



National Coastwatch
EYES ALONG THE COAST

Gwennap Head NCI - Wildlife Report August 2016

Strong gales and rain wouldn't seem to be ideal for watching wildlife, but these conditions produced by far the best spectacle of the month. On 20/8, there was a concentrated passage of Cory's Shearwaters with a total of 178 seen by birders who sat it out from dawn to dusk counting them from Hella Point. They (the shearwaters not the birders) were all going west and back out to sea after being buffeted by the storms. At the lookout we counted 45 in about 3 hrs which isn't bad going. In between the squally showers, these large and graceful shearwaters were beautiful and mesmerising to watch shearing the sunlit crests and gliding deeply into the wave troughs. Originating from the Mediterranean region, the Canaries and the Azores, these birds are undergoing a post breeding fly-around before heading down to the seas off Brazil for the winter, and lucky for us we had the right conditions to bring them inshore. The next few days produced smaller numbers, but with them were other long distance migrants - Great and Sooty Shearwaters, both of which breed in the southern hemisphere. Along with these were thousands of Manx Shearwaters, some Storm Petrels, skuas and terns (including 3 Arctic Terns on 11/8). Small numbers of Wheatears, Curlew and Whimbrel were reported - early signs of an imminent autumn migration. Also evident during the second half of the month was the return migration of swallows and martins; the swifts were gone by mid-month.

It is hard keeping track of the Chough family, but as we haven't heard otherwise, we assume they are doing well. The adult female was seen alone here several times in the early part of the month, perhaps taking a well deserved break from the kids! The Kestrel that regularly came on hunting forays along the cliff edge was seen one day carrying a slow-worm.

Three rare warblers - little brown jobs - were located on 22/8 and 23/8, skulking in bushes in the valley and in the fields above, pursued by equally skulking and often well camouflaged bird watchers. They were Greenish, Booted and Barred (the warblers not the birdwatchers) originating from eastern continental areas. Their names describe them well with Booted referring to the bird's long legs rather than actual boots.

Getting away from birds, a Speckled Bush Cricket appeared sunning itself on a window downstairs, bright green and handsome with two extremely long antennae. It is said to be an inhabitant of gardens, especially those with roses, so perhaps it came up on the alien rose that has established itself outside - as reported last month.

Red Admiral butterflies have been common on the cliffs this month. Most are migrating, heading south to the Mediterranean regions or central Europe where they will lay their eggs and die shortly afterwards. The eggs will hatch and the caterpillars will feed on the Mediterranean version of stinging nettles before becoming the adults that will be arriving on our shores next May. In recent years more of them are attempting to hibernate over-winter, sometimes successfully, and these are the ones we see on the wing very early on in the year.

Seal numbers peaked at 25 on 18/8, and they need to watch out because a possible Great White Shark has been reported by an experienced sea-watcher off Pendeen (21/8). The only other sea mammals we saw were porpoises.

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