



National Coastwatch
EYES ALONG THE COAST

Gwennap Head NCI - Wildlife Report June 2019

Throughout the month there were sightings of a group of Risso's Dolphins from Marine Discovery wildlife tours, the Scillonian ferry etc. and this is now an annual event, these dolphins turning up at the same time as the Barrel Jellyfish. Cetaceans, unless they are travelling, are usually to be found wherever their food is. We saw them on 10/6 about 4 miles offshore out west on a beautifully calm day. They were elusive and as usual they were spread out over a wide area so that counting them was difficult even though their tall dorsal fins were prominent. Only two dolphins were seen on the surface at the same time and it is hard to say how many there were. One was a very pale individual indicating that they were a group of males. Interestingly, there was interaction with a small group of Harbour Porpoises resulting in a good deal of thrashing about and a Risso's tail being thrust out of the water. Who knows what was going on?

On 20/6, some 300 Manx Shearwaters were feeding by the Runnelstone and in their midst appeared a Black Tern, a species we seldom see in Cornwall and likely to be the same individual spotted off the Lizard peninsula a few days ago. They breed on freshwater marshes in countries east of Britain. We continued to see Great Northern Divers flying north – probably too late to start breeding. At least they won't suffer the same fate as one in North Hampshire, U.S.A. on live camera where the chick was taken by a Bald Eagle! On 15/6, a group of 16 Common Scoter passed close enough to distinguish the black males from the brown, pale-faced females. Local rarities this month include Quail and Tawny Pipit.

On 24/6, there was a massive influx into the south coast of Britain of 1000's of Painted Ladies and, having been on the north coast on Gwithian sand dunes that day where they were numerous, I can vouch for that. On 26/6, and for some days after that, we frequently saw these large orange and brown chequered butterflies dashing over heath and rock, maybe originating from that first immigration, or possibly they were more individuals coming in. A local birder counted 46 on a ramble around Porthgwarra. With noticeably small numbers of butterflies so far this year it was a nice surprise. Early in the month numbers of migrant Hummingbird Hawkmoths were also reported (24 on 2/6).

Also on 26/6, we counted 33 Swifts, including a group of 27 flying in, nimble and aerodynamic as they circled above us. A lingering front offshore had pushed in murky air and typically they were feeding around the edge of it.

By the end of the month the turf outside became studded with bright colours – shades of pink and yellow from a mix of flowers – Thrift, Wild Thyme, English Stonecrop, Cat's-ears, Hawk-bits and Bird's-foot Trefoil. The heath is turning purple with Bell Heather, intermingled with tiny white Heath Bedstraw flowers, but most noticeable are the heaps of parasitic Dodder (locally known as red grass) which seems to be having a very good year.

Single deer were seen hereabouts on 1/6 and 6/6; they were probably Roe Deer.

The highest Grey Seal count was 16 on 15/6

Jean Lawman