

THE TRAVELLING NATURALIST

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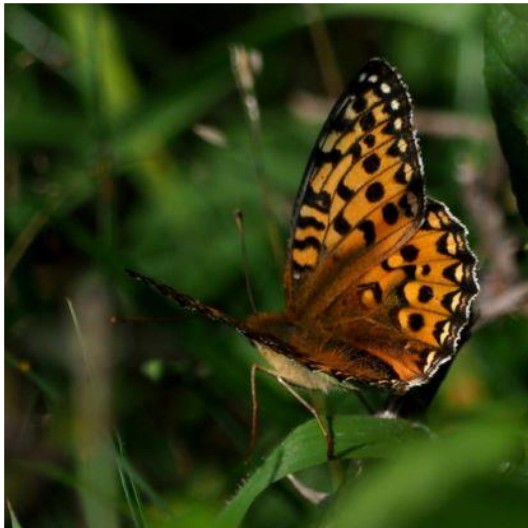


Tour Report

UK – Wild Pembrokeshire

19-23 July 2021

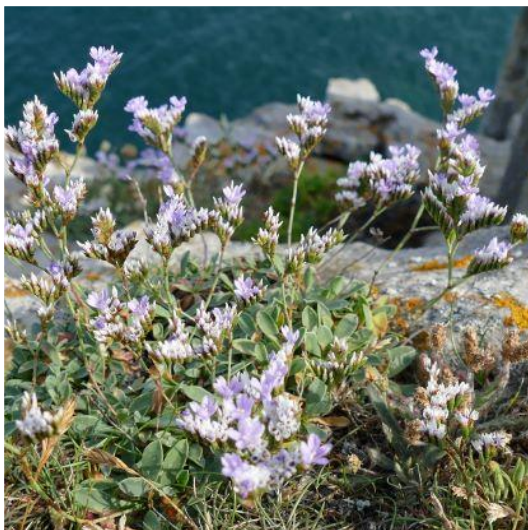
Dark green fritillary



Gannet colony



Rock sea lavender



Puffin and herring gull



Compiled by Barry Embling

Day 1: Monday 19 July 2021

Weather: sunny 27°C

After meeting in the lounge, we braved the heat on Rowrog Common and managed to park in some shade and have some coffee. A golden-ringed dragonfly alighted right by us and gave good photographic opportunities. A walk through some of the heath-fen revealed some lesser-known plants such as marsh cinquefoil, marsh St John's wort, late Southern marsh orchids and the three commoner heather species. Sedge warbler and blackcap were heard and a distant kestrel was seen. Beaten back by the heat we retired to our hotel for a pre-dinner break to refresh. After dinner we attempted to walk out to St David's Point, but due to lack of time we didn't get out all the way, however we saw flotillas and hundreds of passing Manx shearwaters over a still and glassy sea on a warm evening, in a scene more reminiscent of the Aegean.

Day 2: Tuesday 20 July 2021

Weather: sunny 25 °C

A fine sunny start to the day with almost no breeze boded well for our day on Skomer as we made our crossing to Jack Sound from Martin's Haven to North Haven. After a briefing from the assistant warden, we were free for the next four hours to discover the island's wildlife. Puffins were everywhere in North Haven itself, preening, landing, taking off and giving good views as we climbed up the steep path to the plateau - though we'd be seeing many puffins later. Walking inland, sedge warblers and whitethroats were singing. After passing the farm we headed for the Garland Stone, and on reaching there we saw maybe 25 Common dolphins, including mothers with calves, some breaching in a completely flat blue sea – something quite wonderful for us all to see. Moving round the rest of the island we saw a curlew and a female wheatear feeding young. Many of the guillemots and razorbills had now left, though all the other seabirds were numerous, including puffins that entertained and challenged the photographers! On our return via the Lockley Shop we had a cuppa, then proceeded to The Gann estuary at high tide with its lagoons and shoreline. A walk revealed many waders: curlew, oystercatchers, common sandpiper, greenshank, redshank and dunlin all seen well, as well as a surprise sighting of a chough. We returned to St David's Cross to recharge before we had a fine evening meal and an early night.

Day 3: Wednesday 21 July 2021

Weather: sunny 26 °C

A gentle start today at the hotel moth trapping as our boat to Ramsey didn't leave until noon. Given all of the high-quality habitat around the St David's, it was not surprising that we had a good haul of species despite being in the city (village) centre. Elephant and poplar hawkmoths were appreciated by the photographers, with true-lover's knot, plain golden Y, brimstone being a few of the many species trapped, and the highlight was perhaps garden tiger. A smooth trip followed as we crossed the Ramsey Sound on a rising tide under blue skies and next to no breeze. Walking on the northern loop, we saw a distant little owl and encountered chough, with a large flock of over twenty-five individuals seen. Wheatear were feeding young, likely their second broods. Spending time admiring the views looking west into Aber Mawr was a highlight and looking into the nests of fulmars where we saw a couple of fluffy and well-grown chicks. Proceeding around the trail we managed to connect with a couple of red deer and some ponies. An interesting crossing to Grassholm followed on a beautiful warm and still evening. A group of distant circling gannets caught our attention and as we neared we encountered a pod of common dolphins, maybe twenty, perhaps the same pod we'd seen at Skomer yesterday. We proceeded to have a wonderful circumnavigation of Grassholm in incredible evening light with all the noises of a busy bird colony of 39,000 gannets with now very large fluffy chicks, and guillemots, razorbills, shags, cormorants and kittiwakes. On our return to St Justinian's, we saw a few Manx shearwaters then slowed down to view a flotilla of these impressive black and white ocean travellers, viewed in perfect evening light. We continually spotted puffins commuting between breeding and feeding grounds,

including a recently fledged juvenile – a first for all of us. Thus ended two fabulous days of experiencing three very different islands.

Day 4: Thursday 22 July 2021

Weather: sunny 30°C

A day on the mainland was always going to be hot, so we broke the planned long walk in two. We started at the north of Bosherton Lakes, walking through cool woodland and emerging at the top-most lake covered in waterlilies with moorhens and mallard with ducklings. Sticklebacks were seen well, together with various dragon and damselflies. Although the birds were quiet, we managed to see some, with goldcrests seen well feeding their young. Our next stop was St Govan's a short drive (but a long walk away), and the beautiful St Govan's chapel. Around the chapel were screaming swifts, probably with recently fledged young. An ice-cream recharged us before we wandered east along the coastal path looking at flowers and successfully photographed dark-green fritillaries. A walk out to the St Govan's point gave us fine views of a distant Caldey island in one direction and Lundy in another. Before returning to the bus, we had superb views of cliff-edge antics provided by choughs that were well photographed.

Day 5: Friday 23 July 2021

Weather: sunny 25 °C

Our day started with an early walk around St David's back lanes and the cathedral surrounds before returning to the hotel for our last breakfast together. After packing, and most of us checking out of the hotel, we headed for the nearby Corsydd Llangloffan nature reserve, a superb fen with the Western Cleddau river running through it. Whilst the birds were quiet with only brief views of whitethroat and reed bunting, we did see a good array of dragonflies and damselflies, including four-spotted chasers, emperor dragonfly and emerald damselfly, not forgetting the impressive huge examples of tussock sedge and the scarce fern, pillwort looking like grass - growing throughout the pond. Thus concluded our memorable nature tour, with a portion of the very best of Pembrokeshire's wildlife seen well in beautiful weather with some good laughs along the way.

Checklist

THE TRAVELLING
NATURALIST

	Common Name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
	BIRDS					
1	Northern fulmar		✓	✓	✓	
2	Manx shearwater	✓		✓		
3	Gannet		✓	✓	✓	
4	Cormorant		✓	✓	✓	
5	Shag		✓	✓		
6	Little egret		✓			
7	Grey heron		✓		✓	
8	Mute swan				✓	
9	Canada goose		✓			
10	Shelduck		✓			
11	Mallard				✓	
12	Red kite					✓
13	Buzzard	✓	✓		✓	
14	Sparrowhawk					
15	Kestrel	✓				
16	Peregrine	✓			✓	
17	Moorhen				✓	✓
18	Oystercatcher		✓	✓	✓	
19	Curlew		✓			
20	Herring gull	✓	✓	✓	✓	
21	Lesser black-backed gull		✓	✓	✓	
22	Great black-backed gull		✓			
23	Kittiwake		✓	✓		
24	Puffin		✓	✓		
25	Guillemot		✓	✓		
26	Razorbill		✓	✓		



27	Woodpigeon	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
28	Stock dove (heard)				✓	
29	Little owl		✓			
30	Swift			✓	✓	
31	Great-spotted woodpecker				✓	h
32	Skylark		✓			✓
33	Swallow	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
34	House martin			✓	✓	
35	Meadow pipit	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
36	Rock pipit		✓	✓		
37	Pied wagtail		✓	✓	✓	
38	Wren	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
39	Dunnock			✓	✓	✓
40	Robin			✓	✓	✓
41	Wheatear		✓	✓	✓	
42	Stonechat		✓	✓	✓	✓
43	Song thrush		✓	✓	✓	✓
44	Blackbird	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
45	Garden warbler					✓
46	Blackcap	h	✓		✓	✓
47	Whitethroat	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
48	Sedge warbler	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
49	Reed warbler		h			
50	Chiffchaff	✓				
51	Goldcrest				✓	
52	Great tit				✓	
53	Blue tit				✓	✓
54	Nuthatch				h	
55	Treecreeper				✓	
56	Magpie		✓			

57	Carrion crow	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
58	Rook	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
59	Jackdaw	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
60	Raven		✓	✓	✓	
61	Chough		✓	✓	✓	
62	Starling		✓			
63	House sparrow		✓		✓	
64	Chaffinch				✓	
65	Linnet	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
66	Goldfinch	✓	✓		✓	✓
67	Bullfinch				✓	
68	Reed bunting	✓				✓
	MAMMALS					
1	Rabbit		✓	✓		
2	Grey squirrel				✓	
3	Common dolphin		✓	✓		
4	Harbour porpoise		✓			
5	Grey seal		✓	✓		
6	Red deer			✓		
	AMPHIBIANS					
1	Common frog				✓	✓
	SOME OBSERVED PLANTS					
1	Columbine				✓	
2	Red campion	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
3	Sea campion	✓	✓	✓		
4	Scentsless mayweed		✓			
5	Hemp Agrimony				✓	✓
6	English stonecrop		✓	✓		
7	Tufted vetch			✓	✓	

8	Birds foot trefoil					
9	Great willowherb					✓
10	Hemlock water dropwort	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
11	Wild carrot	✓	✓		✓	
12	Hogweed				✓	
13	Alexanders			✓	✓	
14	Fool's watercress				✓	
15	Water forget-me-not					✓
16	Marsh woundwort					✓
17	Viper's bugloss				✓	
18	Rock sea lavender				✓	
19	Greater knapweed				✓	
20	Small scabious		✓		✓	
21	Ling	✓	✓	✓	✓	
22	Cross-leaved heath	✓				
23	Bell heather	✓	✓	✓	✓	
24	Tussock sedge					✓
25	White water lily				✓	
26	Southern marsh orchid	✓				✓
27	Lords and ladies				✓	