

# THE TRAVELLING NATURALIST

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## Tour Report

UK – Wild Pembrokeshire

18 - 22 July 2022

Red deer



Atlantic puffin



Grey seal



Small skipper



Compiled by Barry Embling

## Day 1: Arrive St David's Cross Hotel Dowrog Common

Monday 18 July 2022

*Weather: Sunny 31°C*

Despite the hot weather, we braved the heat and went to Dowrog Common close to St David's, with our first stop being the linear pond opposite the Bug Farm at Waun Fawr. A slight breeze eased the hot conditions as we proceeded onto the common, mostly observing plants and invertebrates. Our main area of interest here was the Dragonflies and Damselflies, and we were not disappointed as they were very active on this very hot day. We saw Emperor dragonflies, Common Darter and a Four-spotted chaser. The real gem was the Small-red damselfly, a rare species, but abundant here and present on almost all vegetation, with many mating. This Mediterranean species is right on the edge of its range here in Pembrokeshire, requiring special ecological conditions, namely high winter water temperatures for the nymphs to survive. Our next stop was the other side of the common and, of course a much-needed cuppa. Another exploration brought sightings of Heath spotted orchid and Bog asphodel, both delightful in their wet grassland habitat. A passing flock of tits added Great, Blue and Long-tailed tits (the latter not really a tit at all, of course) to our list, thus all adding up to our visit being quite productive, given the extreme conditions, a day that ended up being the hottest day in Wales since records began.

## Day 2: Skomer Island

Tuesday 19 July 2022

*Weather: Overcast, showers and then hot sun 26 °C*

The fortunate sighting of a cuckoo whilst walking down to the boat at Martin's Haven was a great start. Our 10:00 boat departure left on time, and after we crossed Jack Sound, we entered North Haven, where our boat was surrounded by puffins on the sea and flying all around us. Our walk up onto the plateau was, as usual, interrupted by stopping and looking at the puffins, but many more of this star bird was to come. Much of the centre of the island was now covered with bracken, obscuring the thousands of Manx shearwater nest holes, with the only evidence of these nocturnal visitors being the white stains of their droppings, and some remains of adults predated on by gulls. Sedge warblers were still singing, and meadow pipits were feeding young around us. Herring and both of the black-backed gulls and their now fledged chicks abounded, and a pair of buzzards induced mobbing behaviour in the anxious adults. From the most northerly point of the island, we looked onto the Garland Stone and saw harbour porpoises hunting with gannets at high water. The outgoing tide rushed west past the point, with many puffins floating past and in the bays; most of the razorbills and guillemots had gone. Some of our group were chuffed to see choughs that were often feeding nearby, looking champion in the camp. Moving on around, we lunched beyond The Wick, after satiating ourselves on more puffin action first. We saw a wider selection of seabirds, including kittiwakes and fulmars at The Wick. The whitened rocks, mostly from the nesting guillemots, were looking whiter than ever, as most of the birds had vacated the cliffs and gone to sea. We completed our navigation of the island via the impressive Mew Stone, the most southerly point. After a calm crossing and a cup of tea, we headed to the local village of Dale and the Pickeridge Lagoon and Gann Estuary. The heat of the day greeted us but was only a mild inconvenience as compared to the excessive disturbance the birds were receiving from walkers, wanderers and paddle boarders. Despite the disturbance, we saw whimbrel, curlew, ringed and grey plover, but the star was a full summer plumaged bar-tailed godwit. This concluded our most satisfying day on the Marloes Peninsula.

## Day 3: Ramsey Island

Wednesday 20 July 2022

*Weather: Cool and overcast then warm and sunny from mid-afternoon, 23°C*

A later start today due to the boats, so we had a morning of moth trapping at the St David's Cross Hotel. A great variety of common species were caught, including such beauties as plain golden Y, gold spot, pebble hook-tip and peach blossom and a couple of elephant hawkmoths. We were informed that our Ramsey Island visit was going to be first to the island itself, and then a circumnavigation of the island afterwards, as the north winds were going to make the return from Grassholm very uncomfortable. Our walk produced good

sightings of choughs and wheatears on the heavily rabbit and sheep-grazed fields. Once at Aber Mawr, we spotted one adult and one juvenile peregrine on the cliffs. As we were leaving the cliffs, we encountered two red deer, remnants from when they were once farmed here. We mostly had the RSPB reserve to ourselves, and on occasions experienced complete and refreshing silence. On the return to the farmhouse, we looked for the resident little owl and eventually saw it in a gorse bush. After a cup of tea, we returned to St Justinian's and dropped off all the other passengers, before we headed out towards the Bitches rock formation on an ebbing tide and saw feeding gannets and harbour porpoises in perfectly sunny and calm conditions. Proceeding around the island we had a good look at the Atlantic seal 'bachelor beach' where we had close views, including an animal, sadly with plastic caught below its neck. In perfect light we looked at the geology and ecological niches of the intertidal and splash zones and encountered shags, fulmars and kittiwakes, as all the auks had now departed, again, their only traces being white areas of their droppings. A diversion out to deeper water produced good views of Manx shearwater, and once we were back in the Sound of Ramsey, we took a look at one of the surviving junipers, one of just five left in the county. A later finish in warm evening sun concluded a good day in much better temperatures as we returned to St David's.

#### **Day 4: Stackpole Estate**

**Thursday 21 July 2022**

*Weather: Mostly sunny 22°C*

We moved to the south of the county today, and the Bosherton area, visiting the National Trust's Stackpole Estate. Arriving at the woodland car park, we today could walk to the Castlemartin military ranges and St Govan's Chapel, which is not always possible on a weekday. We started at the top-most pond and had great views of a grey heron and heard a kingfisher, but never saw it. Further down the ponds, we heard a reed warbler in song very briefly. Just short of the seven-arched bridge, we were alerted to otters by a couple sitting on a bench and bingo, we saw one disappear into the emergent vegetation right by us! Waiting on the bridge itself, we had further views of now two otters - quite extraordinary, and unforgettable. We carried on past the lakes and to the dunes at the back of Broad Haven, identifying various plants, including sea holly and burnet rose. A quick stop and we walked along the cliff tops to St Govan's chapel area and had lunch. After a visit to the hidden cliffside chapel, and an ice cream, we took in the beautiful clifftop rock sea lavender which was at its flowering peak. Not walking to the St Govan's Head itself, we instead opted for a chance to have a paddle at Broad Haven Beach. All was quiet at sea, with only the odd passing gull, but the scenery was spectacular and we had distant views of Lundy. On our walk back we unsurprisingly didn't see the otters again but did get a good pace going, as we were all gasping for a cup of tea. A most eventful day was however not over for some, as we drove to Fishguard and enjoyed a production by the National Theatre at the cinema - and what better way to end this simply wonderful day? ...a curry of course!

#### **Day 5: Llanglofan Fen & Dowrog Common**

**Friday 22 July 2022**

*Weather: Sunny 23°C*

Our last morning together was spent on this site of special scientific interest. Mostly surrounded by fields or intensively managed grassland, though to the east is continuous fen and eventually with the Cleddau Estuary. Amongst the species present, we saw marsh cinquefoil, yellow flag, tall fen meadows dominated by meadowsweet and areas of 1-2 metre high tussocks of greater tussock-sedge, the latter perhaps the penultimate star of the show, as we finally saw a large patch of the rare pillwort, a most un-fern like fern! Interestingly, the site once drained west into the sea, but was modified by glacial meltwater and ultimately blocked by glacial deposits thereby reversing the flow and flowing east and inland as it still does. After seeing some breeding warblers again, passing rooks, and a curious flock of jackdaws mobbing a buzzard, we headed for Dowrog Common, where we had a final cup of tea before returning to St David's for a noon finish. Thus concluded our busy tour, with its heatwave, amazing island days, and otters; with some good laughs along the way.

# Checklist

	Common Name	Scientific Name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
	<b>BIRDS</b>	<b>AVES</b>					
1	Canada goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>		✓			
2	Mute swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>				✓	
3	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>				✓	
4	Grey heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>				✓	✓
5	Little egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>		✓			
6	Northern gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>		✓	✓		
7	Great cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>		✓			
8	European shag	<i>Gulosus aristotelis</i>		✓	✓		
9	Common buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
10	Red kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	✓				
11	Common moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>				✓	
12	Eurasian oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>		✓	✓	✓	
13	Ringed plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>		✓			
14	Grey plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>		✓			
15	Eurasian curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>		✓			

16	Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>		✓			
17	Bar-tailed godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>		✓			
18	Black-legged kittiwake	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>		✓	✓		
19	Black-headed gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>		✓			
20	Mediterranean gull	<i>Ichthyaetus melanocephalus</i>		✓			
21	Great black-backed gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>		✓	✓	✓	
22	European herring gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
23	Lesser black-backed gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	✓	✓	✓		
24	Common guillemot	<i>Uria aalge</i>		✓	✓		
25	Razorbill	<i>Alca torda</i>		✓	✓		
26	Atlantic puffin	<i>Fratercula arctica</i>		✓			
27	Northern fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>		✓	✓	✓	
28	Manx shearwater	<i>Puffinus puffinus</i>			✓		
29	Rock dove	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
30	Common wood pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
31	Eurasian collared dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	H	✓	✓	✓	H
32	Little owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>			✓		
33	Common swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	✓			✓	
34	Great spotted woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>				H	
35	Common kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>		✓	✓	✓	

36	Peregrine falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>			✓		
37	Eurasian magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
38	Western jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
39	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>					✓
40	Carrion crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
41	Northern raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>			✓		✓
42	Blue tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	✓				✓
43	Great tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓				
44	Eurasian skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>		✓			
45	Barn swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
46	Common house martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>			✓		
47	Long-tailed tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	✓				
48	Willow warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>				✓	✓
49	Common chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>				✓	✓
50	Sedge warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>	H	✓			✓
51	Common grasshopper warbler	<i>Locustella naevia</i>	H				
52	Eurasian blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	✓				
53	Common whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
54	Eurasian wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
55	Common starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>		✓			

56	Common blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
57	Song thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>				✓	
58	European stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>		✓	✓	✓	
59	Northern wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>		✓	✓		
60	House sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
61	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>					H
62	Pied wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba Ssp yarellii</i>		✓	✓	✓	
63	Meadow pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
64	European rock pipit	<i>Anthus petrosus</i>		✓	✓	✓	
65	Common chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>				✓	
66	Common linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
67	European goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
68	Common reed bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	✓	✓			✓
	<b>MAMMALS</b>	<b>MAMMALIA</b>					
1	Harbour porpoise	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i>				✓	
2	Atlantic grey seal	<i>Halichoerus grypus</i>		✓	✓		
3	Red deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>				✓	
4	Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>		✓	✓		
	<b>AMPHIBIANS</b>	<b>AMPHIBIA</b>					
1	Common frog	<i>Rana temporaria</i>				✓	