

Puffins begin to arrive on the Isle of May

Thousands of puffins have landed on one of Scotland's most important seabird islands for the first time this year – ahead of the annual influx of visitors.

Atlantic puffins flock to the Isle of May in the outer Firth of Forth each year for the breeding season.

More than 40,000 pairs nest in burrows on the NatureScot reserve, which is the UK's third largest colony.

This year's first puffin touched down on Wednesday March 20, followed by thousands more in the last few days.

The popular seabirds have not touched land for months as they spend winters at sea. They will reunite with their lifelong partners in their annual burrows in preparation for breeding.

Reserve manager David Steel said: "This is an early landing for us, as the first touchdown on the island is not expected until the last week of March.

"Despite this, the birds will remain unsettled and won't actually start their breeding season until mid-April.

"However, it's good to see them back and this year we'll be carrying out a full census of the population so that we can see how they are doing."

Puffins lay a single egg, which both parents incubate for

around 40 days. Pairs share feeding duties until the puffling is ready to fledge in July.

Each spring, the island – five miles off the coast of Fife – becomes home to up to 200,000 birds including puffins, guillemots, razorbills, shags, kittiwakes, fulmars, oystercatchers, various terns and gulls and over 1200 pairs of eider ducks.

Known as the “Jewel of the Forth”, the Isle of May usually receives around 12,000 visitors each year. The island will reopen to visitors this year on Monday 1 April.

