



Gwennap Head NCI - Wildlife Report July 2017

21/7 and 22/7 were exciting. After heavy rain and gales from the southwest, the sea was teeming with seabirds - mostly Manx Shearwaters, but with them were Sooty, Cory's and Great Shearwaters, the last two distinguished by their larger size and graceful wheeling flight - the wonder is where they breed – Tristan de Cunha, Gough Island, Azores etc. Many birders were tucked under umbrellas in the cove and on Hella Point while we sipped tea and ate chocolate biscuits – one for every good bird – in the warm and dry. There was a chance of other rarities. Indeed, Wilson's and Bulwer's Petrel were claimed by birders that day and during the following week. We saw all 4 shearwaters, and also many Storm Petrels from the lookout – swallow sized, dark except for the white rump and a thin white flash on the under-wing; the fluttering flight is distinctive. Bad weather has compensations for some of us. Sea-watching remained good until the end of the month.

Twice, Greater Black Back Gulls were observed on the sea picking over the bodies of Manx Shearwaters. There are so many and the predatory gulls probably had no trouble catching them; they are great opportunists. On calm days shearwaters are slow in getting airborne if they are harassed by a gull and would be easily taken, but with over 300,000 pairs breeding on Welsh islands they are doing well

Common Scoter duck were reported frequently with a flock of 90 plus on 13/7. They fly tight to the sea surface in straight lines and look uniformly dark - males are black, female and juveniles are brown. Arctic and Great Skuas were also seen from here this month.

On 8/7, 40 Swifts gathered over the lookout - a swirling, screaming flock that finally went out to sea, and there were smaller numbers on many other days in July. Were they failed or non breeding birds going south already, or were they feeding as a group on the edge of a weather front?

Our Choughs have been around; there were sightings of a male and a juvenile Kestrel, and unusually for here, a juvenile Green Woodpecker on 26/7.

There were lots of Common Dolphins during the first 2-3 weeks of the month. On 8/7, we saw 4 separate groups off the headland, sometimes leaping and jumping but, more often, quietly milling about. They were usually in groups of 20-40 animals. We noticed that a small dense flock of Manx Shearwaters flying to and fro or in tight circles often pinpointed a group of dolphins feeding below, driving the fish to the surface. Unfortunately, there was a spike in the number of dead dolphins washed up this year from January until early June (187) - result of bi-catch. The highest Grey Seal count was 24 on 23/7.

7 species of butterflies graced us with their presence this month - Meadow and Wall Brown, Small Heath, Large White, Small Copper, Peacock and Red Admiral. One Red Admiral was observed spiralling higher and higher up into the sky before disappearing completely – where was that going?

The heath is blaze of colour with the heather and gorse reaching peak flowering time.

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