



National Coastwatch
EYES ALONG THE COAST

Gwennap Head NCI - Wildlife Report September 2017

The weather this month was consistently unsettled, but there were three memorably good days from 17/9 to 19/9 with lots of sun, light winds and calm seas. During this short episode there was a considerable immigration (and possible emigration - it's hard to tell) of Red Admirals. This was when Poldark was filming here, so lookout for the butterflies in the next series.

We had a sustained period of westerly and north-westerly winds during the second week of the month and this meant for some great sea-watching (seabirds) on the north coast, but not on this side. Remarkably, birds from the sub-arctic (Sabine's Gulls, Leach's Petrel and Grey Phalarope for example) were driven inshore and onto the north coast mingling with others from the extreme south Atlantic (Great Shearwater). We missed out here, but we did see some glorious rainbows along with the heavy showers - no pots of gold - just the odd cow pat. However, there were still some sightings from the lookout of Great, Cory's and Sooty Shearwater along with Storm Petrels and fairly good numbers of Manx when the wind veered to the SW before a front came in. A Grey Phalarope loitered close offshore on 23/9. Groups of Common Scoter were frequently seen heading south on the calmer days.

As usual we often saw Harbour Porpoises, but Common Dolphins were not as abundant as they were in August, although a large group was seen on 26/9. There was one sighting of a Minke Whale on 16/9, and unusually - because it is not normally visible - the tall, very thin blow of this whale was seen! Unusually (according to some authorities) these whales often start to blow from beneath the surface. A tuna breached off the Runnelstone on 31/8 followed by another off the seal-haul-out on 16/9 (probably Blue-fins as Yellow-fins are said to be rare in our waters). They look big – porpoise size. With rising sea temperatures we may be seeing more of them.

The highest Seal counts were of 19 on 7/9 and 22/9.

Astute ring reading by watch-keepers showed that we were visited occasionally by a pair of Choughs other than our local birds. These two frequented the Porthcurno area last summer but were not thought to have bred, perhaps just prospecting. Mostly, we see our regulars.

Migrants have been thin on the ground here due to bad weather and persistent westerly winds. A lone Black-tailed Godwit flew in on 23/9 (distinctive wing bars and trailing feet). A few Wheatears, Goldfinches and Pied/White wagtails were noted and there was an obvious influx of Meadow Pipits during the last week of the month. Overhead visible migration has been almost non-existent and the usual heavy passage of Chaffinches and Skylarks has not got off the ground yet. In the valley, a Red-eyed Vireo (North American) prompted an influx of twitchers on 24/9 with some lingering long as the bird was not very cooperative. It may have been caught up in the hurricane.

Lovely russet tones are tinting the pinks and purples of the heather, the colours glowing beautifully in the elusive sunshine. We still have a few thrift flowers up here to remind us that spring is not far away and we just got to get over Christmas and we'll be there.

Jean Lawman