

**CYNGOR CEFN GWLAD CYMRU
COUNTRYSIDE COUNCIL FOR WALES**

SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST CITATION

PEMBROKESHIRE

SKOKHOLM

<u>Date of Notification:</u>	1954, 1986, 2001,
<u>National Grid Reference:</u>	SM 736050
<u>O.S. Maps:</u>	1:50,000 Sheet number: 157 1:10,000 Sheet number: SM 70 SW
<u>Site Area:</u>	107.3 ha (approx.)

Description:

The site is of special interest for its maritime grassland, and its breeding seabirds, in particular for Manx shearwater *Puffinus puffinus*, puffin *Fratercula arctica*, storm petrel *Hydrobates pelagicus*, razorbill *Alca torda*, guillemot *Uria aalge*, lesser black-backed gull *Larus fuscus*, which together with fulmar *Fulmaris glacialis*, herring gull *Larus argentatus* and greater black-backed gull *Larus marinus* comprise a seabird assemblage, and for breeding chough *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*. Grey seals *Halichoerus grypus* which breed and haul out on the foreshore and the littoral zone are also of special interest. An assemblage of nationally rare and scarce lichens occur including the scheduled golden hair lichen *Teloschistes flavicans*. Skokholm is located approximately 3 km south west of the Marloes peninsula. The island is composed of Old Red Sandstone rock, forming the western-most exposure of this rock extending across Wales. The gently sloping plateau surface, 50 metres above sea level at its highest, southern end, is capped with glacial deposits, and the main soil type is a clay-rich acid brown earth. The cliffs on the southern side are vertical, but elsewhere they become much more indented and irregular.

The southwest shores of Skokholm are subject to the greatest degree of exposure. The sub-tidal fringe here is dominated by dense thongweed *Himantalia elongata* with an understory of mussels *Mytilus edulis* and coralline algae. On the less exposed north-western side, kelp *Laminaria digitata* occurs with thongweed over coralline and red algae. The more sheltered eastern side of the island supports sub-tidal fringe rock dominated by kelp, including a nationally scarce tide-swept kelp community with sea squirts and bryozoans such as the gooseberry seasquirt *Dendrodoa grossularia* and the bryozoan *Alcyonidium gelatinosum*. Lower shores on the exposed south-western side exhibit zones of barnacles *Semibalanus balanoides* and mussels and abundant coralline algae including *Corallina officinalis*, above which the exposed form of bladder wrack *Fucus vesiculosus* var. *linearis* occurs with *S. balanoides* and limpets *Patella* sp. A band of pygmy lichen *Lichina pygmaea* occurs above this zone, but this band is absent from the less exposed shores. The lower shores on the less exposed side support thongweed with an understory of encrusting coralline and red algae, above which channelled wrack *Pelvetia canaliculata* occurs with occasional spiral wrack *Fucus spiralis* and pygmy lichen over encrustations of barnacles and limpets. Upper shores support bands of black-tar lichen *Verrucaria maura*, with laver seaweed *Porphyra* sp. where more exposed, above which a wide band of yellow and grey lichens exists, extending vertically up to 30 metres on the steeper higher

cliffs of the south-western side of the island.

The Skokholm rabbits have avoided myxomatosis due to the absence of the flea vector *Spilopsyllus cuniculi*. This abundance of rabbits, together with the influence of seabird guano, has resulted in extensive modification to the maritime vegetation that has been much studied. An extensive band of thrift *Armeria maritima* hummocks occurs on the southern and western coasts, along with much sea campion *Silene uniflora*. Further inland and along the eastern coast, red fescue *Festuca rubra* characterises the short sward of the old field systems, with abundant Yorkshire fog *Holcus lanatus*, common bent *Agrostis tenuis*, buck's-horn plantain *Plantago coronopus* and English stonecrop *Sedum anglicum*. Bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* dominates sections of the more sheltered eastern coast, but is much more sparse elsewhere and has an understorey with abundant sheep's sorrel *Rumex acetosella* and wood sage *Teucrium scorodonia*.

Only very limited relict patches of maritime heath remain on the eastern side of the island. Springs and seasonally inundated depressions in the boulder clay that caps the centre of the island have a marsh flora of rushes *Juncus* sp. and sedges, particularly sand sedge *Carex arenaria*, with much marsh pennywort *Hydrocotyle vulgaris*. The island also supports a large population of sea stork's-bill *Erodium maritimum* and wild pansy *Viola tricolor* ssp. *tricolor* and on the cliffs out of reach of the rabbits, small colonies of tree mallow *Lavatera arborea* and sea-purslane *Atriplex portulacoides* persist. The wet depressions also contain interesting plants such as the nationally scarce three-lobed crowfoot *Ranunculus tripartitus*, lesser water-plantain *Baldellia ranunculoides*, chaffweed *Anagallis minima*, lesser marshwort *Apium inundatum* and divided sedge *Carex divisa* at one of only two sites in Pembrokeshire. An assemblage of lichen species associated with rock (saxicolous) or the ground (terricolous) has developed on the island, including nationally rare and scarce species such as the scheduled golden hair lichen *Teloschistes flavicans*, *Rocella fuciformis*, *R. phycopsis* and *Rinodina confragosa*.

The nocturnal burrow or crevice nesting Manx shearwaters and storm petrels occur in their thousands, and much research has been undertaken on these species since the island was established as Britain's first Bird Observatory by R M Lockley in 1933. Lesser black-backed gulls, guillemots and razorbills also occur in the low thousands, and fulmars, herring gulls and great black-backed gulls comprise the remainder of the assemblage of seabirds. The chough also breeds on the island, together with oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*, lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*, skylark *Alauda arvensis* and wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*. Grey seals breed in small numbers around the island in the autumn, and haul out on the foreshore throughout the year. Invertebrates recorded on the site include nationally scarce species of butterflies and moths with a distinctly coastal distribution. These include the silver-studded blue *Plebejus argus*, Barrett's marbled coronet *Hadena luteago barrettii*, whose larvae feed on the roots of sea campion, the black-banded moth *Polymixis xanthomista statices*, which frequents coastal rocks and whose larvae feed mainly on the abundant thrift on the island and the marbled green *Cryphia muralis* that is dependent on saxicolous lichens.

Remarks:

The foreshore from Mean High Water seawards is included within the Pembrokeshire Marine/Sir Benfro Fôrol Special Area for Conservation (cSAC). Skokholm is part of the Skomer and Skokholm Special Protection Area (SPA).

The SSSI lies within Pembrokeshire Coast National Park. The foreshore is leased to Pembrokeshire Coast National Park from the Crown Estate.

The grey seal is listed in Annex IIa of the EC Habitats Directive (Directive 92/43/EEC on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Flora and Fauna).

Golden hair lichen *Teloschistes flavicans* is listed on Schedule 8 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended).

The island is leased to the Wildlife Trust West Wales and managed as a nature reserve.

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