

Received from Jenny 26<sup>th</sup> May 2022

## **Flying Rings Campaign - Sailing Round Britain (1)**

Setting off from Portsmouth on April 12th our first planned leg was westwards to Devon, Cornwall, The Isles of Scilly and then up to Milford Haven via Padstow on the North Cornish coast. We enjoyed fair weather in the Isles of Scilly and saw a wealth of flora and fauna there including a Great Northern Diver, Wheatears and the tiny Dwarf Pansy. We saw a small group of Grey Atlantic Seals on the rocks off Bryher Island. They were a long way off with their calls carrying across the water, haunting and beautiful. I managed to don my wet suit and swim in crystal clear water off St Agnes seeing quite a big shoal of sand eels.

On our sea passages little groups of Guillemots have been present all along and in the West we started to see Razorbills. Dolphins visited us as we sailed abeam of Lundy Island swimming alongside, under and in front of our boat, always an amazing and uplifting experience. Then, we caught sight of our first Puffins as we neared Milford Haven! Likely they were out fishing from their breeding colonies on Skomer and Skokholm islands. We could distinguish them from the Guillies and Razorbills by their shorter, stubbier form and flight pattern.

Along the way we've been raising awareness of the plight of seals getting caught in plastic flying rings. I've visited shops in Falmouth, Padstow, Scilly and Dale in Milford Haven telling the owners about the seals and asking any that stocked them to consider not selling the rings. I saw no rings for sale in Scilly but several in Padstow. The Tourist Information Centres in Hugh Town, St Mary's and Padstow were very sympathetic and keen to have leaflets, thank you Hilda for sending them.

Rick Stein, as you will know, is based in Padstow and has his famous Seafood Restaurant there as well as several other outlets. I e-mailed his PA who kindly posted the information I sent about the campaign on their staff (700+) platform and also a link to Kate Wing's Petition calling for a ban on flying rings because of the mortal damage they are causing to seals when lost or discarded.

<https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/613442>

On the way I made contact with the Cornwall Seal Group who have come across seals in Cornwall entangled and injured in flying rings and are campaigning to protect them. Also with the Gower Peninsular Seal Group who are planning to visit all the shops on the peninsular before the summer as part of their 'No to O' campaign.

In the tiny hamlet of Dale, Milford Haven I found a little beach shop run by Tony Parlor. I was pleased to see he stocks only solid throwing rings. He wasn't aware of the danger to seals posed by them and said that was very sad and would pass the message on to others. I also showed Tony a bio-degradable bamboo version which he is keen to follow up.



On leaving Milford Haven we moored at Skomer Island before our passage over to Ireland. We spent a magical evening watching rafts of Puffins, Guillemots and Razorbills resting and preening around us. Manx Shearwaters also nest on Skomer but they hadn't returned by the time we went to bed. Look what we found in the morning though asleep in our cockpit!



A Manx Shearwater who might have got disorientated. I managed to contact the Warden and he rowed out to fetch the bird and keep it until it had rested and could be safely released.

Our Cruising Chute with the Flying Rings Campaign Seal logo emblazoned on it is ready to fly when gentle winds return and we have the courage to hoist it!



*Photo: courtesy of Fia O'Caomh*

A huge 'thank you' to Hilda, Richard and all the other wardens who are continuing to support the campaign at home.

Also to Councillors in Great Yarmouth, North Norfolk District Council and King's Lynn who are continuing to uphold the campaign through their Beach Road Shows, displaying the Sealy Sculpture in the foyer at Great Yarmouth Town Hall and distributing campaign leaflets and posters.

Jenny



*Photo: courtesy of Fia O'Caomh (a very helpful Dublin Skipper)*