



National Coastwatch
EYES ALONG THE COAST

Gwennap Head NCI - Wildlife Report August 2018

An extraordinary event took place on 4/8 during the long, hot, dry period. There was a light shower – not of rain but of ladybirds, although the former would have been welcome. Flying onto the headland from sea and sky were 100's of ladybirds, our common species, the seven spot, (although not so common these days). They were landing on the short turf but they were also all over the bracken to the east of us. Most likely they came from the continent – a weather event perhaps or overpopulation somewhere so they were seeking new ground as often happens with insects. So they must have crossed the channel, exhausting you would think as they don't look to be very efficient at flying, and yet some were mating, the males pretty obviously smaller than the females. Whether they had flown low over the sea (probably not) or were wind assisted and came down from a height is a mystery and I can find no information on this. They looked paler and more orange than those in my garden. A similar event took place on the east coast many years ago.

The sea has been lively. Common Dolphins and Harbour Porpoises were ever present (you could see them every day if you looked hard enough for long enough), Minke Whales were sighted many times often giving good close views and up to 4 Risso's Dolphins were seen several times. A Tuna breached twice just offshore on 24/8.

Seal numbers have been high throughout the month, as they always are at this time of year. The maximum count was 23 on two days.

There was a good variety of seabirds with passages of Cory's and Great Shearwaters - usually when wind and rain had driven them inshore, some Great and Arctic Skuas, and on 15/8 we spotted a Long-tailed Skua - much rarer. Storm Petrels were out there too but were hard to see, being so small. As always at this time of year, rafts of Manx Shearwaters were a common sight with a few Sooty and Balearics among them and sometimes Sandwich and common/Arctic Terns.

Choughs have been visiting us and we know from watch-keepers ring reading efforts that our local pair has been here and also the pair which frequent the Minack area. Thanks to those who have been reporting them.

A Peregrine Falcon was reported one day and we frequently saw Kestrels, mostly juveniles - they in general seem to have done well this year around this coast.

The autumn migration has been evident; waders such as Turnstone, Ringed Plover, Oystercatcher, Whimbrel and Curlew have been passing through, often identified by call alone, and local birders found a Dotterel on the heath.

Small migrants are around but mostly down in the valley. Up here though we have seen Wheatears and on 30/5, a Yellow Wagtail flew over calling.

Butterfly numbers dropped quickly; the good weather meant that many had a shorter season than usual with so much time on the wing, but we were still seeing Graylings and Wall Browns at the end of the month. The show of heather as predicted was not so good this year.

Jean Lawman