



National Coastwatch
EYES ALONG THE COAST

Gwennap Head NCI - Wildlife Report November 2016

November weather was typically changeable; the wildlife was a mix of summer and winter. So it started on 1/11 with a very late arriving migrant dragonfly from southern parts, probably a Migrant Hawker, flying in off the sea. On 3/11, 4 Black Redstarts, regular winter visitors here, kept company on Carn Guthensbras, and 1 or 2 were seen on many days after that, sometimes right in front of the lookout. These birds can be confident, perhaps not surprisingly, as they breed in towns and villages as well as in rocky places. In silhouette and stance, they are not unlike Robins, but they are grey and have the red in the wrong place - on the tail! Then, on 7/11, a Snow Bunting flew round the lookout calling, just as a Red Admiral butterfly skipped waywardly over the turf.

On 13/11, 2 Swallows surprised us as they headed north towards Land's End - and then where? They were juveniles (no tail streamers and probably third brood). They will have tough time getting down to South Africa now.

A Richard's Pipit, a rare vagrant from Siberia, flew around calling with some Meadow Pipits on 1/11, obviously larger than the latter species. A Redwing was feeding on the turf on 28/11, just arrived probably, and soon to be heading off to the fields to join others where it will be more at home. A Blackbird has also been up here, another thrush species that we don't usually see very much.

We experienced the usual November mass migration of Woodpigeons, going south and west to Ireland, France or Spain but also with some staying here. This year, the migration was spread over a long time period, but there were still thousands on some days - often difficult to see as they often fly very high and no-one looks up there very much! A flock of several hundred flew very low over us on 7/11, which, in a small way, was spectacular, but more so was the sound of their beating wings. It brings to mind the flocks of billions of American Passenger Pigeons, driven to extinction long ago by the loss of forest habitat and over-hunting. Imagine a flock of them a mile wide passing over for 4 solid hours and you get the idea. There are often Stock Doves mixed in with our Woodpigeons - small and very beautiful doves much overlooked.

On the sea, divers (mostly Great Northern and Red-throated) have been passing in ones and twos, a few Great Skuas came by and Common Scoters have been passing in tight flocks low over the sea. The Fulmars are back around the cliffs after their moult with groups of up to 22 settling on the sea and we have also seen several adult Mediterranean Gulls which can be always be seen in fairly good numbers and at close quarters further round the coast from us at Sennen Harbour.

Small flocks of diving gannets were reported but no large gatherings and so we didn't expect to see too many cetaceans. The usual small groups of porpoises were located on days that were calm enough to see them, and Common Dolphins were seen three times on 1/11 (5), 13/11 (3) and 16/11 (3). Each time they were elusive with the occasional splash, the odd breach followed by a complete vanishing act.

Our local adult Choughs were seen frequently in the first half of the month, but became elusive later on. Other individuals visited, and with the aid of some competent ring reading we were able to establish their identity. An un-ringed bird became a regular visitor too.

Generally, only small numbers of seals hauled out on the rocks at low tide this month with the highest count being 12 on 1/11.



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Last but not least, on 30/11, a watch-keeper witnessed a stoat killing a rabbit, quite a drama by the sounds of it - who needs Poldark!

Jean Lawman