Gwennap Head NCI - Wildlife Report June 2016

There were four reports of dolphins from the lookout this month. On 9/6, a group of 8 Bottlenose Dolphins travelled westwards, tying up nicely with reports of this same group being seen earlier in the day in Mounts Bay. On 18/6, at least 4 Risso's Dolphins passed slowly and discreetly behind the Runnelstone going west. They are the same size as Bottlenose Dolphins, but more robust looking. Very infrequently, a very tall grey and slightly re-curved dorsal fin cut the smooth surface of an exceptionally calm sea. They were spread out as is typical of the species and nobody on the passing Scillonian appeared to notice them. They had pale grey or white bodies and a blunt head shape, although only the fins were visible most of the time. The pale colour is the result of scarring on the bodies of adults caused by fighting, though you could hardly imagine it watching them going along so quietly and peacefully. Females are darker and often have juveniles with them. My feeling is that this was a group of males.

Better than that, on 27/6, a group of 5 Risso's appeared right underneath the cliff. Incredibly, we first saw two white sun-reflecting, torpedo-shaped bodies gliding along underwater and were unsure what they were. Then, gradually, five fins appeared and what a fabulous sight they were. It was probably the same group with one missed on the previous sighting. Two were white with grey dorsal fins, one rather tattered. We watched them for nearly two hours just offshore - brilliant! Two days later, on 30/7, we located 10-15 Common Dolphins about 3miles offshore.

Locally, there were reports of Basking Sharks, but they were round the corner from here, off Porthcurno and in Mounts Bay.

The Dalmation Pelican stayed in the area for a while. On 8/6 it flew over Gwennap Head and proceeded to fly in a semi-circle round Mounts Bay. I thought it was possibly leaving, but it evidently returned for a while longer before heading off for the Fal estuary - not far as the pelican flies. It has to be the most extraordinary and exotic bird to be seen here for a long time.

The foggy episodes we experienced caused many racing pigeons to get lost and small flocks were seen balling up like starlings. One pigeon grounded itself here and was served best quality wholemeal bread and fresh water, and - dare I say it - a chocolate biscuit, but it was not interested, so it was taken home by a watch-keeper, successfully fed birdseed and more water - a bit more like it. Then It flew away and lived happily ever after.

Swifts were seen coming in off the sea frequently; they seem to skirt the edged of fog banks, and a gathering of 30 was observed off Land's End on 8/6. The Choughs have been successful and raised four chicks. We saw the family of 6 here on 21/6 and on 27/6. With 12 nests altogether in Cornwall this year and 18 chicks already fledged (with 2 more nests to go), we are hoping the population will now show a steady increase.

Most noticeable on the sea were large rafts of Manx Shearwaters, often building up during the day; this happens every year now, but it did not in the past. Something has changed. There is evidently plenty of food in the way of small fish (sprats etc) out there. The gatherings look spectacular when they take flight. On 30/6, we saw our first Sooty Shearwater of the year. Great Northern Divers in summer plumage (too late to breed up north now) and flocks of Common Scoter were also reported.

9 Mediterranean Gulls flew past on 24/6, adults and juveniles, followed by a Curlew, indicating that some birds are beginning to move around and disperse after breeding.

Painted Lady butterflies continued to arrive, and on 7/6, we witnessed some of the Diamondback moth invasion which made the news when trillions arrived on the British coast. They are not conspicuous, being thin and only 5-10mm long. You had to wade through the grass and put them to flight to see them at all. They are significant because they are pests on plants of the cabbage family, Cornish cauliflowers beware!

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