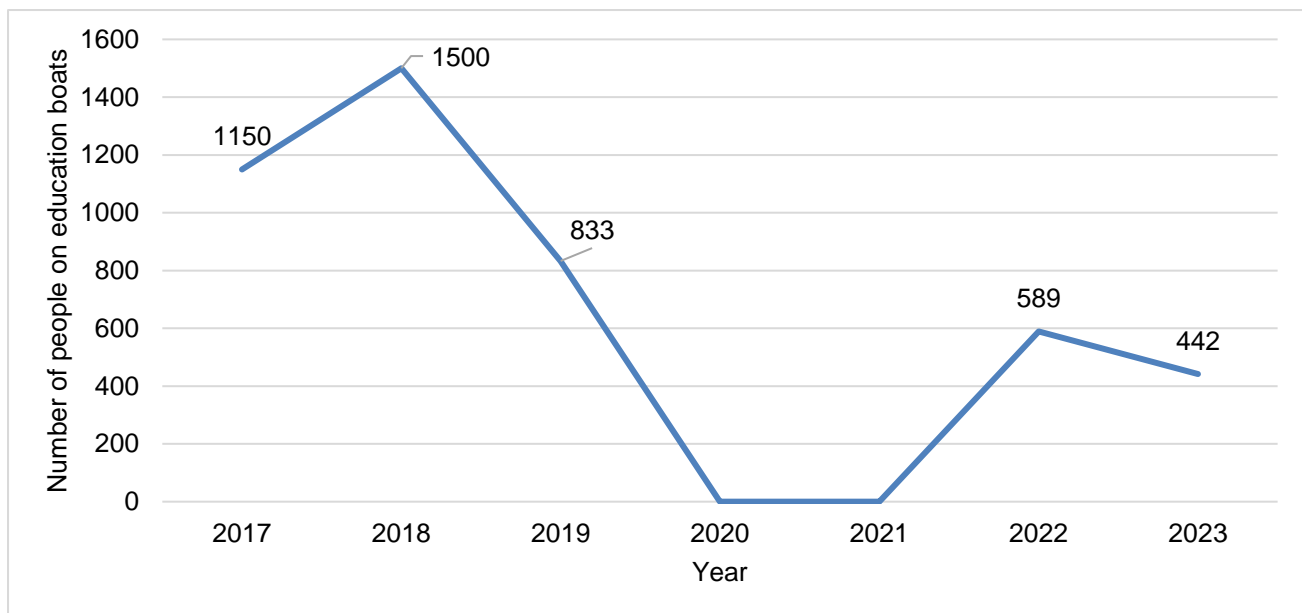


Figure 9 The number of people on education boats each year between 2018 and 2023.

The highest number of education boat visitors was 130 in June, likely because this is typically when schools will run post-exam enrichment trips. Numbers were consistent in April, May and July, but no education boats visited in August and September, presumably because most institutions are on holiday during this time.

The number of education boats booked compared to those available was high in June with 80% of boats booked. It was lower for April, May and July with approximately 40% of available boats being used. When education boats are not booked by education parties, they are re-opened for public sale.

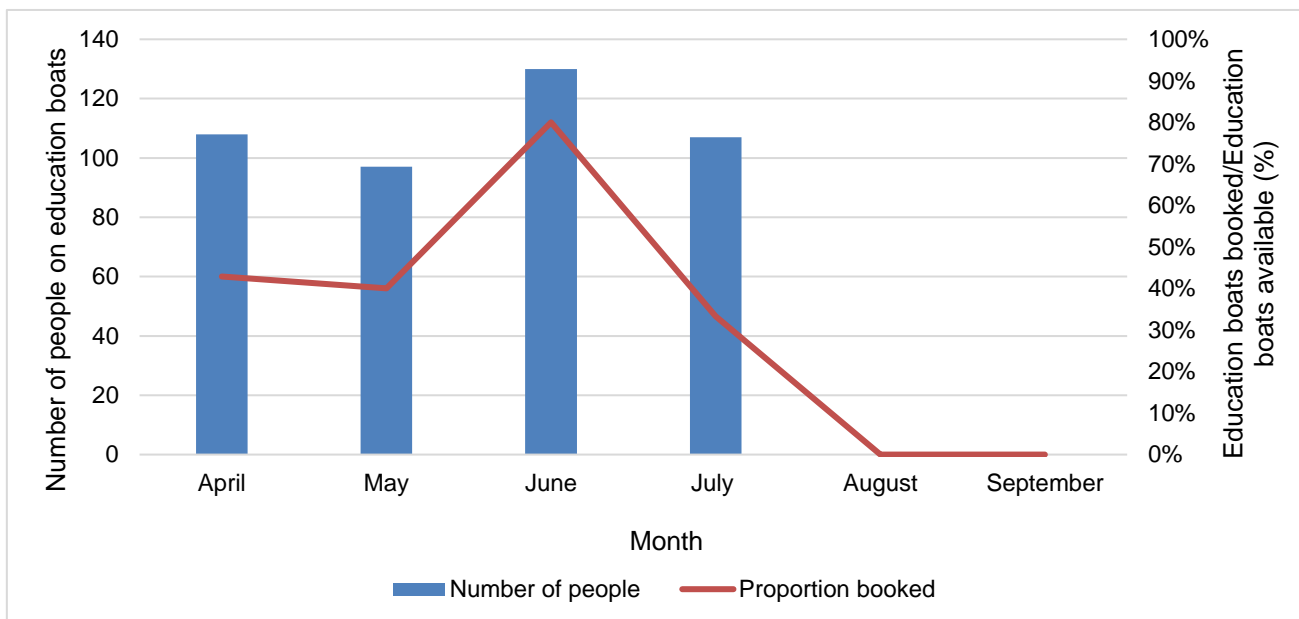


Figure 10 The number of people on education boats each month in 2023 and the number of education boats booked as a percentage of those available each month in 2023.

These figures suggest that further work should be done in subsequent years to increase uptake to these educational visits. It has already been decided to move education days in 2024 to Thursday and Friday which should help increase uptake.

### 4.3 OVERNIGHT STAYS

#### 4.3.1 Bookings

2,554 beds were sold in the hostel in 2023 which made it a record year. Note, beds sold refers to the total of the number of nights a bed was occupied. This equates to 943 individuals staying in the hostel in 2023.

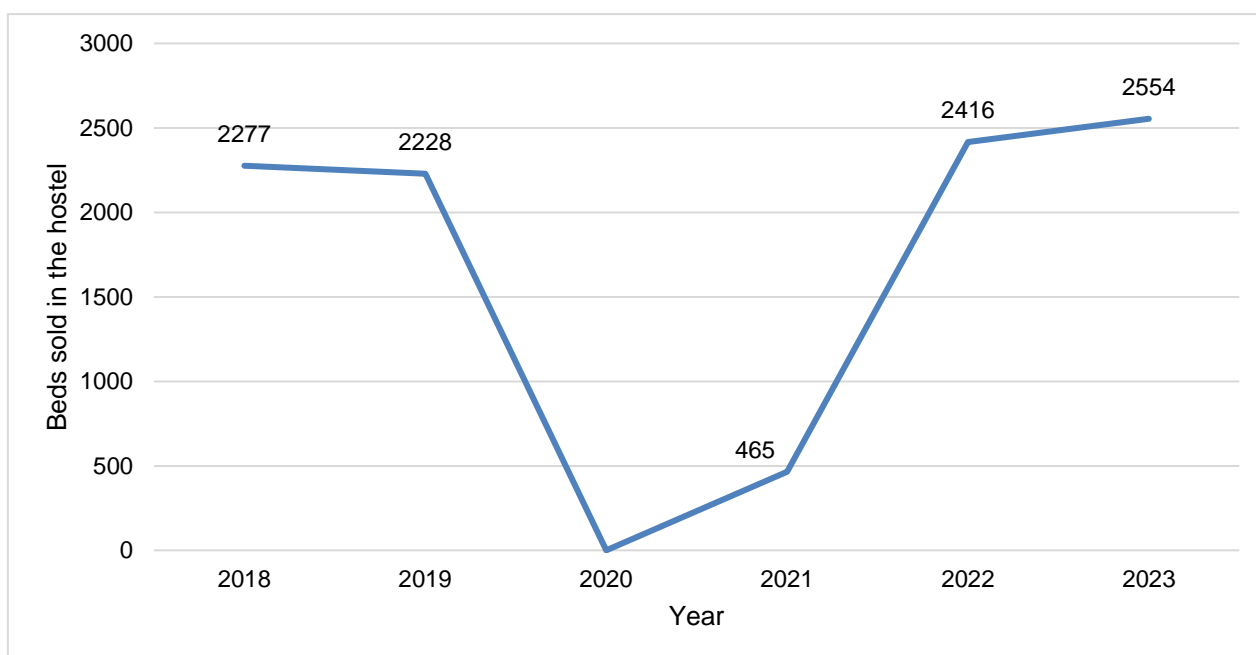


Figure 11 The number of beds sold in the hostel yearly between 2018 and 2023.

3,040 beds were available in 2023, which means that 84% of beds were sold. Figure 10 shows the number of beds sold each month as a proportion of those available in 2022 and 2023. Beds remained sold out in both June and July (with small losses due to last-minute cancellations). It was pleasing to see the percentage of beds booked in May rise to 100%. A rise in April was also noted, perhaps reflecting the increased Puffin activity in April each year.

August and September remained at around 70% capacity for both months. This dip in off-peak hostel bookings has historically prompted us to run events in the later months of the season (see section 7.4). These events are important for education and public engagement and it is encouraging to see that this strategy seems to be filling a good number of beds in the shoulder season too.

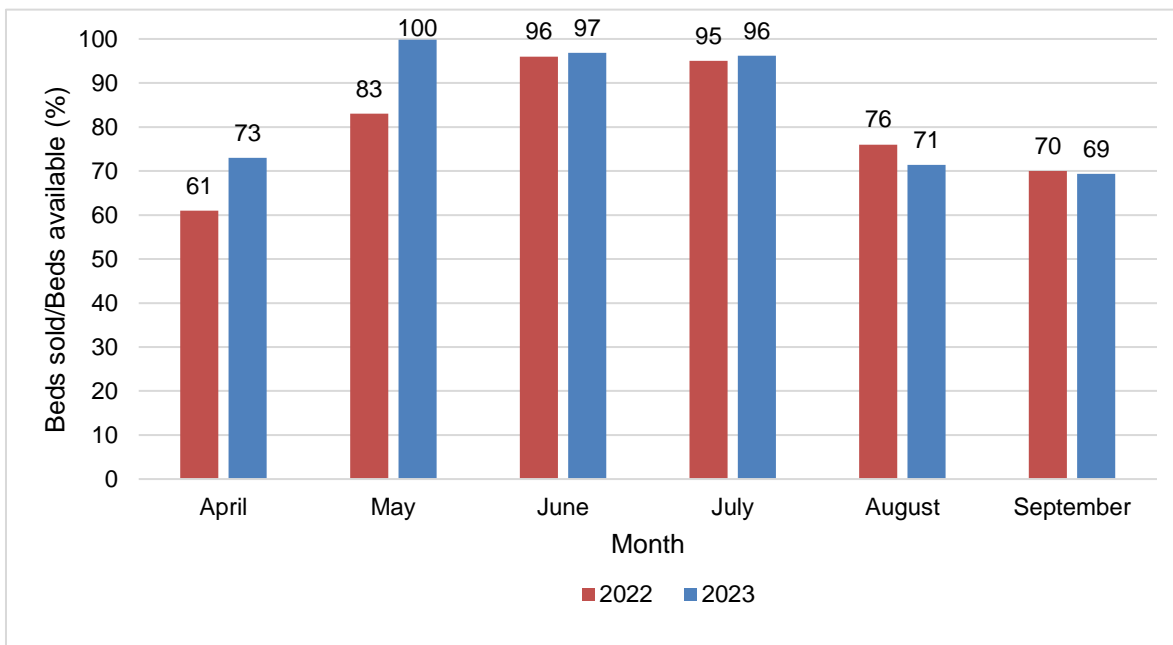


Figure 12 The number of beds sold as a percentage of beds available each month in 2022 and 2023.

Hostel feedback was not given in great enough numbers to report statistically, though comments were largely positive. The only repeated concerns were concerned with the dampness of the downstairs bedrooms which we hope to address in 2024.

### 4.3.2 Cancellations

27 overnight guest refunds were offered to guests as a result of inclement weather. These occurred in July (10), August (8), May (7) and April (2). No refunds were requested in May or September due to favourable weather.

### 4.3.3 Member Bookings

113 member bookings were taken for hostel stays with the most bookings in July (34) and no member bookings in September.

## 4.4 HUMAN IMPACT

### 4.4.1 Visitors

All visitors to the island received a welcome talk. It emphasised the importance of staying on the path at all times and minimising disturbance to wildlife. Visitors were asked to navigate the island in an anti-clockwise direction to minimise pressure on the Wick and to stop people passing on narrow paths.

The island was regularly patrolled by staff and volunteers. During the Puffin season, weekly volunteers were stationed at the Wick to answer questions and prevent disturbance.

Disturbance is discussed daily at bird log and any disturbance noted by staff, volunteers or hostel guests is entered. People off paths and collapsing burrows are the two most common types of disturbance noted. It became apparent from these conversations that due to the increased number of Puffins being seen at High Cliff, a greater level of disturbance was being seen there with people standing and sitting off path. An adjustment was made to weekly volunteer patrols to account for this and less disturbance was subsequently noted as the season progressed.

#### **4.4.2 Seaborne disturbance**

There were several incidents of seaborne disturbance noted in 2023. Boats, kayaks and tenders often came in too close to seabird cliffs and hauled-out seals in North Haven and Rye Rocks. Several people were spoken to by staff whilst out on the island boat. In autumn, boats occasionally enter the voluntary no entry zones in South and North Haven but no major disturbance was noted. All seaborne disturbance data is made available to the NRW's Marine Conservation Zone team at Martin's Haven.

#### **4.4.3 Pollution**

No major pollution incidents were reported in 2023.

### **4.5 EQUALITY, DIVERSITY, INCLUSION, AND ACCESS**

The Skomer team are pleased to have continued efforts to improve access to the island. We continue to work on a local level to tackle some of the barriers to inclusion and diversity which are often encountered across the conservation sector. More on this can be found on a [new page on the Skomer website](#) which sets out our commitment to EDI and Accessibility.

- **Long-term volunteers:** In 2023 we continued to cover travel and parking expenses for LTVs (introduced 2022), again receiving feedback that this made volunteering financially viable for participants. We continue to try to increase the accessibility of this opportunity for early career conservationists for whom finance could be a barrier. We were also very pleased to be able to fund training opportunities for LTVs, in a sector which often expects early-career conservationists to self-fund training to increase their employability. The training they carried out made them more able to assist with the running of the island and enhanced their skills and experience in seeking work post-Skomer. The early-season LTVs completed first aid training both off island and as part of a tailored training session on island whilst the seabird monitoring volunteer completed her RYA Level 2 Powerboat training. Both late-season LTVs completed brush cutter training before coming to the island. We continued to collect information on how much LTVs spend on basic living costs when on Skomer to better understand financial barriers to volunteering. The Friends of Skokholm and Skomer extended their £250 bursary to include the seabird monitoring volunteer this year, meaning that all five long-term volunteers benefitted from the bursary on completion of a research project. We were also able to provide a kit budget, covering footwear for the four LTVs.
- **Duke of Edinburgh Award:** We continued to work with the local Duke of Edinburgh group and the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority (PCNPA) to encourage Duke of Edinburgh (DofE) participation on Skomer as part of our aim to address barriers to access locally. On 31<sup>st</sup> August, five Bronze and Silver participants came to Skomer for a day's volunteering as part of the big island clear-up, supported by PCNPA rangers Chris Taylor and Will Whittington. Six local Duke of Edinburgh Gold participants completed weekly volunteering for the residential components of their award, as well as one Gold participant from outside the area. This was the first year in which six places were set aside for DofE Gold participants undertaking the residential section of their award. Priority is given to those from Pembrokeshire, particularly to those who might otherwise be unable to afford to visit the island.

*“The week that I spent on the island allowed me to experience the wonderful wildlife whilst also affording me the opportunity to meet so many enthusiastic and knowledgeable people from across the UK. It was without a doubt learning from these amazing people that made the week so enjoyable... The award has opened up so many opportunities for me, and volunteering on Skomer is certainly no exception” – Ella Davies, Gold DofE participant*



- **Weekly volunteers:** Through the Skalmey Bursary, we continued to cover the volunteer fee for weekly volunteers who might not otherwise be able to afford to come. We ensured clear communication about this via email and through the website and four volunteers benefitted from the scheme.
- **Young Birders' Week:** Led by Visitor Officer (VO) Rob Knott, the team ran a second very successful Young Birders' Week for naturalists aged from 18 to 25 years. We are very aware of the financial barriers to visiting Skomer, particularly as an overnight guest and ran this trip as an opportunity for young people to access the island. Accommodation costs were subsidised by WTSWW. Additional funding from Pembrokeshire Bird Group and the Nature Networks fund, as well as reduced boat fees by Dale Sailing, allowed 25 young people the opportunity of a more affordable visit to the island at a total of £50 (including boat fee) for a three-night stay. Activities included Manx Shearwater chick weighing, Skomer Vole trapping, moth trapping, Grey Seal watching, cetacean spotting, a guided walk of the island, a quiz and a bird race competition. It received overwhelmingly [positive feedback from participants](#) and from attendees at the Pembrokeshire Bird Conference, where Rob spoke about the event and barriers to young people accessing nature. Since attending, several participants have since applied to return as weekly volunteers in 2024, indicating the valuable role such events play in creating a longer-term relationship with the island. Additionally, one participant has since secured a 12-month position on Ascension Island, a position they say was inspired by this visit to Skomer.

*“I cannot sing the praises of Skomer Young Birders enough, I absolutely love nature, the outdoors, and birds, and I thoroughly enjoyed the whole experience! [...] A fantastic few days in a beautiful place with great people creating memories I will treasure... what more could you ask for” – Liliana, YBW participant*



*Young Birders' Week group 2*

**Black2Nature:** Led by Assistant Warden (AW) Ceris Aston, we ran the island's first Black2Nature residential, aiming to better understand and to help redress some of the barriers for people of colour in accessing the countryside. Black2Nature is a small organisation aiming to bring visibly minority ethnic young people into nature. A group of 15 young people aged between 10 and 18 spent three nights on the island, supported by two facilitators, and engaged in activities including moth trapping, Manx Shearwater chick weighing, small mammal trapping and more. The event was supported by the LTVs, a stellar group of weekly volunteers, Seal Fieldworker Birgitta Bueche, and Lewis Fisher from OxNav.

*"Black2Nature had a fantastic time on Skomer Island. We were greeted with a friendly and knowledgeable team. The young people who attended had a brilliant time, learning about nature and the outdoors. The highlight of the stay was being able to hold the Manx Shearwater chicks! The island itself is absolutely stunning and so natural. Thank you so much for allowing our young people to have such a wonderful experience on the Island." - Ayesha, Camps & Events Manager Black2Nature*



*Lewis shows the B2N participants a Manx Shearwater chick*

- **Welsh language:** We continued efforts to improve and embed our use of the Welsh language on Skomer. Ceris Aston, Assistant Warden (AW) is continuing to learn Welsh and to incorporate some Welsh into welcome talks and VO Rob Knott is also learning. After the success of last year's Welsh language guided walk, two were scheduled for 2023; unfortunately, due to weather only one ran with three participants. Led by Mari Elin and Gruffydd Jones, the event received excellent feedback. Welsh is being increasingly used on social media, with several bilingual posts. Advertising for some events next season is being prepared in both Welsh and English.
  
- **Education boats:** We continued to offer boats at subsidised rates for schools and education groups. School-age child tickets (up to 16s) are £12 for a combined boat fare and landing ticket with accompanying adults paying £20. College and university student tickets are £20 per head. These were available two days a week outwith a three-week period over Whitsun.
  
- **LGBTQ+ inclusion:** We continue to review job, volunteering and booking forms to ensure correct and inclusive terminology and make our inclusion more explicit. We received positive feedback about the inclusion of a pronoun category on forms from a non-binary volunteer. Team members opted to add pronouns to their email signatures signalling an LGBTQ+ inclusive workplace. Pronoun pins were made available to all staff, researchers and volunteers who wished to wear them.
  
- **Digital accessibility:** Alternative text (alt text) describing images and videos continued to be added to live media across social media channels and our island blog to make content accessible for those using screen readers.
  
- **Physical accessibility:** Our [new webpage](#) was created as a way of centralising how we are working to make Skomer physically accessible. For example, welcome talks are now available in written formats for those who are hard of hearing and chaperones available for those who are blind or partially sighted. The page also encourages visitors to get in touch about individual needs so this process will hopefully expand our measures even further.



# 5 Staff and Volunteers

## 5.1 ISLAND STAFF

Warden Leighton Newman, Assistant Warden Ceris Aston, and Visitor Officer Beth Thompson, moved out to Skomer on 2<sup>nd</sup> March. Beth Thompson left Skomer to take up a new role on 8<sup>th</sup> April. The new Visitor Officer, Rob Knott, joined the team on 1<sup>st</sup> May. Field Worker, Hannah Greetham, joined the team on April 11<sup>th</sup> and was on Skomer until leaving for a new role on 30<sup>th</sup> July. The Seal Field Worker contract was fulfilled by Birgitta Bueche, who arrived on August 10<sup>th</sup>. The seal assistant for the autumn was Sarah Bond who started on 30<sup>th</sup> August and finished on 11<sup>th</sup> October.

Ceris, Leighton, Rob and Birgitta remained on the island until 17<sup>th</sup> November.



## 5.2 LOCKLEY LODGE

Chrissy and Gary Eade ran Lockley Lodge in 2023. The Lockley Lodge team worked extremely hard throughout the season and the island could not have run so smoothly without their hard work. The transition to a new booking system was made all the easier by the work and support received by Lockley Lodge.

## 5.3 VOLUNTEERS

### *Weekly vols*

We had a total of 151 volunteers over 28 weeks, carrying out public engagement, cleaning, maintenance, vegetation management, and wildlife monitoring throughout the season. Of these, seven were completing their Duke of Edinburgh Gold award. We're incredibly grateful to the Skomer volunteers, whose hard work, humour and enthusiasm contribute not only to visitors' experience of the island but to the lives of all who live and work there.

### *Work parties*

Island clean-up: On 31<sup>st</sup> August, we welcomed a group of local Duke of Edinburgh Silver and Gold participants and rangers Chris Taylor and Will Whittington from the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority to the island for an island clean-up, removing several tonnes of rubbish from North Haven and the Farm. Huge thanks to everyone involved, including the weekly volunteers who loaded and unloaded the barge. A fantastic effort by all. Thanks also to A&C Aggregates in Narberth for the donation of tonne bags.



Beach cleans: On 7<sup>th</sup> August, island staff, researchers and long-term volunteers tackled South Haven beach, which despite having only been cleaned a year before was full once again of old fishing gear, shoes, tennis balls, all manner of rubbish and a total of 206 plastic bottles. Our thanks to the Skomer Marine Conservation Zone team who transported all of the collected rubbish to boats and disposed of it.





Spring work party: From the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 25<sup>th</sup> of March, a work party set to with a range of projects on the island. In just a week, the team successfully built a new balcony on the research accommodation at North Haven, reroofed the fridge room at the Farm in far from pleasant conditions, reclad the North Haven buildings, continued work on the Mooney Mere boardwalk, and installed new steps at the top of the landing stage. Many thanks to Martin Pratt, Nigel Saverton, Peter O'Shea, Dean Maiden, Will Whittington, Gruffydd and Mari Elin Jones.



*Unloading a barge delivery*



*Spring Work Party. From left to right: Peter, Gruffydd, Mari Elin, Martin, Nigel, Dean, Leighton*



*Battery room roof replacement in progress*



*Battery Room roof replacement still in progress but in far worse weather*



*Other spring Work Party tasks of replacing cladding and repairing the research balcony at North Haven*

Autumn work party: From 16<sup>th</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> September a team of volunteers constructed a new compost loo and urinal at North Haven and roofed the new wood store at the Farm. The new compost loo will not only save water but also increase storage space. Watching it progress from an idea to a sheet of paper to a construction was quite something. Thanks go to everyone who helped (Dorothy Blatcher, Phil Blatcher, Martin Pratt, Nigel Saverton, Martin Peel) and to Mike Penny for the architectural drawings.



*Autumn Work Party building compost toilet and urinal.*

## LTVs

In 2023, we were joined by four long-term volunteers – Erin Gold and Lotti Budd-Thiemann (April–July) and Madeline Davis and El Biggs (July–September). In addition to a busy programme of public engagement, wildlife monitoring and maintenance tasks, the LTVs also helped run events, supervise and instruct weekly volunteers and create content for the island blog and social media channels. Skomer long-term volunteers also carry out individual research projects. These projects are supported by the Friends of Skokholm and Skomer bursary and add to our understanding of different aspects of the island.

Erin's project looked at Manx Shearwater predation on Skomer. She wanted to see how changes in brightness overnight might affect predation rate and whether predation was different across the island. This was achieved by walking a transect twice weekly and counting the number of predated Shearwaters. Erin found that predation was more closely linked to the moon cycle than cloud cover and that the west coast was the most heavily predated area.

Lotti was interested in monitoring Chough nest activity. She monitored eight pairs of Chough weekly from April to July and identified active nests in 7 locations. Four nests successfully fledged young. This project provided the team with an extremely helpful and thorough monitoring programme of our Chough this year.

El, having previously been on Skokholm as an LTV, was asked by the Friends of Skokholm and Skomer to write a report about their summer on both islands. Whilst on Skomer, they used project time to carry out cetacean surveys.

Maddie completed a project on the different lichens of Skomer. She used a transect to record lichens found in different areas.

We were also joined by seabird monitoring volunteer Hebe Denny from 21<sup>st</sup> May until 24<sup>th</sup> June. She was a valued member of the team, assisting with the counting of cliff-nesting species from land and sea and also carrying out Manx Shearwater censuses. Her help was greatly appreciated during the busy seabird season.

We are extremely grateful to all five volunteers for their enthusiasm and commitment – their help was vital in helping the island to run smoothly. We wish them all the very best for the future.



*(L-R) Erin and Lotti, Hebe, El and Maddie.*

## 6 Reserve Administration

### 6.1 FINANCE

#### 6.1.1 Landing Fees

Landing fees for private landers and those coming on an overnight trip changed slightly from 2022, with the child rate raised to £15. Babies aged under two years' old go free (on the lap of an adult).

Category	Adult (12+)	Child (2 – 12)	Baby (0 – 2)	Members
Landing fee	£20	£15	Free	£20

Table 9 Landing fees for private landers and hostel guests.

Landing fees for day visitors were charged alongside the Dale Sailing boat fee, which changed depending on the month.

	April	May and June	July	August and September
Adults (12+)	£40	£44	£40	£30
Child (2-11)	£30	£30	£30	£24
Infants	Free (on the lap of an adult)			

Table 10 Day visitor fees in 2023.

#### 6.1.2 Overnight Accommodation Fees

Accommodation fees for 2023 can be seen below.

Hostel Prices 2023						
Prices are per person per night	Room					Dorm prices per person
	Curlew x2	Guillemot x2	Chough x4	Puffin x3	Shearwater x5	
	Two single beds	Two single beds	Two single beds + set of bunk beds	One single bed + set of bunk beds	Three single beds + set of bunk beds	
April	£60	£60	£60	£60	£60	£50
May-July	£85	£85	£85	£85	£85	£60
August	£50	£50	£50	£50	£50	£45
September	£50	£50	£50	£50	£50	£45
Children (12 and under)	Half price					
Single occupancy	Cost x 1.5	Cost x 1.5	Cost x 3.5	Cost x 2.5	Cost x 4.5	

Table 11 Hostel prices in 2023.

#### 6.1.3 Gift Aid

Gift Aid from the 2023 season is still being calculated.

### 6.2 MEMBERSHIP

Active recruitment for WTSWW members did not take place on Skomer this year. 113 members stayed in the hostel during 2023.

### 6.3 ISLAND SALES

792 pairs of binoculars were hired out for the day in 2023 for £5 a pair. April was our most popular month for hiring. September was the lowest, as was to be expected with reduced visitor numbers. May and June were also low, perhaps because visitors during this time usually have their own optical equipment. September saw the highest percentage of visitors hiring binoculars at 12%.

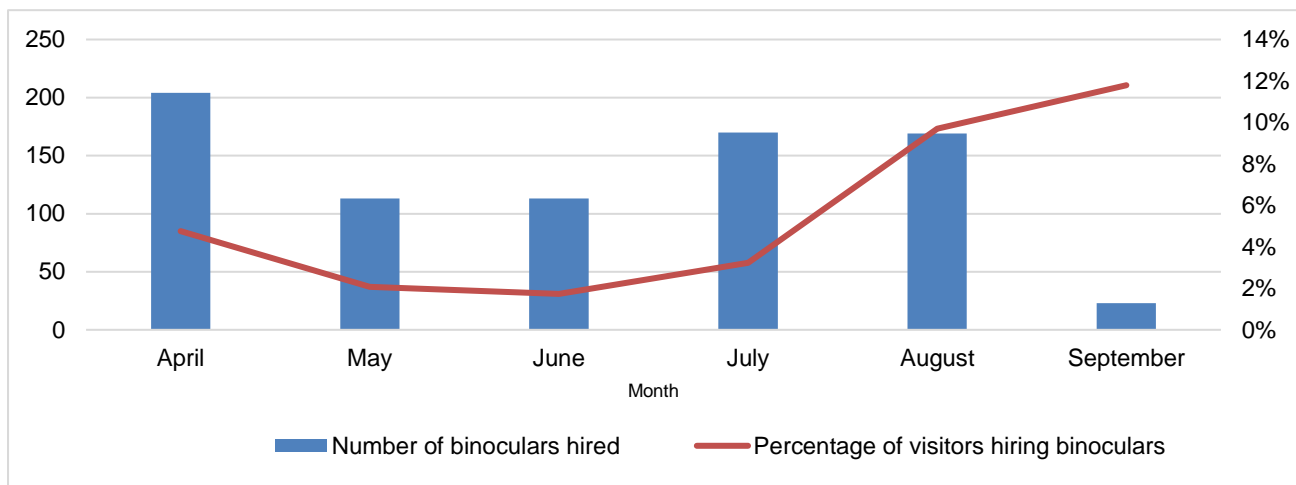


Figure 13 The number of binoculars hired and percentage of visitors hiring binoculars in 2023.

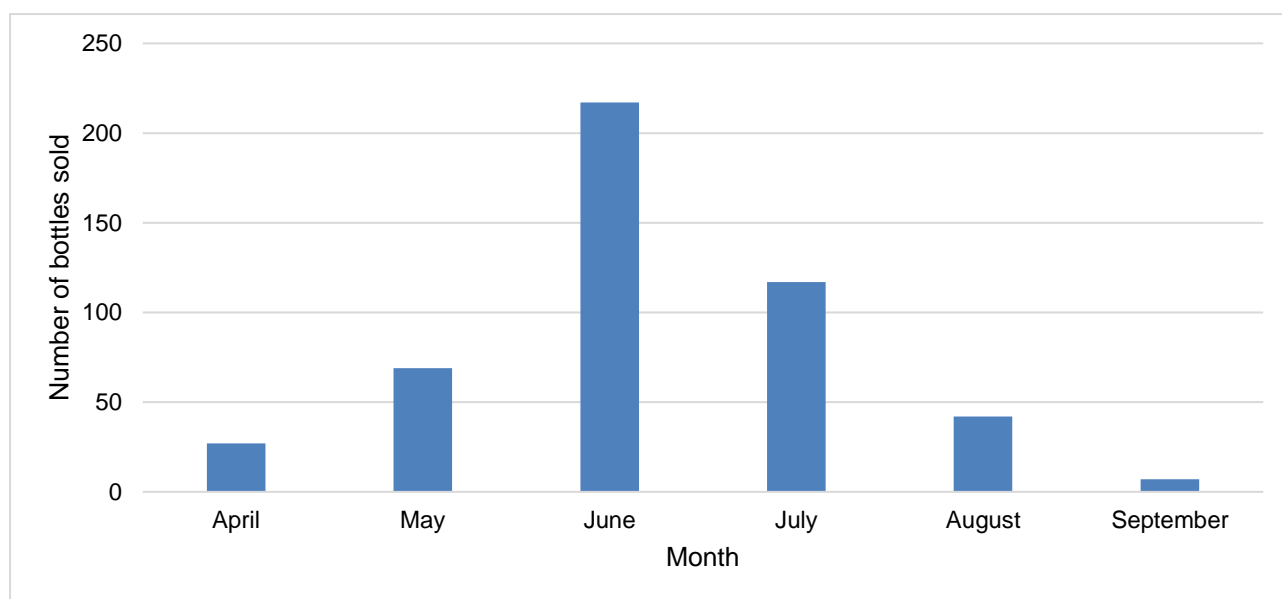


Figure 14 Bottles of water sold in 2023.

479 bottles of water were sold in 2023 with a peak of over 200 in June. These were sold for £1. We also had guidebooks for sale in English and Welsh for £3.

### 6.4 COMMERCIAL CODE OF CONDUCT

The Commercial Code of Conduct was continued as a way of ensuring that commercial groups visiting for the day and staying overnight understand our expectations of their groups. Each company pays a £100 fee and signs the code of conduct, which permits them to operate on the island.

13 operators signed up for the 2023 season, of which five were new. 21 overnight commercial operator trips were led from the hostel.



## **6.5 TRAINING**

The following training was completed in 2023:

Rob: Emergency First Aid, Powerboat Level 2, Dumper Truck, Ropes Access

Leighton: Emergency First Aid, Ropes Access

Ceris: Sea Survival, Emergency First Aid, Ropes Access

## **6.6 HEALTH AND SAFETY**

All accidents and near misses were reported in a timely manner using the correct procedure. There were five reports submitted. The most serious first aid incident required a Coastguard helicopter on 24<sup>th</sup> June, though the situation was well controlled, and the patient was reported well afterwards.

# 7 Media, Interpretation, and Events

## 7.1 MEDIA AND FILMING ON SKOMER

In 2023, we had 1,233 media articles about Skomer which is a record year. This generated an AVE (advertising spend) of £19.7m and OTS (opportunity to see) of 566m people. The breakdown of media outlets can be seen below.

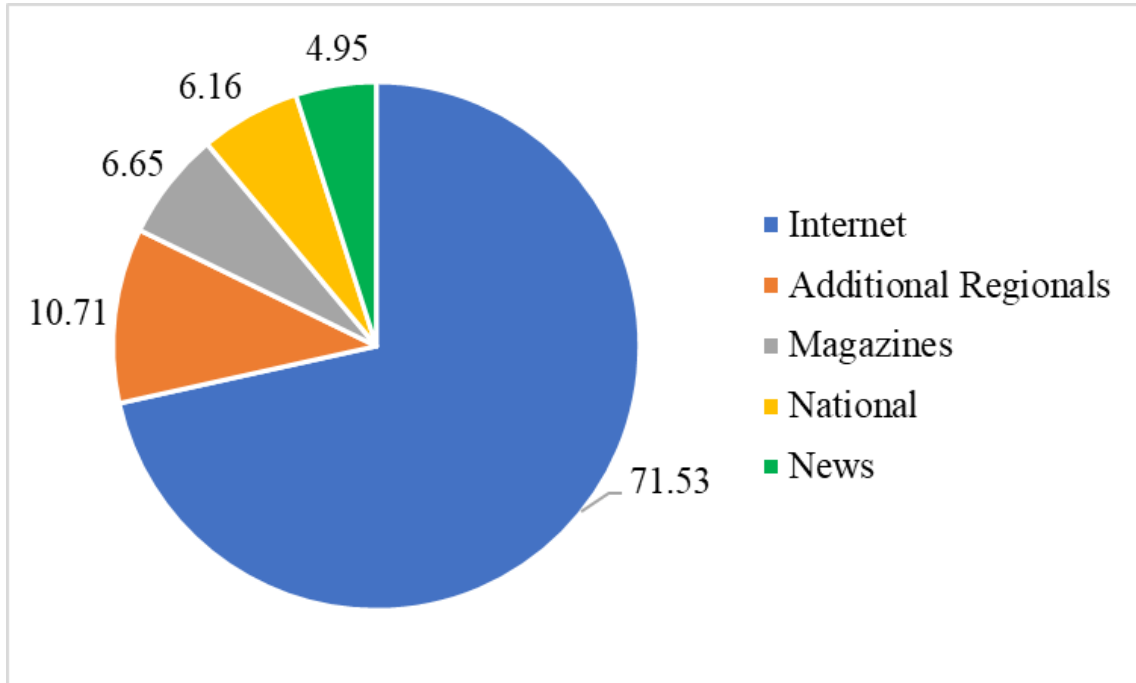


Figure 15 The percentage breakdown of media outlets in 2023.

A word cloud from media reporting can be seen below. The focus is on Wild Isles, David Attenborough and Manx Shearwaters.



Figure 16 A word cloud from Skomer media in 2023.

There were six media visits to Skomer in 2023. This included filming for a variety of media outlets.

Wild Isles, filmed in 2022, was a huge success and contributed significantly towards the AVE and OTS. Two episodes featured Skomer. Episode 1, "Our Precious Isles", released on 12<sup>th</sup> March 2023, looked at Skomer Puffins. Episode 5, "Ocean", released on 9<sup>th</sup> April 2023, focused on Manx Shearwaters, with the closing shots of the show featuring Sir David Attenborough on our Manx Shearwater colony.

A media ban was in place from Thursday May until Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> July 2023 to alleviate pressure from the busy seabird season.



*Sir David Attenborough with a fledgling Manx Shearwater © Alex Board/Silverback Films*

### **7.1.1 SkomerLIVE**

SkomerLIVE was discontinued for 2023. The show was at its prime in viewing figures during and directly after the pandemic and following this success it was difficult to envisage the longevity of this venture given available funding and resources.

## **7.2 MARKETING, PUBLICITY, AND SOCIAL MEDIA**

Our social media platforms and blog remained popular in 2023 and allowed audiences globally to engage with the island.

Facebook follows rose to 19,861 which is an 8% increase on 2022. Facebook accounts for 43% of our social media follows. Twitter followers continued to rise slowly, increasing by 541 (3%). Instagram followers continue to rise the most with an increase of 1,640 (a 15% rise).

Our total followers across the three channels sits at 46,136 (an 8% rise on last year).

### 7.2.1 Facebook

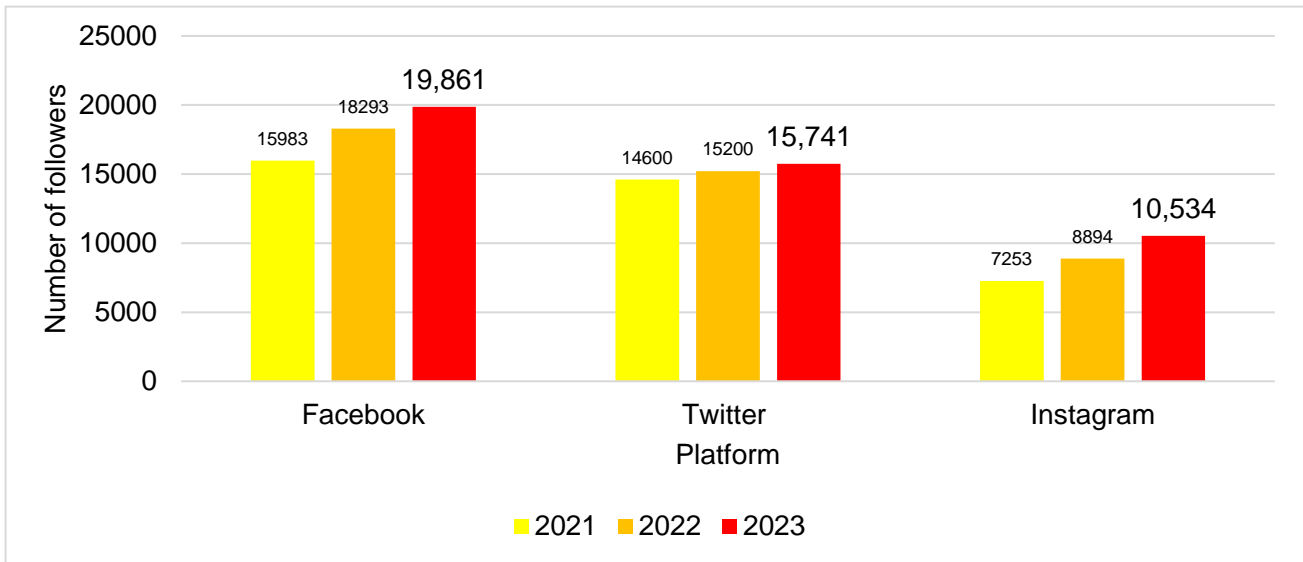


Figure 17 The number of followers on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram from 2021 to 2023.

Our Facebook content in 2023 reached 2,298,440 accounts which is an increase of 233% on 2022. This counts how many accounts have seen a post or content from our timeline. Our page was also visited 48,425 times.

110 posts were published, which is a 48% decline on 2022, however engagement on these posts has increased.

70.8% of our followers identify as female and our top five countries for followers are the UK, United States, Taiwan, Australia and Germany.

Our most reached post on Facebook this year was a photo of a leucistic Puffin on 15<sup>th</sup> June which reached 43,903 people.

Our most reacted to post on Facebook was the announcement of our record-breaking Puffin count on 28<sup>th</sup> March. It had 1,972 reactions, 328 comments and 227 shares.

### 7.2.2 Twitter

Our most reacted to Twitter post of the year was the leucistic Puffin, which was reposted 116 times and liked by 906 people. June was our most engaging month with our 11 posts generating 77,000 post views, 3,159 profile visits and 110 new followers.

Twitter Analytics are currently being updated and cannot show statistics for the whole year.



*A leucistic Puffin in North Haven, as shown on social media.*

### **7.2.3 Instagram**

Our Instagram content in 2023 reached 46,282 people which is a decrease of 43% on 2022. This counts how many accounts have seen a post or content from our timeline. However, our page was visited 11,076 times, an increase of 20%.

88 posts were published, which is a 55% decline on 2022, however engagement on these posts has increased. 68.9% of our followers identify as female and our top five countries for followers are the UK, United States, Germany, Australia and the Netherlands.

Our most reached post on Instagram was one to celebrate the release of Wild Isles on 9<sup>th</sup> April which reached 22,263 people. This was also our most reacted to post with 1,747 likes, 23 comments, seven shares and 29 post saves.



*Our most liked photo on Instagram - the team with Sir David Attenborough during the filming of Wild Isles.*

## **7.2.4 Skomer Island Blog**

We published 12 blogs over the 2023 season. Frequency of blogs varied over the season depending on staff availability.

The blog has been viewed 46,900 times in 2023 with most people finding the blog from Google. Our top country is the UK with 14,000 views, which is just ahead of Singapore on 13,600 views and the United States on 9,970 views.

The most viewed post on the blog was Beth's leaving blog, which was read 1,060 times, followed by one about the new Skomer team and one introducing our first-half LTVs.

## **7.2.5 Skomer Webcams**

The Skomer webcams were offline in 2023 for maintenance, but we are planning to get them running for next season.

## **7.3 INTERPRETATION**

The last signage relating to COVID-19 protocols was removed at the start of the season.

The History Trail Garland Stone loop remains closed due to burrows and nesting gulls, though efforts were made in 2023 to cut back the paths in the hope of re-opening it in 2024.

New biosecurity interpretation was added at the sales point.

In the summer, staff from National Resources Wales visited Skomer with WTSWW's Head of Islands and Marine, Lisa Morgan for discussions with Leighton and Rob about improving and updating signage and interpretation across the island, including in the Visitor Centre.

## **7.4 EVENTS**

### **7.4.1 Overnight Events**

6 overnight events took place in 2023. 132 individuals stayed for these events, a 262% increase on 47 individuals last year. Event feedback was not formally collected for 2023.

- Spring Migration – This event ran between 15<sup>th</sup> April and 18<sup>th</sup> April and was attended by nine people. Dave Astins led the event, and a number of migrating species were spotted.
- Black2Nature – This event ran between 23<sup>rd</sup> August and 26<sup>th</sup> August and was attended by 14 people. Ceris Aston (AW) led the event. Please see section 4.6 for details.
- Yoga – This event ran two sessions: 29<sup>th</sup> - 31<sup>st</sup> August and 1<sup>st</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> September. They were attended by 31 people over the two events. Catrin Norris and Ady Hayhoe led these events. They were extremely popular and sold out fast. Yoga sessions were run in the courtyard and at the Garland Stone.
- Shearwater Week – This event ran three sessions: 13<sup>th</sup>–15<sup>th</sup> August, 15<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> August and 17<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> August. This event was almost sold out with 41 attendees. The event was led as a joint effort between Rob, Ceris and Leighton. Activities included a night walk, an observation of rafting Shearwaters at dusk, an evening talk and chick weighing with a member of OxNav. We are grateful to OxNav, particularly Sarah Bond, for their assistance with this event.
- Young Birders' Week – This event ran two sessions: 3<sup>rd</sup>–6<sup>th</sup> September and 6<sup>th</sup>–9<sup>th</sup> September. They were attended by 25 people over the two events (there were some last-minute dropouts). Rob Knott (VO) led the event. See section 4.6 for details.
- Autumn Migration Week – This event ran two sessions: 10<sup>th</sup> September–13<sup>th</sup> September and 13<sup>th</sup>–16<sup>th</sup> September and was attended by 12 people in total. Dave Astins led the events.

### **7.4.2 Day Events**

79 individuals visited the island in 2023 as part of an organised day trip.

9 Monday guided walks were planned in collaboration with Dave Astins from West Coast Birdwatching: 15<sup>th</sup> May, 22<sup>nd</sup> May, 5<sup>th</sup> June, 12<sup>th</sup> June, 19<sup>th</sup> June, 26<sup>th</sup> June, 3<sup>rd</sup> July, 10<sup>th</sup> July and 17<sup>th</sup> July. Due to inclement weather, only five of these walks went ahead with 76 attendees. These were all fully booked.

Two Welsh learner guided walks were planned for 24<sup>th</sup> July and 21<sup>st</sup> August. However, due to bad weather the fully booked walk in July did not go ahead. Three people attended the walk in August and reviewed it well. This event was run by Mari Elin and Gruffydd Jones, who are long-standing supporters and weekly volunteers on the island.

# 8 Reserve Management

## 8.1 MANAGEMENT PLAN

Species monitoring was carried out according to the management plan. Any adjustments to the management plan were checked in accordance with WTSWW and NRW and through the Island Conservation Advisory Committee (ICAC) advisory system.

## 8.2 SPECIES AND HABITAT MANAGEMENT

Apart from work on the footpaths and clearance of Rosebay Willowherb, no other habitat management was carried out. No species management other than controlling the productivity of Canada Geese was carried out.

### **MS01/01 Control Rosebay Willowherb *Chamerion angustifolium***

Rosebay Willowherb control started on 24<sup>th</sup> July. The four controlled patches from 2021, much reduced in 2022, in 2023 saw only two sites with Rosebay present, and in each instance its abundance was significantly diminished. There were no plants found at either the South Stream or the North Valley Rise sites in 2023. Each patch was cut once during the late summer with any plants left after the last cut being hand pulled. All patches were cut before going to seed. There were no extra patches identified in 2023.

### **MS01/02 Licence to Control Canada Geese (*Branta canadensis*)**

A licence (Ref: S090161/2), provided by NRW, is held to control the breeding success of Canada Geese on Skomer. In total, nine nests were treated.

### **MH1/01 Bracken Control along the history trail**

To comply with our glastir contract, bracken was cut back along the history trail twice during the season, the first cut on 19<sup>th</sup> June and the second cut on 14<sup>th</sup> August.



### 8.3 BUILDINGS AND INFRASTRUCTURE

All buildings were cleaned and decorated as required in March and at the end of the season.

	North Haven	Farm
External infrastructure	<p>Some rot on house and handrails. External condition of the building was assessed by Chris Ward in 2021, and it was noted that the exposed side of North Haven is in poor condition with horizontal cladding held loosely in place as wood beneath is rotten. Windows and sills are also in poor condition and need replacing. Vertical cladding planks are also in poor condition and have started to be replaced.</p> <p>Balcony boardwalk planks on the research accommodation replaced in March.</p> <p>New garage doors fitted on 2<sup>nd</sup> September.</p>	<p>Guttering and downpipes repaired autumn 2023.</p> <p>Window in volunteer block replaced. New glass door installed in AW/VO block.</p> <p>Fridge room roof repaired by spring work party.</p> <p>Door to AW/VO block and LTV room leaking when rain comes from the east.</p> <p>Doors to hostel leak when rain driving from the north.</p> <p>Lintel in visitor centre needs replacing.</p>
Internal infrastructure	OK	<p>Beds in Chough treated for woodworm spring 2023. Woodworm in hut on one of the tables – treated spring 2023. Woodworm treated in VO/AW back door autumn 2023.</p> <p>New soft furnishings and lamps purchased for AW/VO block. New fixings, painting and renovations done in block.</p> <p>New inverter purchased for the hut.</p> <p>New seat cushions purchased for volunteer block.</p> <p>Chairs glued back together in research accommodation.</p> <p>Where necessary painted AW/VO block, volunteer kitchen and bedrooms, hostel in spring 2023.</p> <p>Mouse proofed volunteer kitchen and hostel kitchen autumn 2023.</p>
Broadband/Webcam infrastructure	<p>OK - Lost connection on Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> November and had no connection until moving off on 17<sup>th</sup> November.</p> <p>Infrastructure for old webcams at North Haven was removed in November.</p>	OK - Lost connection on Sunday 12 <sup>th</sup> November and had no connection until moving off on 17 <sup>th</sup> November.
Water supply	OK	No water shortages this season.

Water	<p>Water treatment serviced by Penstar on 16<sup>th</sup> May.</p> <p>Water tested on 30<sup>th</sup> May and failed for Enterococci.</p> <p>Re-tested on 11<sup>th</sup> July and failed for E-Coli.</p> <p>Water was boiled for the remained of the season.</p>	<p>OK – Water treatment serviced by Penstar on 16<sup>th</sup> May. Water tested 30<sup>th</sup> May and failed for Legionella AW/VO block, treated then tested and passed 11<sup>th</sup> July.</p>
Plumbing	OK	<p>Water tank burst in downstairs hostel Sep 2022 – replaced August 2023. Pipes backed up and flooded courtyard April 2023 and hostel ex-closure June 2023.</p>
Septic tank	OK	OK
Compost toilets	<p>Installed by the work party in September. Not used in 2023.</p>	<p>Strong smell on several occasions, despite extractor fans being on for most of the day.</p> <p>Otherwise, OK. Chutes cleaned, and Bracken added weekly by VO and AW.</p>
Solar hot water	Not working	<p>Hostel solar hot water serviced in August 2023.</p>
Chlorine drip	n/a	OK
Gas boilers	Serviced in summer	<p>New boiler installed in AW/VO block.</p>
Immersion Heaters	OK	<p>Immersion heater in AW/VO block worked well. With no hot water possible in hostel, unclear how well hostel immersion heater worked.</p>
Gas cookers	OK	<p>Minor faults with volunteer oven and hostel oven fixed by team throughout year.</p>
Photo-voltaic	OK	OK
Batteries	Replaced on 18 <sup>th</sup> and 19 <sup>th</sup> April	<p>Deteriorating – will need replacing. By the autumn several power cuts and generator required even on days with some sun.</p>
Electrics	<p>OK – several new plugs installed in North Haven bedrooms, kitchens and the office.</p>	<p>Main light in compost toilets (right) not working. Have checked this is not an issue with the bulbs. To be raised upon next service.</p> <p>New plugs installed in hostel kitchen, volunteer kitchen, AW/VO block bedrooms, fieldworker bedroom. Found fault with plug in research kitchen which didn't have earth, new light installed and RCB fixed in workshop.</p>
Fire alarm	OK	<p>Serviced. Several parts replaced, including sounders and beacons.</p> <p>Faults showing throughout the season. Electrician Ian Sutcliffe went through the entire system on 27<sup>th</sup> April and resolved the ongoing faults in Zones 3 and 2, enabling the</p>

		AW/VO block to return to the main system rather than using battery operated detectors.  Further faults repaired by Ian in autumn 2023.
Internal fireplaces	Serviced. Remedial work was carried out to fix leak running down outside of flue and to re-paint the stove where it had rusted due to the leak.	Serviced.
Landing	OK – maintenance carried out to the handrails with some uprights replaced, new steps installed at top next to seating area, path to seating area widened in the spring. Proposal to fit a back board so that soil slippage is reduced.	
Boat Shed	OK – Work to ensure windows close properly in Autumn.	

Table 12 Overview of maintenance work carried out in 2023.



New garage doors at North Haven and the Lime Kiln roof in the process of being replaced



*Future infrastructure work - rotting handrails and joists on North Haven balcony.*



*Before and after. A temporary boardwalk is placed over the wet spring flush at Tom's House to reduce poaching and widening of the paths*

## 8.4 MACHINERY AND EQUIPMENT

	North Haven	Farm
Generator	OK - required a new battery which was fitted on 20 <sup>th</sup> September.	The generator was hardly used in spring/summer because of good weather. The leaking coolant unit was fixed on 11 <sup>th</sup> September. It was also connected to Farm staff smartphones so that staff can monitor power levels remotely. The generator shed roof was re-sealed using silicone and a waterproof mastic to reduce water ingress and risk of rust to the generator. Substantial work was done to remove rust from the generator housing and to paint it with Hammerite. The generator was used considerably in Autumn as the Farm batteries are not holding charge efficiently.
Dumper Truck	Weekly checks were carried out by the VO – this included checking levels, checking the oil, topping up fuel, pumping tyres and checking the treads. No major issues were reported, except a replacement hydraulic hose was needed for the lifting mechanism which was fitted on 5 <sup>th</sup> September. Additionally, mice chewed through a tyre air cap causing a very slow puncture to one of the tyres which is being monitored.	
Mule	OK	
Boat engines	Main engine suffered a severed fuel hose on 30 <sup>th</sup> May. Engineers came out to replace on 1 <sup>st</sup> June. Auxiliary engine replaced on 18 <sup>th</sup> May. Both engines serviced and winterised on 27 <sup>th</sup> November.	
Boat	OK – Gluing work carried out by LGS on 9 <sup>th</sup> May. (Strake, hole repairs and a new towing patch)	
Mainland boat trailer	Jockey wheel replaced in February. Boat was towed on trailer to a new storage facility on Dale Airfield on 4 <sup>th</sup> December.	
Boat trailer	OK	
Cage Generators	OK – Second hand cage generator brought onto island in September to replace a failing cage generator which is leaking fuel through the air filter.	

Table 13 Overview of machine maintenance

## 9 External groups and liaison

### ICAC

The Islands Conservation Advisory Committee (ICAC) meetings were held on 02/03/23 (VC), 25/04/23 (Skomer) and 10/08/23 (VC). The seabird monitoring subcommittee was held on 13/03/2023. Minutes were taken and are kept in the island files.

### Friends of Skokholm and Skomer

The Friends of Skokholm and Skomer reunion was held on 19<sup>th</sup> February. Warden Leighton Newman attended, presenting a scintillating island update, and also pre-recorded a talk for online viewing.

### Marine Conservation Zone MCZ

Especially strong links are maintained with NRW staff at the MCZ office at Martin's Haven. The MCZ team are extremely generous and helpful to the island, and we would not be able to run so smoothly without them. The MCZ team were instrumental in facilitating our autumn beach cleans of the Wick and South Haven.

### Natural Resources Wales (NRW)

The island has obvious and important links with NRW and Paul Culyer has helped source items of equipment and kit funded by NRW.

### Dale Sailing

Another good year working with Dale Sailing. Good communication was maintained with all skippers and boat staff and especially with Gareth Reynolds.

### UK Seabird Monitoring Programme

Skomer staff attend the annual SMP Key Sites review meeting and the SMP Advisory Group Meeting, coordinated by The British Trust for Ornithology. We contribute to SMP multi-partner working groups as required.

### Others

Links were maintained with a wide range of external groups including NRW, the National Trust, Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority, the RSPB (especially Greg Morgan on Ramsey and the Biosecurity for Wales team), H.M. Coastguards and Pembrokeshire Bird Group.



# 10 Grants and Donations

## Grants

Items covered by the grant funding in 2023 included:

- Subsidising our Young Birders' Week events
- Covering costs of Black2Nature residential
- Staff and volunteer training
- Barge hire for delivery of building materials and removal of rubbish
- Pre-season works to island boat, servicing and winter storage
- Boat kit – waterproof boat clothing for staff and volunteers
- Life jackets and PPE
- Help towards the costs involved in providing accommodation on the island for volunteers and seabird fieldworkers

BERF funding – NRW directly purchased several items to facilitate reserve management and help us to improve H&S on site including removal and replacement of the damaged asbestos roof on the lower lime kiln in North Haven.

We received funding from Pembrokeshire Bird Group to further subsidise our Young Birders' Event.

## Research and Monitoring contracts

Skomer also receives annual funding contributions for the following research and monitoring projects:

BTO/JNCC – a contribution to help cover costs of our seabird field assistant role.

NRW – funding received to deliver Grey Seal pup production monitoring project.

The Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales wishes to acknowledge the following contributions received in 2023:

Grant funding for seabird monitoring costs received through the Nature Networks Fund, Round Two, (a Welsh Government grant administered by The National Lottery Heritage Fund in Wales.) This is the second round of funding for Skomer seabird monitoring received through this scheme.



Grant funding received from the Friends of the Pembrokeshire National Park in May 2023 for the purchase of two telescopes and tripods for long-term volunteers to use for seabird monitoring and skills training.



# 11 Acknowledgements

Thanks go to many parties and individuals that helped with the successful running of Skomer Island in 2023. Apologies to anyone left off this inevitably incomplete list.

Many thanks go to all staff and volunteers (long-term, work party and weekly volunteers and anyone drafted in at last minute to help us); staff at the MCZ and Dale Sailing; Chrissy and Gary at Lockley Lodge; Lisa Morgan (Head of Islands and Marine for WTSWW), all staff at Cilgerran and Tondu; Lucy and Sash Tusa; Anna and Steve Sutcliffe; The Friends of Skokholm and Skomer; HM Coastguard and the R.N.L.I.; all contractors; all members of the ICAC and other helpful wildlife consultants; Dave Astins; staff and students at Oxford, Sheffield and Gloucestershire Universities; and finally to all of the visitors that came and enjoyed the island.

The Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales and University of Gloucestershire also wish to acknowledge the partial financial contributions of the JNCC Support Company. The Seabird Monitoring Programme is funded jointly by BTO and JNCC, in association with RSPB, with fieldwork conducted by both non-professional and professional surveyors.



Skomer is one of four key sites for seabird monitoring in the Seabird Monitoring Programme (SMP) and the only one in Wales. Fair Isle, Canna, Isle of May and Skomer all deliver an enhanced level of seabird monitoring each year, including studies of abundance and breeding success, but also adult survival, phenology and diet. The work is conducted by WTSWW staff and seasonal fieldworkers employed by both WTSWW and the University of Gloucester.



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