



National Coastwatch
EYES ALONG THE COAST

Gwennap Head NCI - Wildlife Report August 2019

The most unexpected sighting this month was that of a flight of 22 White Storks on 25/8 described by the watch-keepers as 'quite spectacular'. They had arrived in Penwith the previous day and roosted at Drift where they were disturbed by photographers (not uncommon) and then they went on a fly-about fortunately passing the lookout. The storks were captive bred in Sussex as part of Knepp Farm re-wilding project and were released a few days before. They should be heading south to winter in Africa. Let's hope they make it.

Wader migration was seriously underway and we saw or heard Redshank, Whimbrel, Curlew, Turnstone, Ringed Plover, Dunlin, Golden Plover and Oystercatcher. Locally, a rare American Golden Plover had twitchers excited.

Seabird numbers were disappointing except for the ever-present Manx Shearwaters, but we clocked up Sooty, Balearic and Great Shearwater (only one) as well as Great Skuas, Sandwich, Common and Arctic Terns. Large numbers of 30 Shags and Cormorants (including white-breasted juveniles) were reported as a result of post breeding dispersal. On 25/8, a drama was enacted offshore when a Peregrine Falcon singled out an Arctic Tern and relentlessly pursued it, stooping on it from a great height continually for 8 minutes, eventually exhausting it and knocking it down onto the sea, but the tern's evasive actions were impressive. The tern was disabled and could no longer fly and the falcon, despite many attempts, failed to retrieve it hampered somewhat by gulls settling beside it. It gave up but the tern was doomed.

There were many Chough sightings this month including a flock of 11 on 20/8 and also frequent visits from our local family group of 2 adults and 3 youngsters feeding outside.

2/8 was an extraordinary day for butterflies. There had been a massive arrival of Painted Ladies on the east coast of Britain (millions) and many had made their way across country and reached our Cornish coast (some say they originated from an invasion into Norway). Many were flying over the heather and there was a passage along the cliff top. I counted 64 going east in just over an hour. It is wonderful to see butterflies in a garden or in the countryside but quite amazing to witness real migration.

There were 9 other species up here that morning - many Red Admirals and Large Whites, a few Wall Browns, Meadow Browns and Grayling and singles of Gatekeeper, Common Blue, Peacock and, surprisingly, Green Hairstreak - unmistakable with iridescent green under-wings - a late flying individual and the first I have seen up here although they occur locally in small numbers. My guess is that some of these butterflies drifted up here in the almost non-existent north-east breeze, although Graylings and Wall Browns are resident on these rocky, heather clad tops. There was even a courting pair of Grayling with the male wing-quivering, bowing and drawing the antennae of the female across his scent glands with his wings.

Cetaceans reported this month were Bottlenose and Common Dolphins and Harbour porpoise.

The highest seal count was 18 on 30/8.

Jean Lawman