



## **Gwennap Head NCI - Wildlife Report December 2016**

Much of December can be described as grey and bleak and there wasn't much wildlife to enliven it either, but some days the soft winter light gave rise to golden pink skies, and, against this, we occasionally detected the distinctive humpback silhouette of a diver going east or west to known feeding grounds. All three species were reported this month, most of them Great Northern or Red-throated, but one Black-throated Diver came by on 19/12.

The sea has been relatively calm with little activity in the way of birds or marine mammals. Porpoises were here as usual and often they were seen feeding just beyond the seal haul-out. On 5/12 an adult was seen breaching clear of the water just there which is unusual for this small, shy cetacean. This particular spot must be productive for reasons to do with tides and currents because, one February many years ago, a small Minke Whale stayed around there for 2 weeks. There has been a report of a white porpoise further up the north coast, so it is worth keeping an eye out for this as we know little about the movements and range of Harbour Porpoises. The highest number of seals hauling out on the rocks was 7 on 2/12. Seabirds have been few in number, but there were still some Gannets, Kittiwakes, Fulmars and Shags offshore.

When the sea has been settled for a while, we always see fewer birds - we need some strong westerly gales to stir it up. 4 Curlew flew N on 14/12. It's always a delight to see them because, although we still have a small over-wintering population in Penwith, their numbers have declined over the last 30 years, as they have generally in Britain through loss and degradation of habitat.

On the headland, small birds have been few and far between. Only Stonechat and Meadow Pipit have been reported, and there has been no sign yet of a wintering Robin down on the rocky slopes. At Nanjizal, there was a report of a Little Bunting, which is exactly what it is - a little bunting, sounds boring, but it comes all the way from the arctic regions of Scandinavia or Russia. Choughs have been seen, usually 2, probably the local birds since they always seem to be making for or coming from the blowhole area, but they have not spent as much time as usual feeding on the turf around the lookout.

Once again, on 3/12, the stoat was observed killing another rabbit by one lucky (or unlucky, depending on how you feel about it) watch-keeper, and indeed this probably happens every day. Good job rabbits breed like rabbits then! We seldom see the rabbits up here as they live down among the rocks, but in summer you may see one sunbathing on its back under a rocky overhang. So they have a life when not hiding from Stoats, Mink, Foxes, Buzzards, Peregrines, dogs etc.

The violets by the gate came into bloom in the middle of the month. They are Sweet Violets - garden escapes which are grown commercially locally on a small scale; they are deep purple and quite charming.

The highlights during 2016 were the 2 Humpback Whales and the mega-pod of about 1000 Common Dolphins, both in March, and the Dalmation Pelican seen from the lookout in June.

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