



National Coastwatch
EYES ALONG THE COAST

Gwennap Head NCI - Wildlife Report March 2019

We saw three species of cetaceans. On 6/3, a watch-keeper was treated to a superb 'acrobatic' display of Bottlenose Dolphins, which, judging from her remarks in the log, clearly delighted her – yes, we have several women on board, now! The dolphins were first noted off Nanjizel and made their way towards us. There were 15-20 in the group. They have been seen in various places around Penwith recently, especially the north coast, and it's about time we had a visit. A group of 20 or so Common Dolphins travelled east behind the Runnelstone on 19/3 and a larger group of dolphins, possibly Bottlenose mixed with Common, passed on 29/3. We saw Harbour Porpoises, as usual; they are always out there somewhere, albeit difficult to see and usually no more than a 'blip' on the surface. A favourite feeding site is off the seal haul-out and on 9/3, 4 porpoises were down there and in the strong overhead sunshine it was possible to see them under the water, their lithe pale bodies whipping around after fish prey.

March is the month of the Puffin passage when they head north to their breeding colonies after the winter at sea. Some have even been in the Mediterranean in the late winter period where it would strike me as odd to see a Puffin, but modern satellite tracking devices attached to the birds are giving us information as to the whereabouts of seabirds when they are not at their breeding colonies. Puffins were seen throughout the month but mostly on days with SW winds. Birders reported over 700 on 16/3 during a 2-hour watch, and on 19/3 we counted 40 in 10 minutes and, since the passage went on for 2- 3 hours, this would also have been a considerable total. You need a telescope or powerful binoculars to see them because they are nearly always a kilometre or two offshore, often mixed in with Razorbills and Guillemots, when they can be picked out by their smaller size and stumpy bodies.

The Manx Shearwater passage was full on and other seabirds noted were Red and Black-throated Divers, Great Skua, Fulmars and Mediterranean Gulls.

Choughs have been feeding on the turf outside the lookout, and very successfully too, pulling up fat brown grubs with each probe of their slender curved bills. One day, two copycat crows got in on the act, but try as they might their chunky bills usually didn't find any or couldn't pull them out easily when they did. On 5/3, 14 Choughs gave a lovely aerial display in front of us, and on 22/3, 4 Choughs mobbed a Peregrine that slid majestically past our window and promptly flipped upside lashing out with its claws. Our local pair were reported often, but oddly after seeing the male on its own on 26/3, I then saw a Chough at Pendeen whose colour rings suggested it was our female!

As the weather turned fine after all the wind and rain some early spring migrants came – Sandwich Tern on 19/3, male Wheatears on 19/3 and 25/3, an alba (Pied or White) Wagtail on 19/3 and a few Swallows and Sand Martins. Local rarities included Red-rumped Swallow (24/3), a Stone Curlew (30/3) and some Red Kites

Red Admiral and Small Tortoiseshells were flying at the end of the month in the warm sun!

The highest Grey Seal count was 19 on 22/3. s

Jean Lawman