



National Coastwatch
EYES ALONG THE COAST

Gwennap Head NCI - Wildlife Report April 2019

April was characterized by the predominance of east and south-easterly winds which brought in the small spring migrants. They promptly seek shelter in the valleys and so we see little of them up here in our exposed position although, if you listen hard outside, you can pick out some of their exuberant singing. Better still, if you allowed a short pause down by the gate you would have heard the rich notes of Willow Warblers, Blackcaps, Chiffchaffs, and later Whitethroats, arrival dates being remarkably constant each year. So many fine, warm days with light winds are especially conducive to birders. Not far from here Stone Curlew, 'Channel Wagtail' and Red Kite were reported.

Swallows were arriving from day one, but as they whip over the cliff at speed, especially with a tail wind, it was usually a case of blink and you miss it. For some reason we see more Swallows than Sand and House Martins and it may be that the latter prefer to come in onto low-lying coastlines like Marazion marsh - always the best place to look for the first Sand Martins.

Late March and early April saw the usual influx of Carrion Crows, an event unnoticed by many people. We see them arrive from way out to sea in small numbers before alighting on the cliff-top and causing much agitation among the resident Jackdaws, Crows and Choughs etc. Nobody knows where they hail from, but they come in all round the Penwith coast and on other parts of the British coastline including the east coast. Intriguingly, a Hooded Crow often turns up at this time too as one did this year, as well as a hybrid Carrion/Hooded, suggesting origins of further north or west (possibly Ireland) but most amazing this time was a Pied Crow (of African origin) which turned up at Land's End before moving over to St. Just. There is some debate as to whether it could have been a wild bird!

On the sea Manx Shearwaters dominated with very large numbers present some days. On 12/4 whilst looking through such a flock it was most unusual to see a small pinkish coloured falcon mixed in with them. It was of course a Kestrel and most likely a migrant which flew in towards Land's End. We noted a small passage of Red-throated divers with a group of 5 on 10/4 being the most seen flying together. Likewise, there has been the usual northward migration of Whimbrel flocks and on calm days they were often heard calling below and out of our sight.

Our local Chough pair appears to have moved site, but are thought to still be on the headland.

Common Dolphins are ever present in our seas these days being regularly reported from the Scillonian ferry and from the Marine Discovery wildlife tours. We too see them fairly often, usually distantly, but on 23/4 a group of 20/30 were cavorting close offshore before heading westward. Sightings of Porpoises have been very few and this has also been the case with the boat observers.

There is a wonderful show of Spring Squill this year probably due to the long spell of dry weather.

The highest seal count was 18 on 19/4.

Jean Lawman