

Isle of May wins awards for new visitors' centre



The Isle of May has won four awards this week for its spectacular visitor centre.

The Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) visitor centre won the Nature Tourism Award at the prestigious RSPB Nature of Scotland awards, as well as three awards at the Dundee Institute of Architects Awards.

The Isle of May offers a first-class wildlife spectacle with over 250,000 seabirds on the island in peak breeding season. The island's grey seal population is one of the most important in Scotland with seals resident throughout the year and numbers peaking during the autumn breeding season. Over 10,000 visitors visit the Isle of May every year.

The Nature Tourism award recognised the “high quality visitor experience” and “unique vantage point to unobtrusively observe the island's spectacular seabirds and seals,” as well as the information presented about the island's “rich natural heritage.”

The Dundee Institute of Architecture awards included the Best Project (Less than £500,000) Award, the Best Use of Timber Award, and a commendation for the Best Commercial/Non Domestic Award.

David Steel, SNH's Isle of May reserve manager, said, “We're thrilled to win these awards. A lot of planning went into building our visitor centre sustainably, as well as making it a great place to watch and learn about the wildlife on the island. The May really is a special place, and we love sharing that with people. Our visitor centre has made trips to the

island even better, as it not only gives people shelter and spectacular viewpoints, but also provides a great spot for the terns to nest!”



SNH opened the visitor centre in July 2014. The building has panoramic views of the island’s rugged scenery and spectacular wildlife, including close-up views of the island’s thriving tern colony, with special panels also allowing views of puffins burrowing within a metre of the building. The centre also helps visitors explore the island, and gives information about the important wildlife and research on the island.

The centre was built sustainably and was designed to fit into the landscape. It has a turf roof planted with native maritime species, reflecting the island’s coastal grasslands. The centre is also low maintenance with no energy costs, as it uses only natural light and collects rainwater for flushing toilets. Where possible, materials were reused and recycled. Crushed stone from a demolition was used for foundations and granite sets from the demolished building were used for the floor.

Known locally as ‘The May’, this small island sits on the edge of the Firth of Forth. The island’s importance for seabirds has drawn scientists to its shores for many years and the May is home to the oldest continuously running bird observatory in the UK. This island is a historical gem and it’s been a place of pilgrimage for centuries with an early island monastery. The May was also the site of Scotland’s very first lighthouse, built in 1636, while the current, castle-like lighthouse was designed by the engineer Robert Stevenson.