



# Field Views

April May June Issue 2002 .2

## Skokholm 2002

In May, Karen organised a stay on Skokholm Island, West Wales, and, at an unearthly hour on Saturday morning, a group of us set off in heavy rain for the 3 night stay. I was a bit concerned that we might be prevented from landing on the island by heavy seas, as had been the case when I visited Skomer a couple of years ago. However, all was well at Martin's Haven, the rain had cleared, and with the other visitors, we unloaded from the van all the provisions that had been ordered for us, and then formed a chain to load them and our bags onto the boat, the Dale Princess. All ready to go, the boatman announced that the forecast for our return day wasn't good, so if anyone had to be back on time, they had better not go in the first place! A few raised eyebrows, but mostly we thought that it was a standard word of warning and not very likely - silly people! Anyway, no-one decided to stay behind, not least because of the disruption and delay to everyone else that would be caused by searching out bags already stowed below the deck.

Skokholm was delightful - quite small and of course very quiet apart from the sea and the birds. There is no electricity (not even a generator going), no phones (even mobiles were switched off to conserve batteries) and we washed with rain water from butts outside the buildings. We had a rota for washing-up after meals and could only use any hot water that was left in the boiler when it was our turn. The food was excellent, and the wardens, Graham and Theresa, and their assistants Paul and Wendy, were all very friendly and welcoming.

We waited up for the Manx Shearwaters the first night, their return proving to be in the early hours by the time it was dark enough. Subsequent nights were really too light for them, even with cloud cover. Theresa told us where to wait near the stone wall by the cottage for Storm Petrels coming in, and on the second night, in heavy drizzle, sure enough, a tiny petrel fluttered around us like a bat, eventually settling on the wall side and quickly disappearing into its burrow deep inside. My first ever sighting!

The island was covered with burrows occupied by the shearwaters, rabbits and, near the cliffs, the Puffins. There were several small hides clinging to the slopes overlooking bays, which proved to be a boon to shelter in from the wind and rain, as well as to see the Puffins from just a few feet away. Guillemots and Razorbills nest on the cliffs, along with Fulmars and gulls, and Kittiwakes and Gannets passed constantly to and fro from Skomer and Grassholm respectively. The sea off the lighthouse was teeming with birds, especially in the evenings when huge numbers of shearwaters gathered waiting for dark. Several porpoises and dolphins were usually there too. Seals were often in the bays.

We saw Choughs, a family of 7 Ravens, a Peregrine patrolled the cliffs and of course there were hundreds of Lesser Black-backed and Herring Gulls nesting. Three small meres on the island held Shelduck, Mallard, Moorhens and Canadas, all of which bred, but not very successfully as the eggs or chicks were predated by the gulls. There were 2 Whimbrel and about 6 Dunlin feeding there, and Oystercatchers, Wheatears, Skylarks, Meadow and Rock Pipits nested all around. We found a couple of pairs of Sedge Warblers, Blackbirds, Swallows, Spotted Flycatchers, a pair of Redpolls, a Wren and 2 Wood Pigeons, and not a lot else! In fact, on the last morning, most of us dashed off to the mere to "twitch" a pair of Gadwall that had called in! Quite a rarity there.

Departure day arrived wet and windy (again) and the sea was huge. No boat could land, and we were warned that it might be that way for several more days with more storms on their way from the Atlantic. We were very glad of the cosiness of the common room most afternoons as it was the only warm place, with a fire burning. The next day the news was the same, and by afternoon 4 of the visitors felt that home commitments simply couldn't wait out the uncertainty, and hired a helicopter to take them off to Milford Haven. I believe they enjoyed the flight, but it looked really dodgy to me in that wind!

Thursday dawned - a beautiful sunny day with light winds and clear skies. After enjoying the sun and the birds all morning we returned to the farm - still no Dale Princess and still too rough in the harbour. Two chaps in an inflatable seemed to be joyriding in the waves, and as the wardens went down to remonstrate with them for disturbing the birds, I commented "you wouldn't catch me in one of those!" Famous last words! Ten minutes later, we were rushing about packing, wrapping luggage in bin-liners and hurrying down to the quay - the RIB was our transport! It was actually an exhilarating experience, although very wet, and, unbelievably, the water at Martins Haven was like a millpond compared to the open sea.

Did the family miss me? No! Would I go again? Yes! (but with extra underwear!) And I'm sure that everyone who went has heard every "marooned on an island" joke in the book!

Lesley Staves

### NDOC Scrapbook

As a result of the appeal in the last Field Views, the NDOC scrapbook has been located in safe hands. It will probably be available for all to see at the next AGM and Members' Afternoon. Jon Wilding has agreed to keep a new scrapbook so anyone with suitable material should send it to him. All we need now is for reports of meetings and outings to be sent in to the NWN - any volunteers?!