



News

[Voice for Nature](#)

[Brexit](#)

[Green Infrastructure](#)

[Natural Health Service](#)

[Our Land Our Future](#)

[What's On](#)

[30 Days Wild](#)

[My Wild Life](#)

[Every Child Wild](#)

[Inspiring People](#)

[Back to news listings](#)

Tuesday 25th February 2014

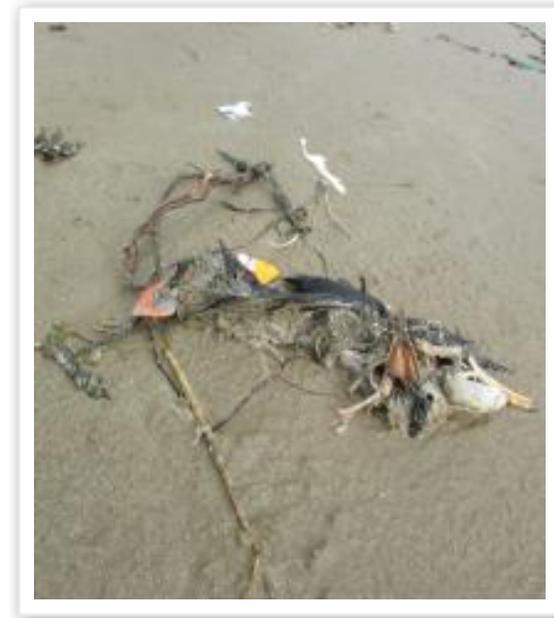
Following one of the stormiest winters on record, there are reports that wrecks of dead seabirds are being washed ashore on many of our beaches.

[The Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales](#), which manages the internationally important seabird islands of Skomer and Skokholm on the Pembrokeshire coast, says that following recent reports of wrecks on the English and French coasts, many are now also being reported from beaches like Newgale, Broad Haven and Ferryside. Between them Skomer and Skokholm are home to over 20,000 puffins as well as around 28,000 guillemots and 9,000 razorbills, which makes up the most important colony of cliff nesting seabirds in southern Britain. There seems little doubt that many local birds are amongst the recent casualties at sea.

Skomer Wardens Ed Stubbings and Bee Büche visited Newgale beach in Pembrokeshire on 23 February with local birders Anna and Steve Sutcliffe.

“We found around sixty dead seabirds, almost half were razorbills”, explained Ed. “Like wrecks of birds recorded elsewhere on the coast, many were clearly malnourished, and had suffered badly in the stormy conditions”.

This was confirmed by Pembrokeshire veterinary volunteer John Walmsley, whose post mortems clearly demonstrated the emaciated condition of the dead birds.



“The back to back storms that have affected large areas of the North Atlantic and English Channel this winter have been so severe that they are thought to have killed more birds than the Sea Empress and Braer oil disasters combined”, explained Bee.

“This also comes on the back of two mortality events in 2013, one caused by storms in the North Sea and one by the discharge of PIB or polyisobutylene from boats.”

Dr Lizzie Wilberforce, Conservation Manager with the Wildlife Trust, believes the unprecedented combination of threats facing our seabirds make them a priority for research.

“We are recording declines in breeding success of many colonies which we believe to be connected to climate change”, she said.

“Together with storm impacts and pollution events, we have reason to be very concerned for these iconic species. However, we are also seeing significant cuts to the funding that supports seabird research and monitoring, just when we need it most. Natural Resources Wales has withdrawn funding altogether from one forty year old programme of monitoring Skomer’s guillemots, led by the University of Sheffield, which generates absolutely critical data. The timing couldn’t be worse- we really need to understand how our birds are reacting to these threats if we are to be equipped to help them.”

“We’re hoping to go back out to Skomer in the next couple of weeks in preparation for the coming season”, said Wardens Ed and Bee.

“We will be doing everything we can to assess the effects of recent events on our Pembrokeshire birds as the breeding season progresses, but we may not know the true impact for some months or even years.”

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