

## **Oystercatcher Productivity on Skomer Island- Jane Taylor LTV Report**

During my time on Skomer Island (Spring 2016) I've had the opportunity to conduct a study on the islands Oystercatcher population. My background has primarily involved waders and cannon netting, so this opportunity to assess the productivity on Skomer's most prolific (and noisy!) wader was an obvious choice for me.

Oystercatchers, in common with other waders, are precocial, which means the young are relatively mobile and mature almost immediately after hatching. This poses a monitoring issue; because the chicks are so readily active it is difficult to ascertain which chick belongs to which brood. Also there can be gaps in the data, where three eggs were one day; the next visit can easily be met with an empty nest and well-hidden chicks.

**Figure 1. Typical clutch of three well-camouflaged Oystercatcher eggs**



### **Method**

Beginning in early to mid May I watched for pairs forming territories. This initial stage was mainly attained incidentally as I walked around the island. The piercing trill of the Oystercatcher often made studying them extremely irritating, but it is very useful in determining where a territory or a nest may lie! It was through Oystercatchers various techniques to move my attention away from the location of their nest that, ironically, made finding their nest more straightforward. The Broken Wing Display is one of their favorites.

I regularly monitored twelve nests around the island, recording the number of eggs initially and any changes as they occurred. I checked to see if the eggs were warm and also took note of adult behaviour.

As previously mentioned it was difficult to assess the outcome of the clutch, as they are a precocial species. If the nest was empty, with eggshells or within the dates of hatching, the adults agitated behaviour again proved to be a solid indicator that although I couldn't see the chicks they were still present.

Rarely did my nest record fall neatly on 'Fledged' for most chicks ('Fledged' here meaning 'able to fly'); rather I usually ended with an empty nest accompanied by agitated adults. This is still valuable information in determining presence and survival of chicks. There were a few chicks I could determine as fledged as they were spaced far enough away from other nests to avoid confusion.

**Figure 2. A chick a week or so shy of fledging**



## Results

The overall mean productivity (given as the total number of ‘Fledged’ chicks per nest across all sites) is 0.67 (Table 1). ‘Fledged’ refers to chicks within the study seen flying while ‘Yes’ in the Chicks Hatched column refers to where individual chicks could not be seen to be counted but vocal/agitated adults indicated presence of chicks. There may have been more chicks which hatched and wandered more widely, making them too difficult to follow to ‘Fledging’, meaning that 0.67 is a minimum. The most recent productivity figure I could find for Skomer’s Oystercatcher population was 2006 with a productivity of 0.94.

As shown in Figure 3 there has been a decrease in Oystercatcher numbers from the late 1980’s through until the early 2000’s. This year’s total population was 66 pairs.

**Table 1: Oystercatcher Productivity**

Nest number	Eggs Laid	Eggs lost	Chicks hatched	Fledged	Individual Nest Productivity	Percentage eggs hatched
1- SH	3		Yes			
7- SH	3		Yes			
2- CK	3		3	2	0.66	1
3- HS	4	1	3	2	0.5	0.75
4- GS	3	3				1
5- BH	2		Yes			
6- BH	3		Yes			
8- WCK	3		3	1	0.3	1
9- MM	3		3	1	0.3	1
10- WS	3		2			0.75
11- LOWL	3	1	Yes			
12- SP	3		3	2	0.66	1

Productivity

**0.67 ‘Fledged’  
chicks per pair**

**Figure 3. Historic nesting pairs of Oystercatcher**

