



National Coastwatch
EYES ALONG THE COAST

Gwennap Head NCI - Wildlife Report June 2018

June will be remembered for fine and sunny weather, give or take a bit of fog. The stars this month were the Risso's Dolphins - their tall dorsal fins neatly cutting the surface of the wonderfully calm and tranquil sea otherwise short of any other wildlife. If you are a wildlife enthusiast and you look at an empty space for long enough something will always turn up. The Risso's arrived back in May when we saw 3 of these charismatic animals quietly surfacing out west. A watch-keeper reported 3 again on 8/6, and following reports from Mounts Bay, we saw at least 8 on 24/6 heading that way. The attraction is apparently the spawning of squid and cuttlefish (they came at the same time last year). At least 4 were exceedingly pale animals with much white visible on their dorsal ends and these were especially visible when logging - lying very still on the surface - chilling out! The white is scarring, a result of fighting among the males.

A small group of 7 Common Dolphins were active offshore on 4/6 and we watched them steadily moving west for over 2 hours during which there was much breaching and tail slapping. Their position was always known due to a small number of gannets constantly in attendance. We saw little of the Harbour Porpoises this month; they may be finding richer pickings elsewhere. A calm, settled sea is often not conducive to an abundance of marine life.

So, it was with the seabirds - no big congregations apart from a raft of Manx Shearwaters several hundred strong near the Runnelstone on 21/6. A build up, often thousands, usually occurs at this time of year, but the constant NE winds apparently pushed them far out to the west towards the islands. We still hope for another spectacular summer for seabirds and cetaceans like 2017. These events have happened fairly recently and some people are of the opinion that the huge abundance of small prey available is a result of over-fishing - not enough big fish eating the small ones.

Seabird numbers were low generally – wrong winds, calm seas etc, but we saw some Arctic Skuas, Great Skuas and Common Scoter. 19/6 was a day when you could see only fog from the lookout but down in the cove where there was some visibility birders reported Sooty Shearwaters and Storm Petrels during a rare south-westerly breeze.

Locally, a Turtle Dove (surely the prettiest dove, very rare now and almost extinct in Britain for the usual reasons) was seen on the lane with the local Collared Doves and a Hobby was reported hunting over the heath on 24/6 - probably after dragonflies. The Choughs chicks have fledged and their success this may be linked to the apparent failure of the Ravens to breed this year. Parties of Swifts coming in have been almost an everyday event.

More wild flowers are blooming around the lookout including Wild Thyme, Bird's-foot Trefoil, Restharrow, Heath Bedstraw, Dodder, Bell Heather and Lesser Centaury. Butterfly numbers have been low but Common Blue, Painted Lady, Large White and Meadow Brown were reported seen regularly.

The highest seal count was 8 on 15/6. They must be hot out on the rocks in the sun!

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