



National Coastwatch
EYES ALONG THE COAST

Gwennap Head NCI - Wildlife Report February 2019

Albatross fever hit west Cornwall for several days between 8/2 and 10/2 when a Black-browed Albatross was spotted off the southerly tip of the Lizard Peninsula three times in two days going west twice and east once on 8/2 and 9/2. Birders rushed over to the Lizard and even crowded Hella Point on this headland (which is visible from the lookout) hoping for a sighting but, apart from the few chaps at Lizard Point that happened to be there at the right time, they were disappointed. The albatross had come from deep in the Southern Ocean (most likely the Falklands) and so would have somehow crossed that zone of light winds around the tropics known as the doldrums – a place where most of the birders ended up. That journey would normally be much too difficult for a bird that relies on strong winds for efficient flight, which is why they are so very rare in the North Atlantic. There are a few records in Britain, even one from Gwennap Head just under 10 years ago. You can't mistake a flying albatross – the extremely long bowed wings and incessant gliding as it traces huge arcs over the sea. I know because I once saw one many years ago circling the Brisons. It may seem like negative news but just to know that such a bird has been not too many miles offshore from here is tantalizing.

A sub-adult Iceland Gull was frequenting the cliffs here on 13/2. This pale biscuit coloured bird was among around 200 gulls riding the up-drafts resulting from strong southerly winds; they were probably displaced from their high tide roosting sites. These white gulls from Arctic regions - Iceland and Glaucous Gulls - have been thin on the ground this year compared to recent years. A few Manx Shearwaters started to turn up this month as would be expected on their northerly migration. Birders on Albatross watch also clocked up Sooty and Balearic Shearwaters.

The unusual warm spell of weather coming up from the south is thought to have been responsible for some early Swallow and House Martin reports on the south coast of Britain and the nearest to us was a Swallow at Polgigga on 15/2. Several local sightings of Painted Lady butterflies may also be associated with this weather anomaly as were some unusual migrant moths including a rare Crimson Speckled of North African and southern European origin found near here at higher Bosistow Farm.

A Magpie, a female Blackbird, Meadow and Rock Pipits and Linnet flocks were the only small birds we saw.

Choughs have been visiting regularly including our local pair and also the pair from Porthcurno.

There were several sightings of Common Dolphins this month and the usual small porpoise groups most often seen in the vicinity of the Runnelstone or the seal haul-out. We were looking out for (and still are!) a Humpback Whale reported off the east side of the Lizard late in the month.

A Roe Deer was seen along the lane leading down to Porthgwarra on 28/2.

We sometimes see beautiful cloud formations here and the best this month was a large spread of Cirrocumulus Undulatus which forms very high up and is composed of gently undulating lines of tiny individual cirrus clouds, smoky grey and with silver linings.

Jean Lawman