Hugh Davies to Thomas Pennant, 14 March 1782

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From:	Hugh Davies
To:	Thomas Pennant
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In the month of March 1776 walking along the seacoast between Criccieth and traeth-mawr I observed the beach for miles together covered with dead seafowl, particularly those which visit our rocks and islands in summer to breed, viz. the Puffin, Razorbill, Guillemot, and Kittiwake, of which there were many-many thousands; there were several other kinds in great quantities, I noted the Tarrock, more numerous than any of the following, the Gannet, wild ~~g~~Goose, Barnacle, Brentgoose Scoter and tufted Ducks, common Sea Mew &c &c

I have not a doubt of their having perished by the remarkably severe frost which commenced on the 6th. of January preceding and continued till the 2d. of February.[1]

Will this circumstance assist to cast any new light on the Natural history of these our annual visitants? If they migrate, they must then have been on their passage, but it seems to me to have been too early in the year for them to have arrived at their summer residence I would therefore conclude that they pass their winter some distance at sea in our own climate –

I observed a remarkable difference in the bills of the Puffins, which seem'd to indicate the age of the bird till ~~[authorial]~~three years old; the bill of the youngest was narrow, blunt, and wanted those transverse sulei and color which are observable in the old birds; the next class which seem to me to be two years old have the bill in form and color between the last described and those fully formed, the transverse sulei and color in these are faint – As I have at different times had opportunities of seeing vast numbers of these birds on Priestholm Island, and never observed the difference now noticed, I am led to conclude that these birds do not approach the land to breed till they are at least three years old. I observed the same difference in the bills of the Razor-bill – There were among the wreck great quantities of the bone of the Sepin officinalis. I likewise found the upper Jaw of a Dolphin. –

H: D. –
Beaumares, March the 14th. 1782.

Marginalia

Endorsement in Thomas Pennant's hand: Arms of Ednyfed fychan

Editorial Notes

[1] Pennant mentions this account of Hugh Davies's in *A tour in Wales 1770 [1773]* (1778), II, p. 191.