Puffins have Ministerial Ear

17/06/2010

Today the many puffins, seals and Manx shearwaters of Skomer Island will have the ear of Wales' First Minister, Carwyn Jones, as they receive a visit to celebrate the launch of the Skomer Heritage project. This jewel off the Pembrokeshire coast will be the centre of attention as the fantastic restoration work is shown off to members of the Welsh Assembly and the funders who supported the project.

For the last few years the buildings on this iconic Welsh Island, owned by the Countryside Council for Wales and managed by the Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales, have been restored with the help of The Heritage Lottery Fund, The Tubney Foundation and The Crown Estate.

The old farm outbuildings have been converted into accommodation for people wishing to experience the awesome land and seascape overnight, a beautiful new interpretation room welcomes the day visitor with paintings of all the wildlife in this marine nature reserve, whilst a new research centre and warden accommodation has been built to the highest environmental standards. Powered by solar panels and wind turbines this is a perfect eco break destination*.

The island, once covered in trees, is smothered in bluebells from the month of May making it one of the most spectacular wildflower sites in Britain. It is a significant population of puffin and is also home to thousands of Manx shearwater also making it one of our most precious wildlife reserves. The island, along with its sister island Skokholm, has almost half the world's population of the Manx Shearwater and a significant proportion of the world's Grey Seal population.

Sarah Kessell, CEO of The Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales, said: "With its population of 6,000 breeding pairs of puffins,120,000 breeding pairs of Manx shearwater as well as many seals and fantastic marine life off it's rocky shores, it is no wonder that Skomer is the only Marine Nature Reserve in Wales. The work we are doing on the island, along with other research bodies such as Oxford University, continues a long tradition of study started by the West Wales Field Society in 1946."

The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) supported the Skomer Island Heritage Experience with a £1.6million grant. Jennifer Stewart, Head of HLF in Wales, said: "Skomer is a vital part of Wales' natural heritage and an internationally important conservation site. We're delighted to see the difference lottery money has made in improving interpretation and education facilities both on and off the island. The result is an enhanced visitor experience, ensuring people of all ages and abilities can enjoy Skomer.

"The refurbished accommodation and expanded learning facilities has helped encourage more volunteers onto the island and increased the opportunities to develop ecology skills. The new multi-media centre has also created fantastic opportunities for students and school children across Wales to get closer to and explore the wildlife on the island. What's more the remote online presence is showcasing Wales' natural heritage to the rest of the world."

Notes to editors

Using money raised through the National Lottery, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) sustains and transforms a wide range of heritage for present and future generations to take part in, learn from and enjoy. From museums, parks and historic

places to archaeology, natural environment and cultural traditions, we invest in every part of our diverse heritage. HLF has supported 33,900 projects, allocating £4.4billion across the UK.

* The buildings won a Sustainability Award for the Building and Infrastructure Development on Skomer Island in April 2008. The award was from RICS Wales (Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors).

Further information

Lyndsey Maiden, The Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales on 07799 050 805 or l.maiden@welshwildlife.org / Lyndsey@themaidensbarn.co.uk

To find our more about The Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales.