

HOLIDAY HIGHLIGHTS

CORNWALL

5-12 SEPTEMBER 2025

Guide: Julian Skyes

Guests: John Duerden, Yonat Michaelov, John Robinson, Vivien Emery

Day 1 Julian meets Yonat and Viv in the hotel reception area at 5pm, planning for a short walk to a nearby park. However, Yonat, who has been here since yesterday informs us that she saw a small flock of eight Pale-bellied Brent Geese in the bay towards Newlyn. Our guide at once thinks he should change his planned walk to the local park and go look for them!

The three of us walk out of the hotel, cross the road and wander slowly along the promenade where we initially see lots of Herring Gulls and a few Black-headed Gulls, plus House Sparrows, Woodpigeon, Collared Doves, Jackdaws and Carrion Crows – most of which are unusual to Yonat who resides in California.

The tide is in but starting to drop as we make our way west towards Newlyn, stopping for a very obliging Rock Pipit. Now we see our first waders and the majority are Turnstone, which show amazingly well feeding in the seaweed and pebbles – we can even hear them turning stones over! There is also a Dunlin, a few Ringed Plover, and a Knot, which is a surprise.

On we continue to this coastal village, stopping to look at a few gorgeous Northern Wheatears which are making their way along the beach. Eventually we reach the bridge over the stream where we see more Turnstones along with a family party of Grey Wagtails and another Rock Pipit. On a nearby rooftop we find a few Greater Black-backed Gulls amongst the commoner Herring Gulls, and we get good views of both Cormorant and Shag, clearly seeing the size and structure difference between them.

It is now 6:30pm and Julian has arranged to meet John D and John R in the hotel bar at 7pm, so off he goes with Viv, leaving Yonat to wander back at her leisure, which is fruitful as she adds Pied Wagtail to the days tally. We are back at the hotel in time for a quick change and freshen up before we all meet up with the two Johns. Dinner is scheduled for 19:30 but first we get a complimentary beverage in the hotel bar and an input from Julian on what we are hoping to do this week and especially tomorrow, along with our

obligatory Speyside Wildlife gifts and checklists. Once finished we take our drinks and go through into the adjacent restaurant. It is a lovely situation sat looking out over Penzance Bay as the light fades to darkness and just the twinkling of lights on the water. Once finished we soon head to our rooms for a good night's sleep, as we have an early start in the morning.

Day 2

It is the start of another bright day as we meet outside at 07:30 for a pre-breakfast walk, again along the seafront towards Newlyn. The tide is a little further out this morning, but the strong SE wind is making it a little difficult as the sea is quite rough today. We can see Gannets flying above the horizon, with some diving down into the cold, grey water in search of fish. As we walk along towards Newlyn we spot a couple of Turnstone, but the pebble beach is full of 'dog walkers' which is a little frustrating. Julian spots a Sparrowhawk flying just inland from where we are but it's quiet.

We keep going for a while longer with Yonat spotting a group of Oystercatchers on some exposed, offshore rocks, followed by John R seeing an Atlantic Grey Seal bobbing about in the water. It is now time to head back to the hotel as Julian has arranged to meet Viv in the restaurant for breakfast at 08:30. She had decided to catch up on some lost sleep, which given the circumstances was a particularly good idea. On the way back we add a couple of Mute Swans to the list on the local boating lake, before reaching our hotel. We have a few minutes to freshen up before reconvening at our table where we meet up with Viv. An hour later we leave the hotel and drive the short journey to Drift, where we stop at the reservoir car park and get ready for a walk to the hide along the western edge.

We set off and very soon we are watching our first Great Crested Grebes, Little Egret and Mallard with a Green Sandpiper being seen briefly crossing the open water. It's a fine day and we enjoy a few butterflies along the track to the hide, including Red Admiral, Peacock, Speckled Wood, and a Small Tortoiseshell. A Common Buzzard is seen over the adjacent woodland as we reach the small hide where we meet a couple more people already there. These two inform us of a Greenshank and Green Sandpiper in a nearby corner of the lake, which we got good views of. Whilst watching these we notice a smaller duck with several Mallard which we identify as a 1st winter Garganey. We continue to scan, seeing a small flock of Eurasian Teal, more Mallard, Moorhen, Cormorants and Little Grebes.

We now hear the call of "Glossy Ibis" from one of the other people and from our right we clearly see this scarce waterbird flying right past the hide, which is quickly followed by two more – what a result. We continue to sit and watch the area with Yonat spotting a dark mid-sized raptor flying over the opposite

side of the reservoir. Julian hopes it's the Black Kite that's been recently reported but alas it's a 'cream crown' Marsh Harrier – still a very good bird to see here. It is nearly midday as we decide to leave but not before another Glossy Ibis flies into view and past the hide. We now return along the track back towards the car park, with us stopping for a couple of Common Sandpipers along the edge. It has been a great start to the holiday.

Once back at the minibus we set off back towards Penzance, where we make a quick comfort stop at the hotel before setting off for Hayle. We reach the car park at Copperhouse Creek just before 1pm on this now gloriously warm day, with the tide being out and exposing plenty of mud in the channels. We grab our picnics and head to the benches overlooking this wetland area, where we initially see lots of Canada Geese, Common Redshank. Herring, Greater and Lesser Black-backed Gulls. In the near channel Julian points out a Greenshank, Dunlin and a Knot, with Viv spotting a Curlew. We are enjoying our sandwiches as a Sparrowhawk fly's over before a Black-tailed Godwit comes into view. We finish our lunches and after an hour of being there we decide to move on, with Julian knowing the tide is starting to rise.

Back in the van we go the short distance to the Asda car park which overlooks the Lelant estuary. Also here is the Carnsew Basin and we head across the road to this very productive wetland site. We walk out on this now warm afternoon seeing much the same species, but dog walkers are causing us a few problems as they allow their pets off the lead. The basin is starting to fill up and the waders are gathering, with lots of Bar-tailed Godwits, a couple of Black-tailed Godwits, Oystercatchers, Dunlin and Ringed Plovers. These birds all take to the air in a panic and Julian shouts "Peregrine!" as this large falcon flies through and then away over the buildings. We continue our circular walk seeing lots of Rock Pipits plus more Greenshanks and Redshanks in the Lelant Estuary. Eventually we get back to the min road and head back to the vehicle, where we make full use of the facilities in the superstore and our guide even treats us to an ice cream!

It is now mid-afternoon as we drive the short distance to the RSPB controlled Ryan's Field car park. We get our things and walk along the track to the main road where we look out over the Lelant Estuary which is full of water. There are lots of gulls here and wildfowl which we have seen previously, so Julian decides to head to the hide which overlooks Ryan's Field. We soon get to the hide and settle down with our 'scopes' as one of the other occupants informs us of a Spoonbill here. Sadly, it's partially obscured by some reeds, but we still get a good view of it sleeping (as always!).

We continue to look around as there's lots of waders which are most Common Redshank and Curlew but small numbers of Dunlin, Ringed Plover and Oystercatchers. With careful scanning we also find a Greenshank, Green Sandpiper and Bar-tailed Godwit, along with the two Johns, Viv and Yonat seeing a Kingfisher flash past the hide. The Spoonbill miraculously wakes up and starts to preen and feed which allows us some great looks of it in action. It is now time to leave and head back to Penzance and our hotel for a freshen up before our checklist and evening meal – it's been a cracking first full day!

Day 3

We meet for breakfast at 8am with us leaving about an hour later, today driving north away from Penzance towards Stithians Reservoir. It's a cold, wet, grey day as we pass through the 'road closed' signs and slowly make our way past the works that's going on! We first park at the causeway and look down on the muddy fringes of the reservoir, quickly finding Green Sandpiper, Dunlin and a Ruff, which is great. However not everyone in the bus can get a good view and it's now raining really hard, so we drive the short distance to the parking area. We quickly grab our scopes and cameras and walk down the track to the small hide at the end. Inside are a couple who are just leaving (thankfully) and we all get ourselves a seat looking out over the edge of the water.

We start scanning with us all contributing to the species being seen, which includes a couple more Green Sandpipers, Greenshank, a partial summer plumage Black-tailed Godwit, lots of Ringed Plover, Dunlin, Mallard and Teal. Sadly, at this time there is no sign of the reported Pectoral Sandpiper and Curlew Sandpipers. After a while we add Grey Heron, Lesser Black-backed Gull and Curlew, the local voluntary warden arrives and squeezes into one of the benches. After introductions, this man gives us his life story and what he's seen recently in a less than quiet voice! However, while this is going on, another group of waders fly in and start to feed right in front of us, which are more Dunlin, but also four Curlew Sandpipers and the (hoped-for) Pectoral Sandpiper. We get some decent views of this before it walks out of sight along a channel, but a Common Snipe is also found, which is great. We stay for a while longer listening to the warden until the rain abates and decide to leave.

We head back to the main road and head down another track to a second hide which overlooks some feeders. This adds a few more species to our list with great views of Coal, Great and Blue Tits, Chaffinch, Dunnock and Robin. A Jay flies across the gap and in the reeds beyond we see our first Moorhen

along with another Grey Heron and Mallard. We again dodge the rain showers as we make our way back to the minibus, with our guide suggesting we call for a hot drink at the north end of the reservoir.

We drive the quiet roads around the edge of this large body of water until we reach the water sports park, where we stop and make full use of the café. Drinks are purchased and we sit looking out over the water where we watch the kite-surfers doing their thing. Julian sees a couple of raptors in the distance which are the pair of Ospreys that have frequented this site for the past couple of weeks. These birds disappear towards the south with just distant binocular views obtained – maybe we will get another chance later.

Once we have finished, we go back to the minibus and drive out to the entrance where we park and grab our picnic lunches. Thankfully the rain has stopped as we eat our sandwiches whilst checking the north end of the reservoir. Julian finds a couple of Little Egrets followed by a trio of Common Sandpipers which give good views through the telescope. Once we have finished eating, we walk across the main road to check the freshwater marsh. There are plenty of Mallard loafing around here, along with a drake Eurasian Wigeon, which Yonat is thrilled about. A Kingfisher speeds across our view but doesn't stop, sadly, and Yonat finds another Common Sandpiper in one of the water channels. Julian sees one of the Ospreys over the main body of water, and we all manage to get a decent view of it hunting through the telescopes. We spend a little more time here getting another brief flight view of the Kingfisher before heading back to the minibus as it's started to rain again.

We drive back south and towards the coast where we head for the very popular Gwithian, which has lots of people out and about on this Sunday afternoon. We eventually get to the National Trust car park and luckily find a space before getting ready for a walk to Godrevy Point. The tide is out as we set off along the coastal track with lots of gannets being seen out in the bay. It's still very windy as we check the seaweed-covered rocks where we find lots of Turnstone, Oystercatchers, with a few Curlews, Ringed Plover and Dunlin.

We continue to walk to the point stopping for a family of Stonechats along the way along with a couple of Rock Pipits. We soon reach the end and disturb a Northern Wheatear from this area, but it doesn't fly far and we watch it for a while at close quarters. We now stand on the large ledge looking out over the island with its lighthouse. There are lots of Shag on the rocks along with a few Cormorants and also some Atlantic Grey Seals hauled out, which look great through the telescope. Julian is checking the sea and finds a few Kittiwakes heading south past the headland followed by several Manx Shearwaters.

Despite the high winds the grey clouds have given way to some blue sky and it's a lovely situation with the gorgeous lighthouse and atmospheric rough sea as a backdrop.

It is now late afternoon, and we set off back to the car park stopping again to check the waders on the beach and adding Sanderling to our daily tally before reaching the minibus. We set off slowly away from here and eventually get back to the main road where Julian stops again to check a nearby freshwater pool. There is an island in the middle of this pool with lots of Canada Geese, but Yonat picks out two different birds, which are Barnacle Geese and quite a surprise to our guide. On the water we see lots of Mallard and Teal but also Coot and at the very back there's a couple of Tufted Duck, but they are not easy to see from the minibus. We stay a while longer and all manage to see one before it is time to leave and head to our hotel in Penzance. We arrive in plenty of time to freshen up ahead of our daily checklist and evening meal.

Day 4

It's a fine sunny morning with a cool breeze as we go for breakfast at the usual time of 8am, with us leaving around an hour later. Julian has decided to go SW today, this time we head towards Newlyn and the hairy, winding roads, where we encounter no less than four dustbin wagons! Eventually we take the minor road to Porthgwarra, but it's not an easy drive on these narrow roads with high vegetated walls either side, which leave no room for error. However, we reach the car park at this lovely cove unscathed and impressed by the natural beauty of this Cornish valley.

Once we are ready, we set off up the tarmac road that leads to Gwennap Head coastguard station. We can already hear Chiffchaffs calling in the roadside trees and shrubs, which is an encouraging sign and in one of the gardens we get a glimpse of one along with Great and Blue Tits. It is glorious with the ivy in full bloom and covered with bees and butterflies, with lots of Red Admirals, Peacocks, Speckled Woods, and a Painted Lady.

We continue up the quiet, winding lane until we stop for a couple of Greater Whitethroats in the adjacent brambles. We meet another birder who has just seen a Wryneck further up the hill and the excitement mounts! We go a little further and Vivian spots a couple of birds in the vegetation across the field. Our guide puts the scope on them, with one being another Whitethroat and the other is a juvenile Whinchat – brilliant. Sadly, it flies before everyone gets a good view, so we carry on up the road checking the tops of the bracken. We find a pair of Stonechats followed by the Whinchat, which is sat next to one of the Stonechats, giving a wonderful comparison.

Our thoughts now turn to Wrynecks as we make our way to where the guy had seen it but so often with this secretive woodpecker there is no sign. We do add a few Linnets to the list and a few other common species but not the one we had hoped for. Julian needs the call of nature and walks back down the lane to a discreet place, and on his way back spots a raptor being mobbed by crows – it's the Black Kite! He starts to run back up the hill shouting and pointing towards it, and we find it drifting towards the coast. Breathless, Julian arrives and we continue to watch it as it now turns east and follows the coastline out of sight – what a result and some recompense for not seeing the Wryneck.

Very pleased with this we keep going up to the buildings at Gwennap Head. It is much breezier here as we stand looking out to sea with Julian pointing out the Scillonian, followed by Wolf Rock Lighthouse and then the Isles of Scilly themselves. John R. is looking further down the coast and points out the Longships Lighthouse which is situated off the coast from Lands End – the whole area is absolutely stunning. We hang around here, watching the Gannets and Shags passing, but not much else before Yonat finds a few Atlantic Grey Seals hauled out on some rocks and Julian hears the distinctive calls of Red-billed Chough but only gets a brief look at them before the pair disappear below us.

We continue to wander slowly around the grassy tracks, seeing more Linnets, along with lots of Bumblebees and a Grasshopper before Julian says we will head back to Porthgwarra for lunch. We have some time available and stop at the Wryneck site again finding just a few Chaffinches, Great and Blue Tits. In the warm sunshine we watch a Kestrel hunting along with a few very vocal Common Buzzards, but things are generally getting quiet.

We eventually get back to the minibus and our guide distributes the sandwich bags and we walk down through the village to the cove, where we sit in the very warm sunshine. There are some Tamarisks here, where we see a couple of Chiffchaffs 'fly-catching' for insects, plus we see a single House Martin amongst the many Barn Swallows. As we are enjoying our lunches Yonat finds a couple of Grey Wagtails feeding on the seaweed and Julian points out a constant stream of Manx Shearwaters moving past the entrance to this narrow cove. You could sit here all day! However we have places to go and once we have all finished, we head back to the minibus via the public facilities and drive away from this gorgeous, peaceful place.

We don't drive far before stopping again in the quaint village of Polgigga where we park alongside the sports field, which is tree-lined. As we are getting ready to go for a walk, Julian notices a bird fly out and back into a Sycamore.

It's a Spotted Flycatcher! Julian suggests we walk out onto the grassed football pitch where we get cracking views of this and a second individual hawking insects from the low branches.

Soon we set off along the road and on to another much quieter tarmac road, where we wander along looking for more migrant species. It is quiet, with only a couple of Blue Tits being seen before we reach the entrance to the farm. We decide to turn back here as a small falcon flies just above the tree line - it's a Hobby! Sadly, it stays just above the trees making it difficult to follow and soon lose it from sight. The rest of the return walk is just as unproductive as the outward journey, and we are back at the minibus in good time.

We only have a couple of hours before needing to be back at the hotel and we drive to another vegetated valley – Nanquidno. It is again very scenic but also quiet for migrant birds with a few Chiffchaffs calling from the track side trees. We do get excellent looks at both Common Buzzard and a Kestrel before returning to the vehicle. Our guide has one last place to visit, which is enroute to Penzance and again it does not take long for us to get to the car park at Pendeen watch. Here we walk the short distance to the sea-watching area and set up our scopes but quickly realise that there are very few birds passing this headland. We do see plenty of Gannets, along with several Kittiwakes and a couple of Sandwich Terns but not much else. A little after 5pm we make our way back to the bus and drive the short distance back to the hotel.

Day 5

The weather forecast is again poor with strong NW gales and heavy rain showers, so Julian opts to play it safe initially by returning to Stithians Reservoir. We get there for around 10am and walk down to the hide which unfortunately has a couple of people in, but we manage to 'shoehorn' ourselves into a seat and start scanning the area. There aren't as many waders today but still a good mix as we find a single Curlew, Sandpiper, Green Sandpiper, Black-tailed Godwit, Curlew, several Dunlin and lots of Ringed Plover. The two others decide to leave as there isn't much rain, but the wind is still a problem. We now spread out a little and continue to check the birds with a couple of Little Egrets, Grey Heron, Mallard and Teal being added to our daily total. After about 30 minutes the warden enters the hide and not wanting to listen to his stories again, we decide to move on. We walk back to the main road and quickly check the feeders, but this only produces the same common species as our previous visit.

Back at the minibus we set off and continue with Julian's original plan of visiting the Lizard, which takes about 30 minutes to get there. We first head down to the peninsula of Lizard Point where we park, pay the charge and make full

use of their facilities! We walk down to the most southerly point on mainland UK and it's pretty busy – in fact there are a few sea-watchers there? We set up the scopes we have and start to look out to sea, we can see there are lots of Manx Shearwaters moving past the headland along with several Fulmar and Kittiwakes. Apparently, there had been Great Shearwaters earlier, but they had moved further out and are now very difficult to see – typical! During this time, we could see the rain belt moving in and before we get soaked our guide asks if we would like a hot drink and the café – clearly no one objects on this poor day. We really enjoy the refreshments and being out of the wind for a while before we venture back out, with us now returning back up the track to the car park. This is normally a good place for Red-billed Chough, and we are not disappointed as a pair fly over calling, but sadly land out of sight along the steep sea cliffs.

We reach the minibus and before heading off Julian checks a field full of corvids for Chough, but unfortunately all he can find are lots of Rooks, Jackdaws, and several Carrion Crows. We now do head off as it's nearly lunchtime and our guide wants to be at the next site before breaking out the lunches.

We return to the village and continue north, soon turning off for Kynance Cove. Here we park up near where a Hoopoe had been reported the previous day and after having our lunch at the van walk around this immediate area but to no avail. It's unbelievably windy as we start to walk along the coastal path, finding a few Stonechats, Pied Wagtail and Linnets. In fact, it's almost dangerous as we are blown about, so our walk is curtailed before we start down the steep part of the track to the beach. We turn round and walk back with the wind now thankfully behind us, making things slightly easier!

On the way back we see much the same species apart from a Whimbrel which flies right past us calling, obviously looking for somewhere sheltered to roost for an hour or so. We get back to the minibus and it's wonderful to be out of the wind again, although the van is being shaken all over. The rain has again stopped and the sun is trying to come out as we drive away from the cove and call in at the Windmill Farm reserve. This is primarily for Adder and Slow Worm, with us parking at the entrance and walking to the mats they sometimes stay under. Julian systematically lifts each mat, but we again are disappointed with the result as no reptiles are found but to be fair the weather conditions are not conducive with this as we haven't even seen a butterfly today!

This place is interesting, and Julian suggests we go to look at the windmill, which is now a 360° hide, affording fabulous views of the whole area which is still used for grazing livestock amongst a network of small pools.

As the weather is so windy we decide a walk round would be pointless, so our guide decides we shall finish the day at Marazion Beach, which is on the way back to Penzance. It takes a while to get there but arrive at the car park next to the beach, which is in the shadow of St Michael's Mount. The wind is horrendous and there is no point getting out of the vehicle as we wouldn't be able to stand up! The sea though is incredibly impressive with huge 'white horse' waves crashing onto the shore with Turnstones and Sanderling running around. We don't stay long and visit a small pool on the road back to Penzance, where we finish our birding day with a few Little Grebes, Moorhen and Mallard before returning to our hotel for a very welcome freshen up after this very difficult day, but we are looking forward to the Scillies tomorrow.

Day 6

It's a very early start and sadly Yonat and John D have decided not to travel on the Scillonian to St. Mary's as the forecast strong winds could make it a potentially rough crossing. It is still dark as we head for Penzance harbour with drizzle and a cool breeze blowing, Julian kindly drops us (Viv and John R) returning the minibus to the hotel and walking quickly back! The three of us board the Scillonian III around 7am, having to wait for an hour before she leaves the port. During this time, we see plenty of Rock Pipits, several Turnstone and a Sanderling flying past the boat. It is still drizzling as we head into Penzance Bay, but it soon stops, and the conditions get a little brighter as we reach open water.

We are already seeing lots of Gannets fishing, along with the usual gull species before Julian spots our first shearwater, which is a Manx, followed by plenty more and close to the boat too. Julian spots a Balearic Shearwater amongst a group of Manx, but it's flying low over the water and not 'shearing', making it difficult to see. A little further and a cetacean breaks the water, and the small dark dorsal fin reveals a couple of Harbour Porpoise, which aren't easy to see in the swell. However, as we follow the line of the mainland towards Lands' End, we are pleasantly surprised by how calm the boat is. On board there are lots of other observers and most are watching from 'our side' as we start to see our first Great Shearwaters, which is brilliant as these are new for Viv and one, she'd hoped to see.

As we travel on these 'big shears' appear more often, with some flying right alongside the ship, making for some incredible looks, even though it's still quite dull. Julian sees our first Sooty Shearwater of the day (with only a few being seen on the crossing) followed by a few Storm Petrels, but these proved to be very tough to get on to! As we pass Wolf Rock a Cory's Shearwater is seen from the ship, but we fail to locate this bird, thankfully a little further

and another appears, showing it's diagnostic plumage and languid flight. Viv and John are over the moon as they are now getting some more fabulous views of this scarce seabird.

Julian is constantly watching as we add Arctic Skua and Arctic Tern to the list along with lots more shearwaters and a few European Storm Petrels. Our guide spots another petrel, which looks slightly larger and longer winged than the stormies, flying more purposefully above the waves and shouts "Leach's". We all get on to it as do the people around and great views as it follows the boat for a while before peeling off. The Isles of Scilly are getting closer as we continue to see more of these seabirds passing the boat or even sat on the water, with a small pod of Common Dolphin now showing well right alongside the Scillonian. We soon enter the calmer waters surrounding these islands and after a short wait, we dock in St. Mary's Harbour. It has been a wonderful crossing, especially now as the cloud has dispersed and blue skies are appearing.

We eventually get off the boat on to the quay and we are keen to get ourselves some proper breakfast, with Julian wanting us to go to the Longstones Café. This requires a taxi, and we are lucky as we manage to share one with some friends of his, who are going to Old Town. These friends are going to look for the Dotterel and Buff-breasted Sandpiper which were reported the previous day and will tell our guide if they are successful.

Our taxi arrives at the café, and we have a marvellous hot drink and piece of cake (John's favourite of the week!), sat outside in the warm sunshine and getting our crumbs robbed by the local House Sparrows! It is almost midday when we are ready to leave, with about 4 hours left before needing to be back on the quay, which is great. There has been a Hoopoe close to the café, and we start by checking the fields locally but there is no sign of it.

Following this we make our way through the Holy Vale nature trail, but it is very quiet until we reach a small reed-fringed pond, where we first hear a Cetti's Warbler. We patiently wait and cannot believe it when this small brown warbler pops out and sits in full view for a few seconds – as Viv rightly says, "that's unheard of!". We continue our walk reaching the Porthellick trail, with its larger pools and along here we see a few Chiffchaffs, Whitethroat, and Goldfinches.

We call into the hide where a Pectoral Sandpiper had been seen but the warden and volunteers were working on the boardwalk surrounding it. Still, it's really nice to have a sit down and now break out our picnic lunches, which we have been carrying around. There are several Sand Martins, with the

Swallows and House Martins and also a single Green Sandpiper but not much else. Julian has had a text from his friends saying they had not seen the waders they were looking for, which is a little disappointing. However, we are heading that way back to Hugh Town so we would give it a go, you never know.

Our walk reaches the coastal path, and we meander our way around a couple of bays and a small headland, finding a Northern Wheatear, Stonechats, Little Egrets and a few common waders. We eventually reach the edge of the airport grounds, with the grass-lined concrete runways adjacent to our path. Julian is now in full search mode and finds a few more Wheatears, Linnets, etc but nothing else. He sees a small track to the runway and leaving us at the end walks up to check this grass and after a couple of minutes starts waving frantically. We go and join him and there about 3m ahead of us on the edge of the runway is a Buff-breasted Sandpiper – brilliant. Our guide puts the telescope on this rare Nearctic wader and we get some fabulous views.

While we are looking through the scope, Julian, now rejuvenated, keeps searching this area and sees the top of a bird's head in the grass! He can just about make out a supercilium – it's the 1st winter Dotterel! He gets really excited as he points the scope at this scarce wader, especially as it stands up and starts to feed with the buff-breast. Viv is absolutely elated as she has wanted to see a Dotterel for many years having missed them on several visits to their breeding grounds in Cairngorm National Park. We watch these two birds a while longer, but Julian is conscious of the time, and we head to go for the return crossing. We make our way round to Old Town and then over to Hugh Town, getting to the quay in perfect time for the ferry. In fact, while others are queuing, we sit on a side bench with another very welcome hot drink before boarding. It has been a wonderful few hours on this gorgeous island as we now return to the outside deck of the Scillonian.

At 4:30pm we set off slowly out of the harbour seeing a few Sandwich Terns flying past as we get back to open water. The Common Dolphins reappear as do the Cory's Shearwaters, with some more cracking views especially in the much-improved conditions. The wind has got quite strong, and the boat is rolling more now than the outward journey, but not too bad thankfully. We are again logging much the same species until Julian shouts, "Minke Whale breaching" Everyone in earshot looks out to where he's looking and the whale for a second time lifts out of the water and makes an almighty splash as it drops back in – just incredible!

We soon leave this great cetacean behind, and it's not seen again but Viv has been searching and spots a tall dorsal fin, which wasn't a Common Dolphin. She's puzzled until she looks at an image of a Risso's Dolphin, saying that was

it – superb. The journey continues back towards Penzance with us seeing lots of shearwaters, a few stormies, a few Guillemots and our only Great Skua of the day before getting back into the much calmer waters of Penzance Bay. We are all quite tired as we head into the harbour and around 7:30pm we make our way slowly on to 'terra firma'. We all opt to walk back to the hotel which takes around 15 minutes, with just half an hour to get ready for dinner as we are due to meet Yonat and John D.

We reconvene at our table with the other two waiting patiently and we swap stories of our respective days, which was also very good for the Yonat and John. In fact, Yonat had walked all the way round to Marazion Marsh, where she had got incredibly close views of a Glossy Ibis, along with some excellent photos. She had also visited the nearby small park again seeing the usual woodland species but also adding Goldcrest to our very respectable list of species we are accruing. As we were later than normal, it is decided to leave the daily checklist until tomorrow and soon after finishing we head off to our respective rooms for a good night's sleep on this very memorable day.

Day 7

It's our final full day and the forecast again is poor with more gale force winds and heavy rain showers, which clearly isn't ideal. Julian's original plan is to go to Lands End and walk over to Sennan but that would be horrendous in this weather, so he's planned an excursion to somewhere new to all of us! We set off at 9am after another hearty breakfast and drive north through the expected rain for about an hour, heading for Wadebridge. Despite the rush-hour traffic we make good progress and get to this estuary town in the expected time, first calling for a hide key from the local warden. Thankfully he lives just a few minutes from the reserve and after a few instructions we are winding our way to Walmsley Sanctuary, which is owned by the CBWPS (Cornish Bird Group).

We park at the allotted layby and walk through the gates out on to the reserve, where we cross a couple of fields, over a stile and into a small hide. It has started raining but there's nothing to see here as it's too overgrown so Julian leaves us to investigate another hide. He leaves us here to see a Grey Heron flying over the reeds and can hear what we think are Sedge Warblers. Julian soon returns and says the bigger and better hide is a little further so off we go, once this bout of heavy rainfall abates.

It does not take us long to get to this second hide and there was actually no need for the key as it's already been opened by a couple of locals. This hide is large and does accommodate us all comfortably as we settle down to look out over this farmland marsh with a shallow pool. As always, we make an initial sweep of the area, seeing lots of Mallard, Canada Geese, Mute Swans,

Moorhen and Grey Heron. Though with careful scrutiny we also find several Eurasian Wigeon and Teal, plus a female Pintail, which apparently is a very good bird to see in September. A couple of egrets are with the cattle but difficult to get a good look at until they fly and we confirm there are actually three Cattle Egrets and a single Little Egret.

We continue to watch as a gorgeous male Marsh Harrier flies into view and systematically quarters the area, flushing everything, including a Common Snipe, which is great. We stay here for some time avoiding the rain until it looks clear and start back for the minibus, very satisfied with our visit here. As we are crossing the field back to the stile, a Glossy Ibis flies over, which is the third time this week we have seen this once very rare species to the UK! Eventually we reach the minibus and set off back to the warden's house to return his key, which goes very smoothly.

The temptation of one more rare wader sees us crossing the county to another new site and around 40 minutes later we are pulling into the car park of Sibleyback Reservoir. This is also an activity centre with a café, and our guide makes the rash promise of a hot drink later that afternoon. First though, we want our picnic lunches and we sit around the parking area, overlooking this large body of water, having our sandwiches. Once we have finished, we grab our things and set off north along the excellent track. Stopping periodically to look at the water and shoreline or talk to a birder coming in the opposite direction – sounds like the rare wader is still there!

As we near the north end, Yonat finds a Northern Shoveler amongst the Mallard and Teal in the water. There are a few waders running around in front of us, which are mostly Ringed Plover and Dunlin but there is also a juvenile Ruff too. We can see a few other birders in the distance and now hurry on to where they are standing and sitting. One person says the bird is not far off and points towards a mud flat. Unfortunately, the sun is right in our faces, so getting any definition on the assembled waders is difficult. Although Julian is struggling to find the bird in question, with these being more Dunlin and Ringed Plover!

We now widen our search area, and we move position to get the sun in a better place, which makes things easier. We carefully check all the waders until Julian says, "I've got it" He trains his scope on a small wader and hands it on for us to look, John D gets a decent look before the flock is spooked and they fly up in a tight-knit group. Luckily, we could watch the flock wheel around and then drop in again where we had come from, about 100m back along the track.

We all walk back slowly together to try and keep the flock from flying again and again start to relocate the bird. This time it doesn't take Julian long and he soon has it again in the telescope, with us all getting a good look at a juvenile Baird's Sandpiper – another good North American shorebird. We can all relax a little now as we continue to go through the waders on show, also finding a couple of Curlew Sandpipers, another Ruff, Green Sandpiper, Redshank, Oystercatcher and Curlew. It is now just after 3pm and our guide is conscious that the café closes at 4pm so suggests we set off back to the car park – there is no argument.

As we walk back, a Common Snipe gets flushed into some nearby Willows and we also spot a couple of Northern Wheatears along the foreshore, before reaching the café. The drinks at the cafe are lovely (as are the facilities), and a very welcome addition to the itinerary for future visits. We still have a good drive back to Penzance and around 4:30pm we set off back, getting to our hotel about an hour later. We again have plenty of time to freshen up before meeting in the bar, where we go through our final two days of checklist and our highlights of the week, which have been many and varied. Following this we go through to the restaurant for our final dinner of the week before heading back to our respective rooms, with a clear plan of what's happening the next morning.

Day 8

Julian first takes Viv to Penzance train station and returns to the hotel for breakfast. Later the rest of us check-out and we again go to the train station where Julian leaves the two Johns for their onward journey. Julian and Yonat continue north stopping at the Devon border, where he leaves Yonat to meet a friend. A Sparrowhawk is seen on this drive, which is quite remarkable, and brought to a conclusion, another terrific week in this wonderful corner of the UK.

Species of the Trip

Viv	Dotterel
John D	Marsh Harrier
Yonat	Glossy Ibis
John R	Northern Wheatear
Julian	Sparrowhawk (seen every day!)

Place of the Trip

Viv	Scillonian crossing
John D	Lelant/Carnsew Basin
Yonat	Gwennap Head
John R	St. Mary's
Julian	Porthgwarra to Gwennap Head

Magic Moment

Viv	Seeing the Buff-breasted Sandpiper and Dotterel together
John D	The Glossy Ibis fly-by at Drift Reservoir
Yonat	The Gannet above our heads at Godrevy Point
John R	Feeding the House Sparrows at Longstone Cafe
Julian	Eventually finding the Buff-breast followed by the Dotterel

BIRDS

Mute Swan	Turnstone
Canada Goose	Knot
Barnacle Goose	Dunlin
Pale-bellied Brent Goose	Curlew Sandpiper
Mallard	Pectoral Sandpiper
Northern Shoveler	Buff-breasted Sandpiper
Pintail	Baird's Sandpiper
Wigeon	Green Sandpiper
Eurasian Teal	Common Sandpiper
Garganey	Common Redshank
Tufted Duck	Greenshank
Little Grebe	Black-tailed Godwit
Great Crested Grebe	Bar-tailed Godwit
Fulmar	Curlew
Cory's Shearwater	Whimbrel
Great Shearwater	Ruff
Sooty Shearwater	Common Snipe
Manx Shearwater	Arctic Skua
Balearic Shearwater	Great Skua
European Storm Petrel	Black-headed Gull
Leach's Storm Petrel	Mediterranean Gull
Gannet	Herring Gull
Cormorant	Great Black-backed Gull
Shag	Lesser Black-backed Gull
Little Egret	Kittiwake
Cattle Egret	Sandwich Tern
Glossy Ibis	Arctic Tern
Spoonbill	Guillemot
Grey Heron	Feral Pigeon
Black Kite	Woodpigeon
Marsh Harrier	Collared Dove
Common Buzzard	Kingfisher
Sparrowhawk	Great Spotted Woodpecker
Kestrel	Sand Martin
Hobby	Barn Swallow
Peregrine	House Martin
Moorhen	Meadow Pipit
Coot	Rock Pipit
Oystercatcher	Pied Wagtail
Ringed Plover	Grey Wagtail
Dotterel	Dunnock
Lapwing	Robin
Sanderling	Northern Wheatear
	Stonechat

Whinchat
Blackbird
Cetti's Warbler
Greater Whitethroat
Common Chiffchaff
Goldcrest
Wren
Spotted Flycatcher
Long-tailed Tit
Blue Tit
Great Tit
Coal Tit
Jay
Magpie
Jackdaw
Rook
Carrion Crow
Red-billed Chough
Raven
Starling
House Sparrow
Chaffinch
Goldfinch
Linnet

MAMMALS plus

Grey Squirrel
Rabbit
Atlantic Grey Seal
Minke Whale
Common Dolphin
Harbour Porpoise
Risso's Dolphin (presumed)
Bluefin Tuna
Common Toad

BUTTERFLIES & OTHERS

Large White
Small White
Common Blue
Small Heath
Small Tortoiseshell
Speckled Wood
Small Copper
Meadow Brown
Painted Lady
Red Admiral
Peacock
Clouded Yellow
Common Hawker
Migrant Hawker
Southern Hawker
Common Blue Damsel
Common Carder Bee
White-tailed Bumblebee
Fox Moth caterpillar
Broom Moth caterpillar