



National Coastwatch
EYES ALONG THE COAST

Gwennap Head NCI - Wildlife Report October 2018

The gold star this month (21/10) goes to a small olive coloured bird with a bold creamy eye-stripe and a lively disposition, drawing attention to itself in the Blackthorn patch behind the lookout with a loud definitive 'tekking' call. It was one of those little brown jobs. Not wildly exciting to look at but attractive, its plumage very fresh with dusky overtones. It was a Dusky Warbler, only slightly bigger than a Wren, and the miracle was that it came here from the Siberian taiga taking a wayward migration route south as it should have been heading for SE Asia. The valley was covered in fog in the early hours, but not this headland so it must have come down in the night from who knows where onto that little bit of scrub. This is a rare bird here. It didn't stay long, but chose to head down to the valley where it proved a difficult task for newly arrived birders to locate, although its call was always the giveaway.

As usual there was a flurry of rare and unusual migrants locally followed by a bigger flurry of birders from all over the country. In the valley below there were several Yellow-browed Warblers (regular but scarce), a Red-breasted Flycatcher and a Barred Warbler among others. Land's End hosted a Catbird (2nd for Britain) from the other side of the Atlantic and probably a hurricane casualty.

There was much overhead migration assisted by prevalent NE winds, especially on 7/10, 19/10, 28/10 and 29/10; many hundreds of Skylarks were involved along with Chaffinches, Brambling, Siskins and on 19/10, hundreds if not thousands of Starlings which crowded the wires by Roskestal Farm. This was a good place to see a Turtle Dove and a Rose-coloured Starling, this last a good indicator of where our winter starlings come from – Northern and Eastern Europe. The annual Woodpigeon and Stock Dove invasion occurred on 28 and 29/10. Common Snipe arrived in ones and twos, but we saw a flock of 20 on 7/10. Our winter thrushes, Redwing and Fieldfare also arrived assisted by the frequent northerly winds. How many will stay in the area remains to be seen. A flock of about 250 Golden Plover turned up as usual this month and can often be seen distantly as they spend much time in the air over towards Sennen. This is all very lovely to see since we are currently in a period of massive decline of bird populations and expect ever more diminishing numbers in the future. Short-eared Owl and Hen Harrier were also reported over on the heath, as well as 3 Great White Egrets. On 2 occasions, a Great-spotted Woodpecker visited us – it's that time of year with lots of dispersal going on. We saw our last Swallow on 11/10, but I saw them elsewhere right up to 30/10. On 26/10, in a bitterly cold and very strong northerly wind and quite in accord with the weather, 2 geese flew in which weren't the usual Canada Geese or Greylags; they were Greenland White-fronted Geese. A winter Robin has arrived below us on the cliffs and on good day he pops up and gives us a little song.

There have been many Chough sightings both of our local birds and of strangers (colour rings tell us this) and a group of 6 were seen here on 22/10.

The sea has been fairly quiet for birds particularly in the second half of the month. However, I don't believe I have ever seen so many Gannets feeding offshore as on 9/10, spread between the Runnelstone Buoy all the way round to Land's End. Great and Arctic Skuas were seen harassing gulls or Kittiwakes, and there were several flocks of Common Scoter passing. Fish there must be, because predatory Bluefin Tuna have often been noticed breaching and thrashing on the surface. Of cetaceans, we saw a Minke Whale on 7/10, Common Dolphins on several days and many glimpses of Harbour Porpoises.

Wall Brown, Small Tortoiseshell and Red Admiral butterflies were flying on good days.

Jean Lawman