



Gwennap Head NCI - Wildlife Report March 2017

As I scanned the sea for Puffins on 16/3, a Watch-keeper (looking for sinking ships) noticed that one of the cows reclining in the heather had sprouted antlers – big antlers. It was a mature Red Deer stag, not what we expect here. In the hazy conditions with the sea for backdrop it looked magnificent, particularly when it stood up - except for the baler twine hanging off its head-dress! You wouldn't want to argue with it - it was big. It spent the morning in the company of the cows, seemingly not bothered by passers by equipped with cameras.

There have been a few Red Deer (2 young stags, a doe and a fawn as far as I can gather) in the area for about 3 years, nobody knows where they came from. This animal is probably one of the stags grown up a little, making it, maybe, 4-5 years old and so it may get even bigger. We are used to seeing Roe Deer here but they are much smaller.

The Puffins didn't materialize that day, although there had been 1 on 13/3 and 4 on 15/3, but on 19/3, they got going and, after some mist cleared, 103 were counted going west either as individuals or in small groups. Puffin passage occurs in March each year when they fly north to their breeding colonies after a winter spent in the open ocean. Pity they are never close, always Runnelstone distance or beyond, except rarely. Likewise a passage of Manx Shearwaters began with 16 on 13/3 in light SW winds. Following a series of westerly gales, there was a significant movement back out to sea of Fulmars on 6/3 with 800 per hour passing the lookout. An Iceland Gull accompanied some Herring Gulls flying past on 28/3.

We experienced difficult hazy conditions with very strong, often gale force, easterly winds late in March, particularly on 26/3. You don't expect to see much on such days, but our first Sand Martins (9) came winging their way in off the sea - with some relief I should imagine after a long channel crossing. It was also a surprise to see Meadow Pipits displaying over the heather. As we could hardly get in the door that morning, it seemed an impossible feat for such a tiny thing weighing just a few grams to cope with such a wind.

Also in the way of small birds we heard the loud echoing song of a wren issuing from rocks below the lookout, 2 House Sparrows which are rarities here flew over pursued by a Meadow Pipit and were picked up on call. Pied Wagtails, Goldfinches (both likely migrants) and flocks of Linnets were also reported. Local rarities reported in the area included a Great White Egret and a rare Baillon's Crake which eluded birders after posing for a photograph on nearby Porthchapel beach before flying off.

A Common Dolphin breached off the seal haul-out on 26/3 and the only other cetaceans were Harbour Porpoises. A maximum of 11 seals hauled out on the rocks on 28/3.

A Painted Lady (butterfly) was reported by a watch-keeper on 22/3. This is a very early record but it ties in nicely with another report from a local birder. It may have been an early migrant rather than an over-wintering individual because some immigrant moths were caught locally around this time during a southerly air flow.

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