



National Coastwatch
EYES ALONG THE COAST

Gwennap Head NCI - Wildlife Report September 2016

There was drama this month at the lookout (other than Poldark). Our two adult Choughs have been here frequently extracting tasty morsels from the turf. On 21/9, they were joined by another and they definitely didn't like it invading their space. The fight that followed was vicious with both the pair attacking and pinning down the third bird, jabbing it with their bills, which being blood red made the episode look worse. I was on the verge of rushing outside to do a rescue, but thankfully the bird wriggled out and got away. The rings will tell us who the intruder was - possibly a relative. These things happen in nature! There was a report of an un-ringed Chough this month which is interesting because most, although not all, of the locally breeding Choughs are ringed.

The warm tropical air and strong south/ southeast winds during the second week of September brought large numbers of migrant butterflies onto our coast from the south. The largest numbers occurred along the north Penwith coast. One day, I counted 250 at Pendeen in less than 2 hours, but even here on Gwennap Head it was evident that something was going on. They were mostly Red Admirals, Small Tortoiseshells, Large and Small Whites with smaller numbers of Painted Ladies. With them were some dragonflies and moths - mainly Silver Y's and, interestingly, Vestals which are small cream moths with a crimson dash across the wing. The picture can be confusing as some of these butterflies also undergo a southbound migration in autumn, notably Red Admirals and Painted Ladies, but this time the presence of moths of continental origin and the prevailing wind direction meant these had crossed the channel.

The winds also brought in migrant birds. Among them were some rarities. A Dotterel was heard and then seen from the lookout on 8/9, and later settled on the heath to the north causing a minor twitch, as did a Red-backed Shrike (visible from our balcony), a Citrine Wagtail and several Yellow Wagtails. A fleeting visit from a Pallid Harrier was noted by a local birder. A visible migration of Meadow Pipits occurred on 21/9 with several hundred counted flying in during the early morning.

A handsome male Kestrel - with gleaming copper back and slate blue head – sheltered on the windowsill downstairs one day; he looked good because everything around was enveloped in thick grey fog; maybe he was lost.

On the sea we were still seeing Cory's Shearwaters in the first half of the month, usually during strong south-westerly winds, but most notable were the numbers of Balearic Shearwaters (56 in less than 3 hours one day). The total world population is only 10,000: they are an endangered species, suffering from disturbance and predators (rats and feral cats) in their island breeding caves in the western Mediterranean region. A tiny Grey Phalarope was seen from the lookout on 21/9.

Seal numbers have been high, with a maximum of 21 on 18/9. As for cetaceans, a Minke Whale surfaced four times on 1/9 - significant because there have been very few sightings this year. As usual, Harbour Porpoises were seen on calm days.

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