

The Manx Shearwater and Light Pollution

Skomer and Skokholm Islands have the largest known breeding concentration of this species in the world, which together with Ramsey and Middleholm make Pembrokeshire an incredibly important area for the Manx shearwater (*Puffinus puffinus*).

There has been increasing concern locally from the Wildlife Trust, RSPB and bird researchers on the islands about the impact of light pollution on young Manx shearwaters as they leave the islands in August/November, making their first flight. This is an issue that particularly involves brightly lit tankers at anchor in St Bride's Bay, and the terminals and refineries around the Haven.



Birds are affected by the bright lights, causing them to ground.

When grounded, even if they are uninjured, shearwaters struggle to take off. This is due to their 'forward heavy' anatomy which requires a cliff, slope or a long 'runway' to enable take-off. Thus, if a grounded bird is not helped, it can fall victim to dehydration, starvation, be caught by predators, or hit by cars. Birds that hit ships and fall to the sea may also be vulnerable to predators.

Bird researchers from Skomer visited a tanker at anchor in St Brides Bay for an overcast night in September 2017 and encountered 49 Manx shearwaters on board, 2 of which died, and 7 of which were grounded a second time. "Fallout" of fledgling birds that are grounded after being affected by artificial lights tends to be higher during darker moon phases (i.e. new moon), when skies are overcast or with low cloud cover and fog, and when prevailing winds move birds towards brightly lit obstacles.

Light pollution is a global issue and its effects are not limited to bird populations. Artificial brightening of the night sky ("skyglow") can negatively impact other species such as bats, ruin dark-skies, and waste energy and money. Pembrokeshire County Council and the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority are keen to improve the dark skies of Pembrokeshire for both the human experience and the wildlife (Pembrokeshire is currently home to a network of 8 Dark Sky Discovery Sites; a nationally-recognised designation for top stargazing spots across the UK). This map: <https://www.lightpollutionmap.info> shows the effect of tankers at anchor in the Bay quite clearly.



Information on care of fallout birds:

If you come across a fledgling bird which has grounded, follow these temporary care instructions:

- Pick it up from behind, wrapping a cloth around its back and wings.
- Keep the bird well away from your face at all times.
- Find a medium/large-sized box and place a folded towel at the bottom.
- Ensure there are holes in the box big enough for airflow.
- Place the bird in the box and keep in a dark, quiet place.
- Keep the bird at ambient (outdoor) temperatures if possible.
- Please don't feed or leave a dish of water for the bird.
- Leave the bird alone.
- Always wash your hands after handling the bird.
- Release the bird at night from a boat or from the coast, preferably on a clear night.



If you are worried about the health of the bird or want further advice or assistance to release it, call Skomer Island (07971 114302), Ramsey Island, (07796 611951 / 07881 846498) or the Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales (01656 724100).



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