



Gwennap Head NCI - Wildlife Report January 2017

Let's start the New Year with (mostly) positive news of the Choughs. There are now 50 something individuals in the Cornish population; things are looking up. We may expect a further increase now they have reached this fairly sustainable level. Over-winter survival has been good in the last few years with mild winters making finding food easy for them. There have been good size flocks round the Penwith coast, usually 10-15 birds, with an unverified report of 25 at Botallack, but we have not seen more than 4 together this month on the headland, 2 being the local birds and 2 other regular visitors, one of them un-ringed. The Chough which was attacked here in the autumn by our local pair (with 2 'mud' colour rings) was seen shortly after the event in Mousehole, but has not been seen since, so perhaps it didn't survive as a result of the injuries inflicted.

Two Stonechats, a male and a female, have spent much time close to the lookout. They hold territory behind the building where they will hopefully breed in the spring. Apart from a few Linnets, they are the only small birds we have seen up here this month. On 14/1 during strong, cold north-westerly winds a Common Snipe flew in off the sea, probably driven down from the north by inclement weather, seeking better conditions. On this day too, 3 Buzzards were noisily active in the air in front of us, two of them, probably the local pair that breed on cliffs nearby, seemed to be chasing off an intruder. Our Ravens have been indulging in synchronized flight displays during which they frequently tip right over, folding one wing beneath them as they go. Nesting is imminent; they are early breeders. On 25/1, the male and female Sparrow-hawk which nest in the valley were performing spectacular courtship displays behind the lookout - which I would have missed if I hadn't been stuck outside when the doorbell wasn't working!

A flock of 8 Common Scoter flew by so unusually close inshore on 8/1 that you could easily distinguish the black males from the duller brown females. A Common Gull (which is a northern species and not common at all round here) was seen on 20/1.

A Fox was on walkabout up here on the morning of 18/1, likely to be the same one seen here last month, taking advantage of the lack of disturbance at this quiet time of year (or hunting rabbits that the stoat might have missed!).

The only dolphins reported this month were 2 on 21/1 following a tripper boat, species unknown, but probably Bottlenose or Common. Harbour Porpoises have been observed as usual with 7 on 2/1 being the maximum count. As usual at this time of year there has been much cetacean bi-catch when they are caught and asphyxiated in fishing nets and this has involved all 3 of the above mentioned species (20 plus dead animals at the time of writing). We only know about them when their carcasses wash up on the beach; we don't know how many decompose and sink before reaching shore. Seals are also caught in the nets. The highest Seal count here this month was 9 on 3/1.

Best weather phenomena this month - beautiful crepuscular rays radiating patches of golden sunshine onto the sea surface – often quite spectacular.

Jean Lawman