



Gwennap Head NCI - Wildlife Report April 2017

We enjoyed many calm, sunny days this month, sometimes with barely a ripple on the surface of the sea and no swell discernible. It's on such days that you hope to see a Minke Whale, and so we did on 15/4, somewhat early in the year for a sighting of this elusive cetacean. After surfacing twice about 3 miles offshore, it typically vanished - never to be seen again, probably travelling some distance before resurfacing. If you are not looking in the right place at the right time - that's that - although sometimes it's possible to track these animals across a broad stretch of sea.

On another such day with a mirror calm sea, we counted 35 Harbour Porpoises scattered in small groups, their small fins glinting in the sun as they rolled over, and they were sometimes very small fins too as there were babies with them. Unfortunately, through this scene of gentle activity, came a black bullet - a speedboat doing a very great speed; heaven help any porpoise in the way of that. The only dolphins seen were 8-10 Common Dolphins heading rapidly towards a container ship, probably hoping to bow ride, but they didn't make it - and missed the boat. The largest seal count was 20 on 12/4.

Rumours abound that the Red Deer Stag from last month has been seen in the Lamorna area.

With all the lovely weather spring migration was pretty evident. To my mind, there's no more elevating sight than groups of swallows sweeping in from the channel, the sun picking up blue iridescence as they skim over the flower strewn turf; I say this every year, but it's just so brilliant. Dun-coloured Sand Martins accompanied them and, later on, House Martins. With their differing calls, you don't have to look up to know which is arriving. On schedule, Willow Warblers and early Whitethroats arrived in the valley, and after easterly winds in the middle of the month large numbers of Wheatears came in. We saw several up top, but a local birder counted 70 on 20/4 spread over the wider area surrounding us.

Fairly unusual was a Canada Goose flying past on 11/4 (but not surprising really given the hundreds residing in Cornwall these days) and so too, were a pair of Woodpigeons displaying out over the sea - maybe they lost their bearings in the excitement. A Rook on 27/4 was also unexpected as we don't often see them up here. Among the rarities reported by birders were a Subalpine Warbler at Land's End and a Red-rumped Swallow at Penberth (it's worth checking the swallows). Up to 4 Red Kites were reported locally, heralding the usual influx in May when silage is being cut providing titbits for scavengers. Otherwise, a Wood Warbler and a Turtle Dove were also uncommon visitors to Porthgwarra.

On the sea, Puffins came by in small numbers, but with a group of 18 on 27/4. We began to see returning Sandwich Terns on 4/4, the first Whimbrel on 16/4 and saw several Great Northern Divers in immaculate summer plumage heading north, as well as a few Red-throated Divers.

There is uncertainty as to how our Choughs are faring at present. The extra two seen here last winter are prospecting close to Porthcurno.

Flower-wise, the recent dry weather prompted a fantastic show of Spring Squill, and last but not least, on 7/4, a Painted Lady butterfly graced the cliff top.

Jean Lawman