

Isles of Scilly

27 September – 4 October 2008

Trip Report

Leaders:

Will Wagstaff
Phil Read

DAILY DIARY

Saturday 27 September

There were no weather hold ups so we all arrived in good on the Isles of Scilly. As is customary the first evening was spent at Will's Isles of Scilly slideshow. This gives an excellent introduction to the wildlife of the islands.

Sunday 28 September: St Mary's and boat trip.

A calm and sunny morning enabled us to enjoy a stroll around the shores and nature trails adjacent to Hugh Town. An interesting selection of waders at Porth Loo included three Curlew Sandpipers and the rarity highlight of the week, an American Hudsonian Whimbrel.

The Lower Moors nature trail held a scattering of passerine migrants including a perched Tree Pipit.

We spent the afternoon on the "Seabird Special" boat trip cruising along the shores of Samson and Tresco and passing close to offshore rocks, the roosting spots for many waders. The highlight of the trip was an elegant Spoonbill looking rather out of place amongst Curlew and Oystercatchers on a low lying rock. Waders included over a hundred Curlew, three Whimbrel and two Bar Tailed Godwit.

Monday 29 September: Tresco.

Another fine day, weather wise, so we ventured to the island of Tresco. From the boat on the way there we saw over twenty Little Egret and had rather distant views of the Spoonbill.

We started by searching the beaches and shorelines and saw a variety of waders and one Mediterranean Gull. The Great Pool was rather quiet but the flock of Greenshank, fourty three on this occasion, that gather here are always a fine sight.

In the afternoon most of the group visited the world famous subtropical gardens. The rest of us wandered around the east side of the island. A few migrants were found including a Pied Flycatcher that gave excellent views and a Yellow Browed Warbler that was far more elusive.

Tuesday 30 September: St Agnes.

Fresh westerly winds made birdwatching a frustrating business as we explored the delightful island of St Agnes. Waders on the rocky shores included Sanderling and Dunlin and amongst the scattering of passerines we managed to find both Pied and Spotted Flycatcher.

Even without large numbers of birds St Agnes is a lovely island with a variety of dramatic and wild landscapes and is always a fascinating place to visit.

Wednesday 1 October: St Mary's.

The strong westerly winds again made bird finding a frustrating affair as we explored a variety of habitat and nature trails on St Mary's. One of the highlights was a fine Snow Bunting alongside the coastal path near the airfield. A short break "fin spotting" was rewarded with the site of around ten Harbour Porpoises offshore. Two Jack Snipe were watched feeding at Porthellick at what is, without doubt, one of the best places in Britain to see this species.

Thursday 2 October: St Martin's.

The wind was still rather stronger than we would have wished as we visited the island of St Martin's. Although one of the biggest of the Scilly group it is also one of the remotest and least developed with some stunning coastal views and sweeping beaches. The sheltered trees alongside the cricket pitch held a few passerines including Spotted Flycatcher and Blackcap. The water is very shallow along the west coast of St Martin's and a flock of fifty Sanderling were feeding on the exposed mud.

A rest break at one of the highest points of the island gave us an opportunity for a short seawatch and we were rewarded with a small pod of Harbour Porpoise offshore.

Friday 3 October: Tresco.

With the wind failing to abate we decided to return to Tresco and explore parts of the island we hadn't previously visited. A Hooded Crow appeared to be a different bird than the resident single bird. A scattering of warblers in trees alongside the Great Pool included a Willow Warbler and a very elusive Yellow Browed Warbler.

A Red Throated Diver was alongside the quay when we returned on the boat but unfortunately didn't stay long enough for everyone in the group see it.

One member of the party who had stayed on St Mary's for the day had been fortunate in seeing a Dotterel, accompanied by a Golden Plover, on St Mary's airfield. A few of us managed very distant views of this bird from the Peninnis headland in the late afternoon.

Saturday 4 October

Fortunately the weather didn't prevent us leaving in good time from the islands.

BIRDS

Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>	Introduced birds seen on Tresco.
Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	Common on Tresco.
Golden Pheasant	<i>Chrysolophus pictus</i>	Introduced birds seen on Tresco.
Canada Goose	<i>Branta Canadensis</i>	Four on tresco.
Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	Seen on Tresco and one at Porthellick Pool.
Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>	Seen on Tresco.
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	Common on the Great Pool, Tresco. Scattered records elsewhere.
Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>	Three on Tresco on 3 rd .
Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	Seen on Tresco.

Red-throated Diver	<i>Gavia stellata</i>	One close inshore, although rather briefly, alongside the quay on 3 rd . (This is a new species for <i>The Travelling Naturalist on Scilly</i> .)
Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>	An immature bird looked rather incongruous perched on a rocky island during our Seabird Safari on 28 th .
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	Seen daily. A relatively common bird around the islands.
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	Around 20 to 25 birds seen on and around Tresco.
Northern Gannet	<i>Sula bassana</i>	Seen offshore daily.
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	Seen daily in small numbers.
European Shag	<i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i>	Very common, large feeding flocks seen.
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	Seen most days but only single sightings.
Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	Single sightings on two days.
European Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	Only sighting was of a female on 28 th .
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	The one, and only!, Buzzard was seen in its usual haunt on Tresco on 3 rd .
Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>	Heard most days with occasional sightings.
Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	Seen in suitable habitat around the islands.
Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	Common on the Great Pool.
Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	Common and widespread around the coasts.
Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>	A flock of seven were on St Martin's on 2 nd , and one on St Mary's airport on 3 rd .
Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	Seen daily in small numbers.
Eurasian Dotterel	<i>Eudromias morinellus</i>	A single bird on the airport on 3 rd was seen well by one member of the group and very distantly by a few others.
Jack Snipe	<i>Lymnocyptes minimus</i>	Two were seen at Porthellick Pool on 1 st .
Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	Five at Porthellick Pool on 1 st was the highest count.
Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>	Two were seen during the Seabird Special boat trip.
Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>	Three were seen during the Seabird Special boat trip and one on Old Town beach.
Hudsonian Whimbrel		By far the rarest bird of the week. Fortunately this extremely rare transatlantic vagrant stayed on the islands long enough for us to see it on the morning of 28 th (the last day of its stay). This was only the sixth sitting in Britain of this distinctive (in flight, anyway!) North American form of Whimbrel which is soon expected to be recognised as a full species. (<i>Obviously, this would be</i>

		<i>a new species for The Travelling Naturalist on Scilly.)</i>
Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	We counted over a hundred during the boat trip on 28 th .
Common Redshank	<i>Tringa tetanus</i>	The highest count was sixteen on the edge of the Great Pool on 29 th .
Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	A flock of forty three were on the edge of the Great pool on 29 th .
Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>	Seen daily.
Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>	Around fifty were seen, rather distantly, on St Martin's Flats.
Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>	Three were on the shoreline at Porth Loo on 28 th .
Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	Seen in small numbers on four days.
Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>	The only sighting was of one seen from the boat on 28 th .
Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	Very common.
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	Seen daily.
Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>	Seen daily.
Black-headed Gull	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>	Seen daily.
Mediterranean Gull	<i>Larus melanocephalus</i>	The only sighting was of a bird in first winter plumage on Tresco on 29 th .
Kittiwake	<i>Risa tridactyla</i>	Four were seen off St Martin's on 2 nd .
Sandwich Tern	<i>Sterna sandvicensis</i>	Around twenty birds were present, mainly between St Mary's and Tresco at the beginning of the week.
Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	The only sighting was one near St Agnes on 30 th .
Razorbill	<i>Alca torda</i>	Two were seen off St Martin's on 2 nd .
Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>	Three on Tresco on 29 th was the only sighting.
Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	Seen daily.
Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	Seen daily.
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	One was heard, by Barbara and Bob, on Tresco on 29 th . This rather elusive vagrant to the islands was recorded prior to our visit and subsequently after we had left. <i>(This is a new species for The Travelling Naturalist on Scilly.)</i>
Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	Seen daily.
Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>	A well marked bird was seen on Tresco on 3 rd .
Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	One flew over Porth Loo on 28 th .
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	Common on St Mary's and Tresco.
Blue Tit	<i>Parus caeruleus</i>	Common on St Mary's and Tresco.
Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	Single sightings on two days.
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	Seen daily.
House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	Seen daily.
Sky Lark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	One on Tresco on 29 th was the only sighting.

Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	One on Tresco on 3 rd was the only sighting.
Common Chiff Chaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	Recorded daily in small numbers.
Yellow-browed Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus inornatus</i>	Two sightings on Tresco were both very brief and frustrating.
Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	Highest count was six on St Martin's on 2 nd .
Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapillus</i>	The only sighting was one on Tresco on 29 th .
Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>	Recorded daily.
Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	Very common and widespread.
Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	Common and widespread.
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	Very common.
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	Delightfully common and approachable.
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	Seen daily.
Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>	One was seen on Tresco, by those not in the gardens, on 29 th .
Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>	One was seen on Tresco, again by those not in the gardens, on 29 th . Two were seen on Tresco on 3 rd .
Common Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquatus</i>	Seen daily.
Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	Seen daily in small numbers.
Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>	Seen on five days but in very small numbers.
Pied Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>	Singles seen on Tresco and St Agnes.
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	Very common and widespread.
Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	Very common.
Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	Seen on Lower Moors, St Mary's on 28 th .
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba alba</i>	Seen daily in small numbers.
Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba yarrelli</i>	Single sightings on two days.
Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	Seen daily.
Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>	One gave prolonged, if rather distant views, on St Mary's on 28 th .
Rock Pipit	<i>Anthus petrosus</i>	Seen daily around the rocky coasts.
Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	Seen daily, commonest in the vicinity of tearooms!
Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>	Seen most days.
Siskin	<i>Carduelis spinus</i>	Four on St Martins on 2 nd and four on Tresco on 3 rd . (<i>This is a new species for The Travelling Naturalist on Scilly</i>).
Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	Seen daily.
Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>	Seen daily.
Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	One seen by the Great Pool on 3 rd . (<i>This is a new species for The Travelling Naturalist on Scilly</i>).
Lapland Bunting	<i>Calcarius lapponicus</i>	Frustratingly one was only seen in flight on St Mary's on 1 st .
Snow Bunting	<i>Plectrophenax nivalis</i>	One showed well on St Mary's on 1 st .

MAMMALS

Grey Seal
Harbour Porpoise

Halichoerus grypus
Phocoena phocoena

Small pods seen on three occasions. Highest count was ten off Giant's Castle, St Mary's on 1st.

Brown Rat
European Rabbit

Rattus norvegicus
Oryctolagus cuniculus

BUTTERFLIES

Large White
Small White
Green-veined White
Clouded Yellow
Small Copper
Peacock
Red Admiral
Small Tortoiseshell
Speckled Wood
Comma

Pieris brassicae
Artogeia rapae
Artogeia napi
Colias croceus
Lycaena phlaeas
Inachis io
Vanessa atalanta
Aglais urticae
Pararage aegeria
Polygonia c-album

DRAGONFLIES

Migrant Hawker
Common Blue-tail

Aeshna mixta
Ischnura elegans

OTHER INSECTS

Field Grasshopper
Great Green Bush Cricket
Short Winged Conehead
Prickly Stick Insect
Devil's Coach Horse

Chorthippus brunneus
Tettigonia viridissima
Conocephalus dorsalis
Acanthoxyla geisovii
Staphylinus olens

As always I am indebted to Will for sharing his enthusiasm and knowledge of the islands with us.

Although the persistent wind made birdwatching frustrating at times, I hope everyone enjoyed a taste of these magical islands.