



Puffins. Photo: Eric Dempsey



Puffin Island, Co Kerry from An Gleann Iarthach at the tip of Dingle peninsula. Photo: Steve Newton

BirdWatch Ireland Reserves

County Kerry: Puffin Island

Dave Suddaby describes the birdlife of Puffin Island Nature Reserve, Co Kerry

BirdWatch Ireland's **Puffin Island Nature Reserve** was established in 1983. Located just off the southwest tip of County Kerry, it is summer home to many cliff- and burrow-nesting seabirds.

Exploring the reserve

The island is located approximately 300 metres off the tip of the Iveragh peninsula. Its grassy slopes rise out of the sea to a height of 159 metres and stretch for over a kilometre out into the Atlantic, pointing towards the more famous jagged pinnacles of the Skelligs.

The island can be viewed from the mainland, from the headland west of Keel. From here it can be seen that broken grassy slopes on one side are divided from steeper cliffs on the other.

As its name implies, the island is home to many breeding **Puffins** – thousands of pairs are present all summer. They are comical-looking characters, sometimes referred to as the 'clowns of the sea.' They return to their burrows on the grassy slopes from late April onwards and the busiest time of year is June and July when the adults can be viewed returning to their chicks – affectionately known as 'pufflings,' – with small fish to feed them.

The island is also host to other burrow-nesters. It holds one of the largest colonies of **Manx Shearwaters** in the country, estimated at 6,500 pairs. They are nocturnal and to see them requires a visit on a summer's evening when thousands can be seen gathering just offshore before visiting their burrows under cover of darkness. There are also an estimated 5,000 pairs of **Storm Petrels** breeding here.

Other seabirds nest on the steeper cliffs,



including some 400 pairs of **Fulmars**, 200 pairs of **Guillemots** and smaller numbers of **Razorbills**.

Work we are doing associated with Puffin Island

The importance of this island for seabirds is widely recognised: it is a **Special Protection Area** under the European Union Birds Directive and is also an **Important Bird Area** identified by BirdLife International. Puffin Island, together with other internationally recognised seabird colonies nearby, help us in measuring the health of the marine environment. This reserve and your support are vital in helping us to:

- Protect one of Ireland's most important breeding seabird colonies
- Promote the reserve as a place to learn about seabirds
- Provide an environment in which to learn
- Encourage amateurs and experts alike to undertake environmental studies.

Visitor information

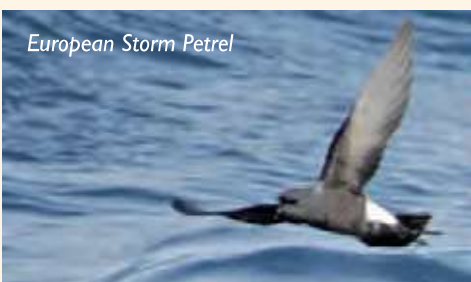
Access to the island is limited, so please contact BirdWatch Ireland for permission to land. Viewing from the mainland offers good views over the island and surrounding seas. A good telescope is advisable to make the most of the view.

Don't miss.....

- The sounds, smells, hustle and bustle of a major 'seabird city.'
- The spectacle of thousands of **Manx Shearwaters** rafting offshore on a summer's evening.
- The whirling flocks of **Puffins** as they fly back and forth from their burrows.
- Possible sightings of **Grey Seals, Basking Sharks, dolphins, porpoises and whales.**



JOHN FOX



European Storm Petrel

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