



Skomer from near Martin's Haven

## ***Martin's Haven***

This area covers 3 distinct habitats:

1. The (relatively) sheltered valley at Martin's Haven, overlooked by Lockley Lodge, the Wildlife Trust of South & West Wales (WTSWW) visitor centre, and containing a range of bracken & bramble, willow/sallow scrub, marsh and a small stream.
2. The walled headland known as the Deer Park, a large area of exposed coastal heath, with a Coastwatch hut at its summit.
3. Wooltack Point at the NW end of the Deer Park, overlooking Middleholm and Skomer islands to the West, and North into St Bride's Bay towards Ramsey Island and the St David's peninsular.

Much of the coast around Martin's Haven (**see map [here](#)**) is owned by the National Trust, as is the car park (charge payable in the summer). The boats to Skomer, Skokholm and Grassholm depart from the landing stage in the haven itself (tickets from Lockley Lodge from 0800). As a result of the islands' obvious attractions, the Martin's Haven area gets a lot of birder traffic in Spring and Summer, but is itself pretty under-watched, particularly outside the main tourist hours and sea bird breeding season. It's therefore very well worth arriving a couple of hours early for the boats, since the best chances of birds both on the land and off Wooltack typically occur in the morning before human activity picks up (e.g. 0700-0930 in spring/summer).

The small protected valley, which almost cuts off the headland, is a reliable site for migrants such as Grasshopper Warbler and Spotted Flycatcher, and sometimes gets good "falls" of other warblers. In the evenings the bushes get good numbers of roosting birds, especially Linnets, and large numbers of other finches can drop in during the Autumn and Winter. The bushes in this valley are worth very careful scrutiny (best viewable from the road below Lockley Lodge, and from the banks of the rath within the Deer Park itself) as they have produced regular Wryneck, Firecrest, Yellow-Browed Warblers and Hoopoe, while Melodious Warbler and Spanish Sparrow have also been seen in the area directly below Lockley Lodge. Water Rails, Woodcock, Jack and Common Snipe winter here.

The Deer Park is an exceptionally reliable site for Chough all year round: at least 2 pairs breed, and flocks in autumn can exceed 20 birds. A walk around the headland is the best tactic if looking for Chough, and Wheatears are present both as breeders and passage migrants. Peregrines are often to be seen, as well as the occasional Short-Eared Owl, Merlin and Hen Harrier in winter, and Black Redstarts in autumn. Recently both Woodchat and Red-backed Shrikes have been seen on spring passage, so it is well worth checking all the patches of gorse in the mornings. From late summer (mid-August to end-November) there are also good numbers of Grey Seal pups on the beaches at the western end.

Wooltack Point gives good views of Skomer and Middleholm and the turbulent tidal race between the mainland and the islands known as Jack Sound. In summer, if you are unlucky with the boat sailings, you can get good (but very long distance) views of Puffins in the bays off the islands, while other sea birds,

especially Gannets, Razorbills and Kittiwakes can at times feed in large numbers astonishingly close to the Point. While first thing in the morning is most reliable in spring/summer (i.e. before boat disturbance), the very fast tidal race north out of Jack Sound forms around 2 hours before High Tide and continues until around 3 hours after High Tide. This race concentrates fish, especially sand eels, and so is very attractive for both birds and the resident pod of Porpoises (look for them under the Gannets). Sea watching off Wooltack is clearly overshadowed by the attractions of Strumble Head, but summer can see incredibly large numbers of Manx Shearwaters late in the evenings, as well as occasional Storm Petrels (typically early in the morning after a Westerly blow). Autumn passage and winter gets regular passing Common Scoter and Red Throated Divers amongst the wintering auks and gulls, the occasional Great Northern and grebes, as well as Grey Phalarope, Bonxie and Sooty Shearwater. A Black Tern and Common Sandpipers in May 2008 highlighted the potential of this under-watched area for passage migrants.

See photos [here](#).