



Gwennap Head NCI - Wildlife Report September 2019

On 18/9, a Blue-fin Tuna made several spectacular leaps and indulged in some energetic splashing just off the seal haul-out (Gannel Rocks). Clear of the sea and sideways on you could make out the multiplicity of fins - two dorsal, two ventral and one lateral as well as the thinly curved tail vertically placed. I say this because usually a brief, often distant view can be confused with a breaching Common Dolphin which is not that much larger than a sizeable tuna. Incredibly, it was seen again the next day at roughly the same time and place by the duty watch-keeper. We have seen few tuna this year generally.

Cetacean sightings have been low with just one sighting of a single Common Dolphin (it's unusual to see only one), although porpoises showed more frequently with at least 7 under gannets on 1/9. An adult with a tiny baby was off Gannel Rocks on 26/9. There was little feeding activity involving seabirds this month and the number of cetacean sightings usually reflects this. Manx Shearwater numbers decreased markedly; most have gone south but we noticed an increase in Balearic Shearwater sightings towards the last couple of weeks.

A single White Stork from the original flock of 24 Sussex released birds (22 of which were seen by watch-keepers from the lookout on 26/8) was discovered in a field near St. Levan in the middle of the month and is still there. I have been unable to find out what has happened to the rest but as some were fitted with GPS tags perhaps, we will soon find out. Hopefully they crossed the channel and headed south on the normal migration.

Migration generally has been underway. We saw an influx of wagtails (mostly juvenile 'alba') Meadow Pipits and a few Skylarks and Wheatears. Locally, birders found Wryneck, Redstart, Yellow Wagtail, Turtle Dove, American Golden Plover and ringers trapped a Nightingale at Nanjizel. In the valley behind us 2 Marsh Tits, rare in Penwith, were located in a garden. We saw good numbers of Swallows with a few House Martins and some late Sand Martins on many days during the month but this curtailed during the last week. On 18/9, a Robin was seen perched on a protruding rock down the cliff face in full song – a sure sign of the changing season. This could be part of a local dispersal movement or it could be an immigrant.

Varying numbers of Choughs were reported with the largest group being 9. On 22/9, there was a fine flying display from a mixed flock of roughly 50 birds -Jackdaws, Crows and Choughs with a single Raven, enjoying (I think!) a very strong updraft created by brisk southerly winds. Twice the flock was interrupted by a Peregrine Falcon coming from nowhere and causing mayhem before drifting in a lordly manner above the scattered birds surveying the result of its actions.

A Kestrel has been observed a lot this month hovering over the cliff slopes and a Sparrowhawk dashed around the back of the lookout on 10/9 probably hoping to surprise some of the incoming pipits. We often see Buzzards and generally do well for birds of prey.

Large Whites and Red Admiral sightings were frequent on sunny days.