

Isles of Scilly

Saturday 29 September – Saturday 6 October 2007

Leaders:

Will Wagstaff

Neil Arnold

INTRODUCTION

To visit the Isles of Scilly is always a delight but in perfect autumn weather (except for one day) it becomes a splendid experience. The highlights of the week involved birds of prey and seabirds, the latter being a surprise this late in the season. Other thrills included the sighting of Redstart, Gold and Firecrest, Spotted, Pied and Red-breasted Flycatchers in one small patch of woodland on St Agnes. In theory the rarest bird(s) of the week should have had our pulses racing but rare pipits are something of an acquired taste. The shrew and a variety of insects also gave variety to the holiday.

My thanks go to all of you for being such good company, to Will for his expert guidance, to our friends at Anjeric, to the fine body of boatmen and to Bryan and his staff at the Pilot Gig.

PROGRAMME

Saturday 29 September

Delays at the Heliport actually gave three members the chance to go on an early flight. They were comfortably settled by the time the rest of us arrived, only a little later than scheduled. After an excellent meal at Anjeric Guest House we attended Will's Isles of Scilly slideshow giving us a first class introduction to what lay ahead.

Sunday 30 September

An early bird watch on the Town Beach gave an introduction to some of the local species including Raven and Rock Pipit. It was also pleasing to note Sandwich, Common and Arctic tern. The weather forecast was not promising so we opted to spend the day on St Mary's. On checking some of the beaches we discovered a range of gulls and waders. As we moved on through the Rocky Hill area it started to rain – fortunately a well situated coffee shop enabled us to dodge the worst of the weather. At Holy Vale we found a good place for our picnic lunch, well attended by Song Thrushes, Chiff-chaff and Goldcrests, but the highlight was a Lesser White-toothed Shrew, a mammal confined to the Isles of Scilly within Britain. At Carn Friars we saw our first rarity, a Buff Bellied Pipit; a vagrant from North America, the tenth record for Great Britain. At Higher Moors we were able to watch Snipe and Jack Snipe. We settled for some sea-watching near the Airport but the weather turned wet and we made our way back to the Guest House.

Monday 1 October

A pre-breakfast walk to Porthcressa did not produce many birds but we enjoyed watching a Grey Seal investigate one of our number who braved an early swim. The weather forecast was favourable so we headed for Tresco, walking through the new developments to the Great Pool. A roadside scan showed several species of duck as well as Little Grebe and, in the adjoining fields, pheasants. Getting closer revealed waders on the waters edge with the highlights being Pectoral Sandpiper and Ruff. At the far end of the Pool we could hear Water Rail and had views of Sedge Warbler. A walk through the wood

pile honed our expertise in spotting Stonechats and Pipits. Lunch was taken on a beach where we watched various waders and two Mediterranean Gulls. Will then detected the call of a Buff Bellied Pipit as it flew over our heads. We walked along the beach hoping for better views of this bird but were distracted by a small flock of Sanderling. Even though we had poor views of the pipit we had seen the eleventh record for Britain, having established that the St Mary's bird was still in situ. On reaching the Abbey Gardens, half of the group opted to look round them while the rest went to look for woodland birds – without much success. After a welcome cup of tea (with cake!) in the Café we returned to the alternative Ferry landing at Carn Near.

Tuesday 2 October

An early walk to the 'Dump Clump' proved relatively successful. Our ferry ride took us to St Agnes and en route we marvelled at the vast flock of Shags. Building work on the Quay meant a pontoon landing but we were soon enjoying this lovely Island. The sunshine had brought out a range of butterflies and dragonflies. Will then used his bat detector to try to track down some Short-winged Conehead Crickets. Lots of waders were visible and a Curlew Sandpiper gave very good views enabling us to compare it with other species. Turning inland to Higher Town we began to see more small birds, Gold and Firecrests came first, then, at the Parsonage, we saw three species of Flycatchers with Red-breasted Flycatcher giving particularly good views. We walked across Wingletang to Horse Point and enjoyed our lunch while watching Harbour Porpoises and Manx Shearwaters. Our return to the Quay just happened to pass a Tea Shop.

Back on St Mary's we enjoyed more good food, this time at the Pilot Gig Restaurant.

Wednesday 3 October

Our ferry ride to St Martin's took us 'round The World' as the vessel of that name lay at anchor in the Bay. We landed at New Quay and, after admiring the amaryllis fields and a rather elusive Redwing, headed out onto Chapel Down. Will explained the relatively rare habitat of marine waded heath. Lunch was taken near the Celtic Idol and again we watched Harbour Porpoises and Gannets fishing. We also had a distant view of a Great Skua. Glorious weather helped us to enjoy our walk past the Day Mark and various coves (and a tea shop) on our way to The Plains where we enjoyed good views of Merlin before heading back via the Hotel Quay.

In the evening we attended the nightly 'log' where Will collates the wildlife records of the day.

Thursday 4 October

Again the weather was favourable and we set off on our 'Seabird Special' boat trip with high expectations. There were, however, a number of herons occupying most rocky view points and as a result small waders were hard to find. As we reached Round Island, Will spotted a lot of activity further out and as it was a calm day the Boatman happily took us some three miles further out to sea. At one point a pod of Dolphins raced to join us and play in our bow wave and wake. Among the many Gannets were Manx and Sooty Shearwaters, Great and Arctic Skuas. As we turned back to the Islands, a Grey Phalarope was sighted. The whole experience had to be one of the highlights of the week. After lunch we walked around Tresco and had the good luck to spot a Richard's Pipit. A Great Green Bush Cricket stranded in the middle of the road gave excellent views and it was interesting to hear the varied reactions of a passing group of children. Returning to the Great Pool we visited the hide where Jenny was first to see a Water Rail preening by the edge of the reeds. A Marsh Harrier provided the next excitement before we made our way back to the ferry.

The Pilot Gig was again the venue for our evening meal and we were joined by Will and his wife.

Friday 5 October

This morning's ferry ride took us to Bryher and another 'bouncy castle' landing on a pontoon. As we walked the coast path a pair of skylarks flew over – our hundredth species of the trip. A search for Prickly Stick Insect was unsuccessful but Will's bat detector enabled him to home in on a Grey Bush Cricket. We enjoyed good views of a Lesser Whitethroat and Bar-tailed Godwit were identified among other waders offshore. Lunch was enlivened by watching helicopter deliveries to Bishop's Rock Lighthouse but then Will received news of interesting birds on Tresco. As we headed for the early afternoon ferry and plan B we checked again for the Prickly Stick Insect – this time with success. Once on Tresco, we walked out onto the heath where a group of birders came into view. We homed in on them and soon enjoyed good views of a Golden Plover, joined after a few minutes by a Dotterel. Our final species of the trip was a Buzzard, circling as we waited at the quay for our boat back to St Mary's. Our crossing was accompanied, as had often been the case, by Sally, the dog who hitches rides on the boats.

Saturday 6 October

There were no weather problems so we were able to depart on time for the mainland and our various ways home.

CHECKLIST

KEY

- () Peak count
 [] Total count
 { } No. of breeding pairs at last survey

BIRDS

Little Grebe	Two Tresco
Northern Fulmar	One on seabird trip
Sooty Shearwater	Two on the water, then in flight on the seabird trip
Manx Shearwater	Three off St Agnes. One on the seabird trip
Northern Gannet	Noted daily. Seabird trip (80)
Great Cormorant	Small numbers daily
European Shag	Numerous. (Estimated 600-100)
Grey Heron	Noted daily. Seabird trip (13)
Little Egret	At least twenty two
Mute Swan	At least ten Tresco
Canada Goose	Four Tresco
Eurasian Wigeon	One Tresco
Gadwall	At least fifty Tresco
Common Teal	At least thirty Tresco
Mallard	At least one hundred and ten Tresco, four St Agnes
Tufted Duck	One Tresco
Osprey	Two sightings of a lone bird, Bryher 1 st and Tresco 4 th . The first record for the TN in the Isles
Western Marsh Harrier	A sub-adult Tresco
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	Eight records
Common Buzzard	One Tresco
Common Kestrel	Fifteen records
Merlin	Two. One St Mary's, one St Martins
Peregrine Falcon	Noted on five days. One male, one female.
Red-legged Partridge	Released. Several Tresco
Common Pheasant	Several Tresco
Golden Pheasant	Released. Female Tresco
Water Rail	One heard and one seen Tresco
Common Moorhen	Noted St Mary's and Tresco (12)
Eurasian Coot	Tresco only (35)
Eurasian Oystercatcher	Widespread. Bryher (123)

Golden Plover	One Tresco
Ringed Plover	Widespread. Seabird trip (45)
Dotterel	One immature Tresco 6th
Bar-tailed Godwit	Small flocks. Seabird trip (16)
Whimbrel	One St Agnes
Curlew	Widespread. Seabird trip (127)
Common Redshank	Small flocks. St Mary's (10)
Common Greenshank	Mainly Tresco. (30)
Ruddy Turnstone	Widespread. St Agnes(57)
Grey Phalarope	One on the seabird trip 4th
Common Snipe	St Mary's and Tresco (3)
Jack Snipe	One St Mary's and one Tresco
Sanderling	Small flocks of up to five birds
Pectoral Sandpiper	A scarce visitor from North America. One 1 st and 5 th Tresco
Dunlin	Scattered records [25]
Curlew Sandpiper	Two St Agnes 2nd
Ruff	Two Tresco
Great Skua	Two off St Martins and three seabird trip
Arctic Skua	One seabird trip
Herring Gull	Common
Lesser Black-backed Gulls	Scattered records. Seabird trip (7)
Great Black-backed Gull	Common
Mediterranean Gull	A first winter bird and a second winter bird Tresco and an adult on the seabird trip
Black-headed Gull	Small flocks (60)
Kittiwake	One off St Agnes and seabird trip (9)
Sandwich Tern	Noted daily (12)
Common Tern	Up to three on most days
Arctic Tern	Up to four. The first records for TN in the Isles
Common Guillemot	One on the seabird trip was unexpected
Rock Dove (Feral Pigeon)	Common
Stock Dove	{less than 10} One St Mary's and one Bryher
Wood Pigeon	{100-150} Common
Collared Dove	{60} Common near settlements
Kingfisher	Two sightings St Mary's and heard St Agnes
Sky Lark	Two Bryher
Sand Martin	Four St Mary's 30th
Barn Swallow	{50-100} Numerous on 30 th (100) declining in numbers thereafter
House Martin	{18} A similar pattern to swallow
White Wagtail	More numerous at the beginning of the week (10)
Pied Wagtail	One 1 st St Agnes
Grey Wagtail	Noted daily except 30 th (2)
Richard's Pipit	A scarce migrant, one Tresco 4th
Meadow Pipit	{2} Widespread. Tresco/Bryher (50)
Rock Pipit	{350-380} Common, noted daily
Buff-bellied (American) Pipit	A very rare visitor from North America. One seen well St Mary's (the tenth British record) and a 'flyover' Tresco 1 st (the eleventh British record)
Winter Wren	{1650-3300} Widespread and numerous
Hedge Accentor (Dunnock)	{450-750} Common
Blackbird	{600-1000} Widespread and numerous
Redwing	One, an early arrival, St Martin 3rd
Song Thrush	{520-1050} Common, probably more so than anywhere in Britain
Robin	{250-300} Common resident and migrant
Common Redstart	One St Agnes 2nd
Whinchat	One St Agnes 2 nd and two Tresco 4th
Common Stonechat	{60} Widespread (8)
Northern Wheatear	A common migrant (16)
Sedge Warbler	{10} One Tresco 1st
Willow Warbler	{10-20} One St Agnes 2nd
Common Chiffchaff	{10-30} Widespread (6)

Blackcap	{3-10} A male St Mary's 30th
Lesser Whitethroat	A scarce migrant. One Bryher 5th
Firecrest	One St Agnes 2nd
Goldcrest	{20} Widespread (4)
Spotted Flycatcher	One St Agnes 2nd
Pied Flycatcher	One St Agnes 2nd
Red-breasted Flycatcher	One, a delight, St Agnes 2nd
Great Tit	{100} Widespread
Blue Tit	{50} Widespread
Carrion Crow	{10-15} Widespread. Tresco (27)
Common Raven	Four sightings (2)
Common Starling	{250-500} Common
Lapland Bunting	A 'flyover' St Agnes 2nd
Common Chaffinch	{40-60} Widespread
European Greenfinch	{100-150} Widespread
European Goldfinch	Small flocks (16)
Lesser Redpoll	One Tresco 1 st
Common Linnet	Large Flocks (60)
House Sparrow	{300-600} Widespread

MAMMALS

Lesser White-toothed Shrew	One St Mary's
Grey Seal	Widespread
Common Dolphins	A pod of some thirty, three miles north of Round Island, 4th
Harbour Porpoise	Pods on three days St Agnes 7 and 4, St Martin's 10, Seabird trip 2
Brown Rat	Especially common Tresco
European Rabbit	Widespread

Also noted were:--

BUTTERFLIES

Large White
Small White
Clouded Yellow
Small Copper
Common Blue
Peacock
Red Admiral
Small Tortoiseshell
Speckled Wood

MOTHS

Six-spot Burnet
Silver Y
Broom Moth Caterpillar

DRAGONFLIES

Migrant Hawker
Common Darter

OTHER INSECTS

Great Green Bush Cricket

Grey Bush Cricket
Short-winged Cone-head
Field Grasshopper
Prickly Stick Insect
Devil's Coach Horse

OTHER TAXA

Mullet
Leopard Slug

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