



National Coastwatch
EYES ALONG THE COAST

Gwennap Head NCI - Wildlife Report May 2019

Some days are better than others for wildlife watching and 3/5 was one such day. It was mirror calm with high broken cloud and no wind – perfect – just the day to see a Minke Whale. A beautiful wooden schooner had drifted past, blue-grey hull and pale ochre sail, struggling to make headway. Beyond, a sleek black body rolled over exposing a curve dorsal fin, and that was it - the whale - and then twice more it rose before diving. There were 9 more sightings as it travelled slowly west. On 17/5 it was seen again by a member of the public inside the Runnelstone. 20 or so Common Dolphins and porpoises were out there too.

This month saw a northbound passage of Great Northern Divers, large and handsome with black and white strongly patterned plumage, 5 on the day described above, including one which flew at eye level very close to us. A Red-throated Diver, neater and slimmer with a rusty red throat patch and pale grey head passed too with a tell-tale upward flicking of its bill. Parties of swallows were coming in as well with a count of 60 plus, but with attention focused on the sea many would have been missed. Manx Shearwaters, Puffins were out there and even the Choughs put in an appearance. What a day!

Then there was another day. On 24/5, Red Kites gathered over the headland, 27 - no less, drifting and circling, huge and fork-tailed, their warm colours strong against a blue-grey sky. Some even settled on rocks to the horror of the local buzzards, crows and gulls. The kites had been in the area for several days (maximum count 38 at Polgigga), but not don't usually venture out to the cliffs. This is an annual event here in May when silage is cut resulting in an exodus of small animals, mashed or otherwise, providing fast food ripe for eating. The kites are too young yet to breed and their origin is uncertain. Some say they are all British birds (including introductions) others think some may come from France – we won't know until more birds are tagged.

The Whimbrel passage continued, but instead of seeing them fly by as is usual, two flew in and lingered on the turf and short heather beside the look-out and stayed around for a few days (from 7/5 – 10/5) giving excellent views of their delicately stippled plumage. They winter way down on the African coast and are heading to their northern sub-arctic breeding grounds. We wish them well!

Local rarities include 2 Turtle Doves keeping company with the large flock of Collared Doves on Porthgwarra lane close to either of the farms, a Woodchat Shrike at Bosistow, a Glossy Ibis at Nanjizal (which spends most of its time at Marazion), a Black Kite seen over Skewjack and later at St.Buryan (over my house!). This last was interesting as it probably came over from France and appeared at the same time as the Red Kites.

The highest Grey Seal count was 18 on 16/5.

We rarely see rabbits although we know they are here, but on 16/5, there were at least a dozen of them huddled together (in the biscuit tin made of gingerbread along with some equally attractive pigs!).

Jean Lawman