



National Coastwatch
EYES ALONG THE COAST

Gwennap Head NCI - Wildlife Report January 2016

The most unusual report this month was of four deer, probably Roe Deer by the description given by two watch-keepers on the 17th. We have seen them here on a few occasions but never as many as four. They included two antlered stags and must have been quite a sight as this is not the sort of place you really expect to see deer, although there are areas of scrub to provide cover when they need it, and that is probably quite often. Down by the gate recently there have been prints in the mud that I thought looked like deer slots, so they probably were. Roe Deer are native to Britain but, in the distant past, they became extinct except near the Scottish Borders, and it is possible that the ones we see today originate from various introductions to the southern counties - they are beautiful animals.

Still, on the mammal front, the Grey Seals have hardly used the haul-out (with a maximum number of two on one day), no doubt mostly due to the rough weather, but also because they disperse widely at this time of year. Occasionally, a seal has been seen at sea grappling with a fish, attention being drawn to it by a flurry of gulls hanging above waiting for pickings.

A Stoat was reported on the 24th - watch out rabbits! A Peregrine Falcon has been seen several times, once in the middle in a spectacular stoop, disappearing below the cliff face and causing a huge panic among the gulls and Jackdaws - watch out Stoat!

There have been sightings of Humpback Whales coast (one or two animals) from St. Ives and Porthcurno, so at some time they, or it, if they were one and the same, may have passed this headland - by night perhaps because we didn't see any! On 14/1, a group of 10-15 Common Dolphins were spotted under gannets as they travelled very fast westwards 2km offshore. As usual watch-keepers have reported small numbers of Harbour Porpoises, most particularly feeding just off the seal haul-out around low tide. If there are gannets diving just there, there is a good chance that the porpoises are there too. The group usually consists of two adults with a juvenile. This is one place where it has been possible to catch a glimpse of them in the rough seas we have been experiencing this month.

The Choughs are around, but they don't seem to have been by the lookout at all. However, they have been visiting the breeding site and, if they attempt to nest there again, we should be seeing more of them soon. It may be better if they moved since the nest was predated last year by Ravens and they could be a problem again this year.

Bird-wise, there have been plenty of sightings of all three species of diver (Great Northern, Black-throated and Red-throated) flying both east and west and easily recognizable by the hump-backed silhouette. Apart from the usual seabirds, a flock of Common Scoter were reported, and we are beginning to see the local Cormorants showing white breeding patches on their flanks. A Lesser Black-backed Gull was observed harassing a Kittiwake for the purpose of stealing its newly caught fish. This is unusual because this behaviour is generally confined to its larger, more aggressive cousin - the Great Black-backed Gull. However, gulls are versatile and great opportunists, so perhaps it is not that surprising.

We are seeing Fulmars around the cliff-top commonly now, and if you walk to the edge (and halt!) you may see them hanging gracefully in the air while they manoeuvre gently in the wind - just like on BBC 2 'Winterwatch' on the 27th.

Insect-wise, only the occasional Bumblebee has been seen, apart from a Peacock butterfly in the valley.

Jean Lawman