

ISLE OF MAY BIRD OBSERVATORY

2020



Notes for Visitors

Important Updates since 2019 version. Please Read

The Observatory is an entirely voluntary enterprise and, unlike some larger observatories, we do not employ a warden. Visitors, therefore, are required to manage for themselves for the week that they stay at the Observatory, both in terms of their domestic needs and in **maintaining the field-work recording**.

Transport

Our transport to the island from Anstruther in Fife is provided by Roy Giles, our contracted boatman. He provides a weekly service under contract on a Saturday in the *Osprey*, a RIB (Rigid Inflatable Boat, as used as inshore rescue boats). The skipper will usually be Roy Giles. The time of sailing depends on tides and weather and will be notified upon receipt of full payment. You should always phone Roy on the Thursday or the Friday before you are due to travel to the island to get a precise departure point and to check whether there will be a sailing (because of the weather). Roy Giles' phone number is 07473 631 671. If you cannot get hold of Roy on that number, phone 07957 585 200. You should be ready to load your gear about 45 minutes before sailing time. The decision on whether travel is possible is entirely at the discretion of the skipper, and we expect Low Lighters to respect his decision.

In addition, it may be possible for visitors to the Observatory who are not travelling on a Saturday in the Observatory RIB to travel to the island on other days of the week if Roy Giles is bringing out day visitors in the *Osprey*. Contact should be made direct with Roy to arrange. Sailings will be subject to numbers and weather and those interested should get in touch with Roy at the number above. Payment for these journeys should be made directly to Roy at the time of travel. It may also be possible to travel on the *May Princess* which, weather permitting, sails to the Isle of May daily (except Friday during May & June and with a reduced service in September) with day visitors. Alex Gardner is the skipper of the *May Princess*. It only runs from April to September. These sailings are also subject to numbers and weather. Any such journeys should be arranged direct with Anstruther Pleasure Cruises, and paid for at the time. The phone numbers for checking on sailing times and whether sailings are taking place are on the Anstruther Pleasure Cruises website.

There will be times when the RIB is unable to get out to the island because of bad weather. In that case, the Saturday boat will come to the island on the first available day when the weather is suitable. Visitors to the Low Light should arrange their travel and other arrangements on the basis that they may not get off (or onto) the island on the Saturday and may be on the island for extra days. **In that situation it is open to the visitors to leave the island early (for instance on the Friday) but they would do that at their own expense.** However, in situations where, in the boatman's view, the Low Light visitors would be likely to be stuck on the island for **more** than two days extra, the Observatory would pay for an earlier boat (for instance, on the Friday) to get them off the island.

Luggage

The RIB has capacity for a limited amount of baggage alongside the passengers. If you want to take an unusual quantity of gear, you should contact Roy Giles to discuss, otherwise please be as compact and economical as possible. Please do not bring food in carrier bags which break easily and are not ideal when passing to and from the RIB. The Isle of May SNH Wardens have indicated that they are happy to continue to support us where possible with their transport to and from the harbour, but parties can only expect this to amount to a single load per group in each direction. On busy visitor days the SNH wardens may have to bring the luggage to the Low Light once the *May Princess* has left. We are very grateful to the wardens for the support they provide, often at times when they are hard pressed with their own work. **Visitors should help load their baggage at the pier and then go at once to the Low Light to help unload it.**

Keeping records

The Observatory is equipped with a regularly updated manual with instructions and advice on completing the daily census, the migration log and the "chatty" log. The Committee has noted that some of the log record keeping has sometimes not been maintained as diligently as we would wish. The bird and other recording systems are important practical and historical records in the life of the Observatory. Indeed keeping comprehensive and accurate records is the key activity of the Observatory. **It is the duty of those at the Observatory to maintain these records and we would urge everyone to keep the records and to do so sensibly and sensitively. It is not**

the duty of Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) or other island residents to maintain records.

However, we are aware that at certain times, the Observatory may be manned by ‘non birdwatchers’ who do not feel they have either the experience or expertise to confidently fill in the Daily Census and Migration Log. If this is the case, visitors should liaise with the SNH wardens and make arrangements for these logs to be passed to them for completion. Please note that a failure to keep these records (or make the necessary arrangements to do so) may result in future bookings being refused.

Reporting unusual sightings

Upon finding anything unusual for the isle, all efforts should be made to inform the SNH and CEH(Centre for Ecology and Hydrology) staff at Fluke Street as they would do should they find anything of interest.

Reporting after the visit

All visitors should e-mail Mark Newell (bookings@isleofmaybirdobs.org) and Alan Lauder (alanlauder@hotmail.co.uk) immediately on their return with a brief summary of the highlights of their visit in terms of birds seen. This should take the form of a daily summary of birds of interest, including numbers and with an indication of the weather conditions (check the website to see the style: <http://www.isleofmaybirdobs.org/birds/news>) . Photographs are particularly welcome for inclusion on the website. Ringing parties should also summarise the number of individuals/species ringed in their week, and might note if particular trapping methods were relevant. This information will then be put on to the Observatory’s website.

Please e-mail Mark Oksien (markoksien@btinternet.com) or text mobile 07775593200 to advise of any actions needed in relation to accommodation, to report on any breakages, shortages or replacements that need rectifying for on-coming parties.

The Low Light Manual

It is important that visitors read the Low Light Manual immediately on arrival, consult the notice-board, and read the Health and Safety document (this last is something we require the party leader to agree to do, and for them to advise members of their party accordingly). These documents are important, and they do change from year to year; **regular visitors please take note!** The manuals provide information on the gas and water supplies and other aspects of life at the Observatory

Booking Fees and Payment Arrangements

The charge for staying at the Observatory is £145 per person for a week, Saturday to Saturday, inclusive of boat fares both ways. School children are charged at £85, and full-time students and people under the age of 25 at £100 per week. People staying for a part-week pay £25 per day, plus a fee of £20 for any journey in the Observatory weekly Saturday RIB run.

If any person goes to or leaves the island other than on the weekly Saturday Observatory RIB run, they should pay the skipper of the *Osprey* or the *May Princess* directly for that trip. Thus, if a person leaves (or goes to) the island mid week on the

Osprey or the *May Princess* they should pay the skipper directly at the time the appropriate fare. If they make an arrangement for a special journey in the RIB they should also pay Roy Giles directly at the time paying the full charter fee of approximately £235.

If you choose to travel back to the mainland on a RIB chartered by someone else during the course of the week, you should pay the boatman direct for that journey if required.

A refund of £10 is payable for each day someone is unable to land, and there is no extra charge for days marooned on the island; there is no refund for those who choose to go on later or leave earlier than their booking date.

Booking forms must be returned to Mark Newell. There is a non refundable deposit of £50 per person booked. **Bookings will not be regarded as confirmed unless both form and deposit are provided.** The balance of the amount for the stay (that is the full amount minus the booking fee of £50 per person) should be paid **three months** before the visit. Cheques should be made out to: Isle of May Bird Observatory Trust. Payments of deposits and full amounts should be made to the Treasurer, Niall Campbell, 15 Warriston Crescent, Edinburgh EH3 5LA. Any enquiries about payment can be made to him by e mail: nandacampbell@waitrose.com or phone 0131 556 2895.

Visitors should note that the boat places on the RIB will be booked on their behalf by the Bookings Secretary, on the basis of a Saturday to Saturday trip. As mentioned above, it is possible to travel to or from the island on days other than Saturdays to stay for a shorter period during the period when the *May Princess* is running, but you should be aware that priority is given to those wishing to book for a full week.

Children: Safeguarding Policy

The Isle of May Bird Observatory has a safeguarding policy which can be found on its website. If any party is bringing children, the leader of the party should at the time of booking submit a letter of parental consent in respect of any children who are not accompanied by their parent.

Food

There will be no opportunity to re-provision, so take enough food for your stay. There is an emergency food shelf should you get stuck on the isle due to poor weather for an extra day – you might want to contribute spare food if you get off on time. We have two fridges with freezer compartments. There is currently a freezer available for a small amount of food in the freezer shed in Fluke Street (see SNH warden for details)

Electricity

The Bird Observatory is now equipped with solar panels providing electricity. The primary use is for powering the UV water treatment unit, the fridges and the lights but there should be sufficient extra power for charging batteries, mobile phones, etc. However, there may be times in the season or during periods of dull/foggy weather when there is reduced supply. It is vital that this resource is carefully managed and its provision should not be relied upon. Under no circumstance should the UV be turned off and electricity use should be managed to ensure that the UV system continues to run even when battery levels are low. This can be achieved by turning the fridges to

gas and turning off lights. If the power is failing contact the SNH staff who may be able to advise.

Full instructions on how to change the fridges from electricity to gas are posted on or adjacent to the fridges. Due to diminishing daylight hours, the fridges are to be switched to gas operation from mid- September for the remainder of the year.

Water

We are now well supplied with tanks providing a reasonable reserve of water. This water comes from a run- off well. Nonetheless, there may occasionally be shortages resulting from dry periods. There are two separate sources of water & two separate plumbing systems. Water to the toilet basin, kitchen and shower is syphoned from the St Andrews Well into lower tanks Nos 3, 4 and 5. Water for the WC and outside standpipe come from upper two tanks Nos 1 and 2 which are fed by water coming off the Main Light roofs. On departure, visitors should check and record the water levels in the log provided and either e-mail Mark Oksien (markoksien@btinternet.com) or text mobile 07775593200 with the levels. This will allow us to inform on-going parties in advance if there is likely to be any problem. Tank levels and syphon operation should be regularly checked throughout the week. No changes should be made to the tank valve configurations without consultation with Mark Oksien. Please read the instructions on use of water on arrival.

IT IS VITAL THAT YOU BOIL ALL WATER THAT IS GOING TO BE CONSUMED OR BRING YOUR OWN SUPPLY OF WATER FOR DRINKING.

The UV system should be checked daily. Checking that the UV filter is working is a core function of providing a clean water supply and must be undertaken every day. This can be done either by looking through the low level Perspex port hole in the box section beside the hand basin in the WC or, if done after dark, with the bathroom light off, a greenish glow through the port hole will show that the light is on.

Clothing

Ensure you have plenty of waterproof clothing for the RIB and also that all your gear is well covered in plastic bags or other waterproof material. Stout footwear is advisable.

Sleeping

We have beds with good firm mattresses, each provided with a mattress cover, pillows and a single sized downy/duvet. It is necessary to bring pillow cases, a sheet and a downy/ duvet cover. Some people choose to bring a sleeping bag. There is also a supply of blankets but sheet, downy/duvet cover and pillow case are all that is needed.

Sundries

There are a number of items normally available as a result of previous parties leaving spares, but this cannot be relied upon, and it is sensible to take your own: toilet paper, kitchen roll and dish towels; washing-up liquid and scourers; matches, and fly-papers (July/August in particular). The living room has a wood burning stove as has the kitchen. In recent years the supply of driftwood for the stove has been variable, and in the latter part of the year because of restrictions on access to seal breeding areas it can be very difficult to replenish stock. Visitors throughout the year are requested to take every opportunity to restock the wood shed, and the 'good neighbour' approach

of always gathering more than you use is a sound rule of thumb. Early and late visitors may wish to bring a small bag of coal to help eke out limited wood supplies.

Communications

On the Thursday or Friday before you are sailing, whether going on or coming off, you should confirm with Roy Giles that sailing is possible on the Saturday. All parties should ensure they have a mobile phone with them. Most mobile phones seem to work well, on most parts of the island; but not all, all of the time! Our SNH warden colleagues have at times allowed access to their phone if a party has none of their own; we would not wish to see this generosity abused, and it should only be asked for in a real emergency.

Ringling Equipment

The Observatory supplies all rings, and is well equipped with pliers, pesolas, electronic scales, rulers and identification guides. We have a supply of bird bags, but welcome the fact that many ringers bring their own. Mist net poles are available, but visitors need to bring their own nets, guys, spring-traps, tape-luring gear and torches. **A ringling kit is now set up at the Low Light. However, this is only to be used when using nets at the Low Light.** Birds caught in the Heligoland traps should be processed at the ringling hut.

Photography

Those whose principal interest in visiting the island is photography should make arrangements in advance to get the required permit from SNH, Cupar, Fife office (phone 01334 654038). This is not needed for those taking more casual photos, or those relating to birds in the hand whilst ringling. Photographers should make contact with the SNH wardens on arrival to be given guidance, particularly over keeping to paths.

Paths and access around the island.

Observers staying in the Low Light should on arrival discuss their plans for monitoring migration with the SNH wardens. Low Lighters should stay on the paths for all the time that day visitors are on the island. Any off the path activity during the seabird breeding season (April to end July), particularly by photographers, should be discussed with the SNH wardens. Ringling activities should not be taking place when the *May Princess* is at the island unless by prior arrangement with the SNH wardens.

Mobile phone numbers

It is essential that you provide the Bookings Secretary with a mobile phone number when booking. This number is passed on to Roy Giles and it enables him to alter arrangements if this is necessary for reasons of weather.

Leaving the Island

You should check with Roy Giles on the Friday to see if he is anticipating sailing to schedule on the Saturday. Departing parties should have cleared the Low Light for the new incumbents to take over as soon as they arrive. You will want to arrange with the SNH Wardens to transport your gear to the harbour prior to the boat arriving.

The manuals in the Observatory detail the full procedures for departure. Please remember to bag what rubbish you don't burn, and take off; it can be left in a skip at Anstruther Harbour. Please leave the Low Light as you would wish to find it.

Enjoy your stay.

Key Points:

- Phone Roy Giles ahead of sailing to ensure no delays due to weather.
- Package all luggage sensibly
- Complete all the logs
- Familiarise yourself with the Low Light Manual
- Complete battery readings
- Check water tank levels and inform Mark Oksien
- Inform Fluke St of any notable sightings
- Take off all non-compostable rubbish & recycling. Do not burn plastic in the stoves.
- Send details of sightings to Mark Newell and Alan Lauder
- Report any problems to Mark Oksien