Welsh island puffins protected thanks to Heritage



Thanks to a £48,000 National Lottery grant, wardens can continue to care for the vast colonies of rare seabirds that nest on Skomer and Skokholm.

Normally the puffins that nest on Skomer and Skokholm Islands, off the coast of Pembrokeshire in Wales, draw visitors from around the world.

But the coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis has brought tourism to a standstill, devastating income for the Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales (WTSWW) which cares for the islands.

Sarah Kessell, WTSWW's Chief Executive Officer, explained: "We earn over half of our income from tourism – visitor centres, cafes, shops, holiday accommodation and day visits to the island. That income has been turned off overnight. It has left us with a gap in our budget of more than £500,000."



Skomer Island puffins. Credit: Mike Alexander

They were faced with the prospect of withdrawing their four island wardens – two each for Skomer and Skokholm. But thanks to a £48,000 grant made through our Heritage Emergency Fund, the wardens can now continue protecting the islands' seabirds and other fragile wildlife.

Sarah said: “The funding is ensuring that we can keep the conservation staff who haven’t been furloughed going. That includes the wardens on Skomer who need to be there to protect the breeding seabirds as well three members of staff on the mainland who are looking after 100 nature reserves between them at the moment.”



Skomer Island warders Nathan Wilkie and Sylwia Zbijewska

Skomer Island has a colony of 30,000 puffins and more than 300,000 Manx shearwaters – half the world's population. It is also home to many other birds, including short-eared owls, choughs and peregrines.

Wardens live on the island for several months of the year, protecting the wildlife from unsupervised human visitors and introduced predators. They also collect data on each species, maintaining a vital decades-old dataset which shows how populations are changing.

Emergency grants for nature

Twenty one grants have been awarded to wildlife and nature organisations across the UK since the Heritage Emergency Fund was launched.

They include a grant to the Birmingham Wildlife and Black Country Trust, which manages nine nature reserves, several in urban areas. The grant will cover essential costs including bringing in part time staff.

The Penllergare Trust has also received a grant. The Trust manages the Grade II listed Penllergare Estate north of Swansea, close to some of Wales' most deprived areas. Its cherished green spaces include 260 acres of picturesque woodland and lakes. The Trust expects to lose around 95% of its normal income over the spring and summer months. Their grant will cover costs for overheads and a General Manager to ensure the Trust can maintain its operations and recover from lockdown.

Supporting heritage during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic

Have you applied for support yet?

The National Lottery Heritage Fund is committed to helping the heritage sector through this crisis.

Our £50million Heritage Emergency Fund is open until 31 July for grants from £3,000 - £250,000. We want to support as many organisations as we can. Submit an application before the deadline so we can help your organisation too.

Additional support includes:

- Digital Skills for Heritage: increasing sector skills and confidence to bring heritage to more people
- maintaining our financial commitment to all of our 2,500 existing projects
- help and advice from our UK-wide teams

Find out more.

This feature was updated on 5 June 2020 to show that there are 30,000 puffins on Skomer, three times as many as previously stated.

You might also be interested in...



Larger grants now available from the Heritage Emergency Fund