



Gwennap Head NCI - Wildlife Report May 2018

The month started well with a count of 20 Grey Seals hauled out on the first day (there was also 20 on 29/5).

On 3/5, a large cetacean breached three times distantly behind the Runnelstone making huge splashes on a calm sea. It appeared to have a slim tapering body of a size 20-30ft, it was white underneath and thought most likely to be a Minke Whale, but no sightings were made thereafter. To confuse the issue, shortly afterwards, 3 Risso's Dolphins appeared on the surface in the same place 'logging' as they often do. One was almost white while the other two were dark grey but differing in size. Was the 'breacher' a Risso's seen at such an angle that the thick body and blunt head shape wasn't apparent? There was some uncertainty, but days later a birder reported a large cetacean breaching, probably a Minke, and then on 14/5 we had definite sightings of a Minke Whale surfacing. This illustrates the difficulties that arise with these illusive animals.

The resident Bottlenose Dolphin group have been travelling all round the coast in the far west and spotted in every likely place including off the lookout and in nearby Port Loe by delighted visitors from up-country. They get around quickly (the dolphins not the visitors although they do as well) and I saw them going for miles east to west, then to east again and west again in the same morning off the north Penwith coast. There appeared to be 9, possibly 10, including 2 half size juveniles which are a paler grey. Harbour Porpoises have been frequently sighted.

Bird-wise, the main event later in the month was the usual influx of Red Kites into our area during the cutting of silage when they forage for little victims of the machines. On 6/5 and 17/5 around 30-40 were counted over Polgigga and it wasn't difficult to see them from here with one or two drifting quite close over the heath towards us. They are spectacular birds and one of the few positive stories concerning changing bird populations.

There was a notable migration of Great Northern Divers through the first half of May taking place during the first 3-4 hours of the morning and, on 15/5, 19 were counted passing the cove and rounding the headland in 2 hours. They often flew high and straight against a bright sky, looking very elegant, even sculptural, and more so when several grouped together. They were heading north to their Arctic breeding grounds. Migration of Red-throated Divers peaks earlier on but stragglers were still passing. Disappointingly, there was little skua migration this month, but 3 splendid Pomarine Skuas came by complete with spoon tails on 14/5.

The arrival of swallows, martins and swifts, appearing suddenly from a seemingly empty sky before swooping over the cliff calling ecstatically, went on for days in the good weather and was so very enjoyable after the long, cold and wet winter.

The winter weather may have affected the small birds - numbers of Stonechats and Meadow Pipits seem to be low.

Wall Brown butterflies emerged and migrant Red Admirals and Large Whites were noted. By the lookout we have lovely patches of Spring Squill, Thrift, Buttercups and Western Clover as well as a scatter of cow pats. The biggest event in May

Jean Lawman