

Isle of May is now open to visitors

This year's chance to see thousands of spectacular seabirds, including the largest concentration of nesting puffins along the east coast, has just begun with the public opening of the Isle of May' reserve yesterday.

A record number of people visited the island in 2018 – over 13,500 visitors came ashore to the Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) national nature reserve, making it the fourth consecutive year visitor numbers have grown. But puffins are far from the only attraction. Isle of May reserve manager, David Steel, shares his top 10 reasons to visit this spectacular island.



Puffins are not the only reason to visit the Isle of May. Enjoy a boat trip! The trip over to the May is rollicking good fun, led by knowledgeable guides, and will warm you up with a few bird sightings before you even reach the island.

Experience the feeling of being inside a puffin snow globe. In spring, over 40,000 pairs of puffins return from the open sea where they have been since August. Birds bond for life and will use the same underground nest burrow, so watch out for adults 'spring cleaning' and pair bonding.

Walk in the footsteps of the famous Robert Stevenson, the engineer who designed and built the impressive main lighthouse on the island in 1816. Climb to the highest point of the island to gain free entry to the lighthouse (weekends only) and enjoy the story of this magnificent building.

Watch out for endearing eiders. Spring is the best time to see the largest nesting duck in the British Isles, with over 1,200 females nesting across the island. This loveable duck will sit tight on four to five eggs and will not move throughout her four-week incubation. Many will nest on the footpaths which

criss-cross the island, so watch where you step!

See the Isle of May in bloom. Following the long cold winter months, the island springs to life as the dormant season gives way to spring. Take in the display of the white sea campion which carpets the island, and the thrift (known as sea pink) which grows in the crevices of stone walls and the cracks of the rocks.

Take in the sights, sounds and smells of the seabird city. Don't miss the spectacle of thousands of cliff-nesting seabirds, including guillemots, razorbills, shags and kittiwakes on the high west cliffs of the island. Watch and listen to the buzz of activity and throng of birds as they return from the open sea, display with partners and squabble for nest sites.

See seals hauled out on seaweed-covered rocks as they enjoy the spring warmth. The Isle of May is home to one of the largest grey seal colonies in the UK, with thousands giving birth in the autumn months. However, spring is also a good time to see the animals hauled out on the rocks.

Enjoy the freedom of an island, breathing in the sea air and escaping the hustle and bustle of daily life. The island's walks offer breath-taking views and if clear, there are views of the Forth Road Bridges out to the west, St. Abb's Head to the south and the mighty Bell Rock lighthouse to the north.

Experience the spiritual atmosphere of this special, historical place. Wander around the ruins of the medieval monastery. Learn about the significant role the island played in the history of early Christianity and about the hermits and monks who lived on the island from the 7th century.

Learn more about the fascinating life of a modern-day Robinson Crusoe – meet the friendly SNH staff who will greet you on arrival to the island. The staff live and work on the island

from March to November and deal with all aspects of island living from welcoming visitors to researching seabirds.

David adds, "This is an exciting time on the May. We're all thrilled to be back, welcome the season's first visitors, and see our first seabirds return, including the ever-popular puffins.

"There's a whole variety of events coming up this season, including family fun days and a weekend celebrating the island's seals. My advice to visitors of all ages is to book your place on a boat soon!"

To keep up-to-date on all the wildlife sightings, events and more on the Isle of May, follow the [blog](#) or the [Facebook](#) page