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For a .csv containing tabular data for all stories, see the larger collection at

<https://doi.org/10.7486/DRI.ht259b362>.

For an archived snapshot of the story as it appeared between 2020 and 2023 on

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Dublin Core

Title

Island of the Gannets | Ynys yr Huganod

Subject

Grassholm

Ynys Gwales

Gannets

Huganod

Birdlife

Bywyd adar

Creator

Jon Gower

Publisher

Ports, Past and Present Project

Date

2023

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Relation

<https://perma.cc/73AG-8P38>

Format

Curatescape story

Language

English

Welsh

Coverage

51.73174818259224, -5.479651121705327

Curatescape Story Item Type Metadata

Lede

This internationally important bird isle offers spectacular wildlife - all in black and white.

Lede (Welsh)

Mae pwysigrwydd rhyngwladol i'r ynys hon sy'n cynnwys bywyd gwyllt ysblennydd – a'r cyfan mewn du a gwyn.

Story

We may associate seabirds with islands – puffins standing sentinel on ledges, guillemots in serried ranks on slim ledges – but this is only a temporary habitat. On land they are edgy, vulnerable to predation. These are, after all, sea birds and the gannet spends most of its life far out there, wheeling against the wind on barely moving, riding the air no matter how turbulent it is. They only rest on the waves when they really have to, and stay far away from shore other than when that ancient urge takes them to isolated headlands and islands to breed. Just take a look at auks such as razorbills and guillemots on their breeding ledges in early spring, just after they've come in off the sea, how jittery they are, because exposed. But we humans tend to see them as birds of islands simply because we are hardly ever able to see them out over open ocean, where birds such as storm petrels, no bigger than a house sparrow are very much at home, even in a gale.

The Latin name of the gannet, *Morus bassana*, refers to one of its most famous colonies, Bass Rock in the Firth of Forth. As far back as the early sixteenth century visitors were noting their presence on this great slab of geology: 'Near to Gleghornie, in the ocean, at a distance of two leagues, is the Bass Rock, wherein is an impregnable stronghold. Round about it is seen a marvellous multitude of great duck that live on fish.'

The 'great ducks' are easy to spot when patrolling the waves for a flicker of herring-silver, but when they fish they are simply unmistakable. From a height of up to 140 feet they collapse their wings and their bodies become living spearheads. They plummet toward their prey at a speed of up to 100 kms an hour, or as the poet Christine Evans has it, 'Gannets fall/as if fired back/by sky they have stretched/with their slow, strong wing beats.' Before they hit the surface of the sea small air sacs in the head fill up, exactly like the airbags that cushion a human car passenger from impact. The fine nature writer Tim Dee has captured the kinetic vibrato, the sheer thrill of this avian spectacle – which easily rivals that of African Big Game – and the plunging exhilaration of the dive:

Again and again they do the same thing to catch their food, but each dive shines. Nature's repetitions are never boring. Every time it is like witnessing a fresh marvel in a new world; their visible decision-making, with its corrective twisting and corkscrewing, the rapid origami of themselves, and then their brilliant white match strikes, fizzing into the water (at 60 mph) to leave puffs of lit sea spray. It is hard not to blink and hold your breath as they go in.

The rapid origami of themselves – a phrase worth repeating!

Story (Welsh)

Mae'n bosibl ein bod yn tueddu i gysylltu adar y môr ag ynnysoedd, a bod gennym ddarlun yn ein pennau o balod yn cadw gwyliadwriaeth ar silffoedd o graig a gwylogod mewn rhengoedd clòs ar sgafellau cyfyng. Ond cynefin dros dro yn unig yw hwn. Pan fyddant ar dir, bydd yr adar yn nerfus ac mewn perygl o fod yn brae. Adar y môr ydynt, wedi'r cyfan, ac mae'r hugan yn treulio'r rhan fwyaf o'i oes ymhell allan dros y dŵr, yn gyrru yn erbyn y gwynt dan brin symud, yn marchogaeth yr awyr waeth pa mor dyrfus yw hwnnw. Dim ond pan fydd gwir raid y byddant yn gorffwys ar y tonnau, ac maen nhw'n cadw'n ddigon pell o'r lan heblaw pan fydd yr hen ysfa reddfol yn eu denu i ryw ynys neu bentir anghysbell i fagu cywion. Edrychwch ar garfilod fel gweilch y penwaig a gwylogod ar y graig yn gynnar yn y gwanwyn, toc wedi iddyn nhw gyrraedd o'r môr, a sylwch mor ofnus ydyn nhw, am bod yn fregus. Rydyn ni'n tueddu i'w hystyried yn adar yr ynnysoedd gan mai prin y'u gwelwn ni nhw allan dros gefnfor agored, lle mae rhywogaethau fel adar drycin, sy'n ddim mwy na adar y to, yn gartrefol iawn hyd yn oed mewn gwyntoedd cryfion.

Mae'r enw Lladin ar yr hugan, *Morus bassana*, yn cynnwys cyfeiriad at un o'i nythfeydd enwocaf, sef Bass Rock yn Aber Gweryd [Firth of Forth]. Cyn belled yn ôl â dechrau'r unfed ganrif ar bymtheg, roedd ymwelwyr yn cofnodi presenoldeb yr adar ar y slabyn mawr hwnnw o graig: 'Near to Gleghornie, in the ocean, at a distance of two leagues, is the Bass Rock, wherein is an impregnable stronghold. Round about it is seen a marvellous multitude of great duck that live on fish.'

Mae'n ddigon hawdd adnabod y 'great ducks' wrth sylwi arnynt yn patrolio'r tonnau yn chwilio am gryndod arian rhyw haig o benwaig, ond cwbl amhosibl yw eu camgymryd pan welwch nhw'n pysgota. O uchder o hyd at 140 troedfedd, maent yn gostwng eu hadenydd, a'u cyrff yn dod yn waywffyn byw. Plymiant tuag at eu prae ar gyflymder o hyd at 100 km yr awr, neu, yng ngeiriau'r bardd Christine Evans, 'Gannets fall/as if fired back/by sky they have stretched/with their slow, strong wing beats.' Cyn iddynt fwrw wyneb y dŵr bydd codenni aer bychain yn eu pennau yn llenwi, yn union fel y bagiau awyr sy'n gwarchod teithwyr car mewn gwrthdrawiad. Mae'r awdur natur medrus Tim Dee wedi dal gwefr bur golygfa nad yw'n ail i weld Anifeiliaid Mawr Affrica, y *vibrato* cinetig a rhuthr gorfoleddus y plymio:

Again and again they do the same thing to catch their food, but each dive shines. Nature's repetitions are never boring. Every time it is like witnessing a fresh marvel in a new world; their visible decision-making, with its corrective twisting and corkscrewing, the rapid origami of themselves, and then their brilliant white match strikes, fizzing into the water (at 60 mph) to leave puffs of lit sea spray. It is hard not to blink and hold your breath as they go in.

'The rapid origami of themselves' – dyna ymadrodd sy'n werth ei ailadrodd!

Factoid

Young gannets fly south when they leave Grassholm and many have been recovered, or found dead on the coast of Morocco, Senegal and Mauritania.

Bydd huganod ifanc yn hedfan tua'r de wedi iddynt gefnu ar Ynys Gwales a chaiff llawer eu hachub neu eu canfod yn farw ar arfordir Morocco, Senegal a Mauritania.

Related Resources

Ronald M. Lockley, *Dream Island Days. a Record of the Simple Life* (1946)

Official Website

