

August, Skokholm's Best Kept Secret

August is a very special time on Skokholm. It is the month that our Storm Petrels, Manx Shearwaters and Fulmars are feeding chicks and when autumn migration really begins. The Island is a sea of colour, alive with insects and surrounded by Grey Seals and Dolphins.

Skokholm is one of the most accessible places in the World where visitors can enter a European Storm Petrel breeding colony. There are even birds nesting in the walls surrounding the 18th century farmhouse where our guests are based. As August progresses the Storm Petrel eggs hatch and the gentle pipping of the chicks can be heard from crevices about the Island. This is the time of year when we begin to catch the adult birds to monitor their longevity, numbers and movements. Guests are welcome to join us for the night, to witness these spectacular seabirds being studied in the hand and to release them on their way. August is also when we begin to monitor chick development; a small number of accessible study crevices offer a very rare opportunity to see how the chicks fare each year.



A Storm Petrel chick being weighed. Guests in August can join our researchers when they visit these very special birds.

Manx Shearwaters are busy feeding their chicks in August. Approximately 80% of our estimated 45,000 pairs have a developing chick at this time of year and dark nights see the adults arrive *en masse* with food for hungry mouths. The Island Wardens are busy at this time of year monitoring Manx Shearwater productivity (the number of pairs which manage to raise a chick) and are more than happy to show guests how this is done. There are very few places in the world where you can witness the amazing spectacle of a Manx Shearwater chick, a ball of fluff weighing nearly half as much again as an adult bird. Nights at the end of August see the first chicks emerging from their burrows to develop their wing muscles for a migration to the South Atlantic.



Manx Shearwater chicks in August. There are over 150 study burrows on Skokholm where the wardens monitor the development of these fantastic seabirds.

August is also a very exciting time of year at the Bird Observatory. Onshore winds can see tens of thousands of Manx Shearwaters passing offshore along with scarcer species such as Balearic and Sooty Shearwaters. Passage waders are typically vocal and the first waves of autumn migrants,

particularly Blackcaps, Whitethroats and Willow Warblers, come through. Inevitably a few scarcities also turn up at this time of year; there are multiple August records of Spotted Crake, Woodchat and Red-backed Shrikes, Melodious and Icterine Warblers and Ortolan Bunting. As the month progresses rarer species such as Aquatic Warblers, Greenish Warblers and Bonelli's Warblers have been recorded.



August is one of the best times to enjoy migrant birds passing through Skokholm. Potentially hundreds of common migrants, such as this Sedge Warbler, can be flitting through the flowers and bushes.

To organise an August visit to Skokholm contact Wendy, our Bookings Secretary, on 01239 621212 or islands@welshwildlife.org