



National Coastwatch
EYES ALONG THE COAST

Gwennap Head NCI - Wildlife Report May 2016

The most exciting, and extraordinary, wildlife event this month was undoubtedly the presence of a Dalmation Pelican in the area. It turned up on 9th May and ranged around locally between Porthgwarra, and Drift Reservoir, and could be seen on occasion from this headland when it resembled a small plane gliding around in graceful arcs at low altitudes. It has been seen to land on the sea, on some of the local pools and on Drift reservoir where it was observed feeding and probably catching more fish than the local anglers. This species of Pelican hails from south-eastern Europe and the Middle East and is described as a short distance migrant! This one is well off course but, particularly as other rarities had turned up, driven no doubt by the very strong winds from that direction, people are of the opinion that it is a genuine wild bird, and it is certainly behaving that way. It is still with us and spending much of its time now at Drift or on the Hayle estuary.

Also of particular interest was a Bowhead Whale that came into Mounts Bay on 15th May. This follows a sighting on the Isles of Scilly a year or so ago and it may be the same individual. It is an extremely rare whale in these parts because it is an Arctic species spending much time below the sea ice (hence no dorsal fin). Unfortunately, we did not see it from the lookout, but maybe we will one day.

Chough-wise, happily, the young of our local pair are just about ready to leave the nest as I write this on June 1st.

This year the relatively inexperienced young male has been more boisterous in his efforts to defend the nest from predators, not surprisingly after the loss of last years brood. They are, after all, on a learning curve just like we are.

We enjoyed the usual run of common migrants - Swallows, Swifts, Wheatears, Grasshopper Warblers, Cuckoo - even a Red Kite, but we were surprised to see a Spotted Flycatcher on the cliff-top here, obviously just arrived and soon to feel more at home when it finds some trees. On the sea there were Whimbrel, Great Northern Divers, auks (including Puffins) skuas and terns, and more unusually a local birdwatcher saw a male Scaup fly over.

Porpoises, as usual, have been around in small numbers, usually located by looking beneath circling gannets. Grey Seal numbers on the haul-out have been low with a maximum count of seven. No more Basking Sharks were reported off the lookout this month since the one we saw in April, but there was one in Porthcurno Bay recently.

A Holly Blue butterfly on the cliff-top on 5th May was unusual, it being a butterfly of woodland edge and large gardens, but the strong easterly winds were probably responsible as there is a small population in the valley below where Holly and Ivy provide food sources for alternate generations of caterpillars. On the same note, a hairy caterpillar was observed on the north balcony – no doubt seeking an overall view of the local vegetation in order to locate a patch of its specific food-plant.

A Stoat was observed on the cliff being mobbed by the local Jackdaws on 5th May.

Jean Lawman