



Gwennap Head NCI - Wildlife Report July 2018

The sustained hot weather of June continued well into July; by then the plants had frizzled, the turf turned straw coloured and the heather struggled to put out flowers before they dried and turned russet. The persistent easterlies were no good for seabirds and not particularly special for whales and dolphins, but for a change it was pretty spectacular for butterflies on the many sunny warm days.

14/7 was notable for numbers and variety. A nice divide of habitats was apparent. In front of the lookout, on the low, stony and very dry ground were Wall Browns, orange coloured, flying low and fast. To the south around the heather clumps and granite protrusions flew handsome Graylings, beautifully camouflaged, their lichen patterned under-wings rendering them invisible when they pitched on a stone. Behind us, in the low wind pruned scrub, were Gatekeepers, small, bright and sprightly and keeping to their place precisely. Meadow Browns were all over, being generalists, all they need is natural grasses. Red Admiral, Peacock, Large and Small Whites represented migrants and probably local wanderers. A few Small Heath and Small Copper butterflies added to the variety. Many days were like this and, on 3/7, a Dark Green Fritillary surprised us, but easterly winds will have assisted this strong flier to turn up not so far from a breeding site in west Cornwall.

We get night visitors here, not the kind to worry about though. These are birds, tiny ocean wanderers. Storm Petrels fly in onto our cliffs around dusk at this time of year and flit about looking a little like bats. You may just glimpse the tell-tale white rump. On 15/7, bird ringers with mist nets caught 166, including birds from Skokholm (a place dear to my heart), Cape Clear, Calf of Man and the Lizard. Seabirds are long lived and these petrels will be non-breeding, prospecting birds. They are seldom seen at sea except in very strong winds.

Seabirds generally were few and far between until the end of the month when rain and gales swept in from the southwest. Predictably, there was a very good passage of large shearwaters – Greats, Cory's, Sooty and Balearic, as well as a rare Trinidad Petrel seen by local birders on 29/7. We have seen many Mediterranean Gulls going to and fro, not surprisingly because good numbers (between 20 and 30 have been reported some days in Mounts Bay and in Sennen Bay).

Common Dolphins were reported from here on several occasions this month along with the usual small numbers of Harbour Porpoises. There were 3 Sunfish close in below us on 18/7, unusually close together and circling each other – having a conference?

A red damselfly flew into the lookout, most probably a scarce Small Red Damselfly (yet to be confirmed). Locally, over on the heath on a small pool, there have been some Southern Migrant Hawkers which are very rare migrants. There appears to have been a big influx of these really attractive, blue and black insects.

It doesn't look as if we will have a good show of heather and gorse flower. The very dry conditions have spoilt what is normally a spectacular sight. Heather flowers were browning almost as soon as they opened.