

HOLIDAY HIGHLIGHTS

ISLES OF SCILLY

7 - 14 OCTOBER 2024

Leaders: Simon Eaves & Craig Round

Guests: Hazel Pickering, Susan Dukes, Charles Gordon, Roger Rooke, Hazel & Andrew Fardell, Elaine & Colin George, Pam & Malcolm Mundy

Day 1 Its a sunny warm morning as we all meet up at the ferry on Penzance Harbour with Rock Pipits and a nice close flock of Turnstones around the harbour as we wait in line to board the ferry. Soon we are all aboard and steaming out on the Scillonian, sailing alongside the beautiful and rugged scenic Cornish coastline heading for the Scillies.

The first few Gannets go by as we head out, and some Harbour Porpoise are seen as the skies start to cloud over and the weather starts to change. The sea is fairly choppy today with a strong force 4 Southerly wind blowing this morning, and we are soon all wrapped up in full waterproofs on the open deck at the back of the boat. We sail out past Lands End and soon get good views of 12+ Corys Shearwaters shearing low over the sea with some passing close to the boat, also a single Great Shearwater is seen as well as a Manx Shearwater.

Mid-way on the crossing and into the open sea, we pass the dramatic Wolf Rock Lighthouse and as the rain gets steadily heavier some folk wisely seek shelter inside, while some of us stick out the rain and weather on deck. We see more Corys Shearwaters but also at least six Storm Petrels as the seas calm a little, as the rocky coastline of the outer islands of St Martin's and the Eastern Isles of Scilly come into view and we round the corner of St Mary's and glide into the sheltered harbour filled with its colourful boats. It's a welcoming sight and we can't wait to get ashore. As we arrive the rain is by now very heavy, so after we disembark we decide to walk straight up to the hotel to check in to our rooms settle in and dry out!

A little later we enjoy our first lovely meal of the week at the St Marys Hall Hotel and after have a chat about the plan for the week ahead and look at the map to get our bearings of the various islands.

Day 2 The plan today is to spend the day exploring St Marys and after the wet and windy weather of yesterday and early this morning we head out a little later after the worst of the rain has cleared.

We walk out towards Penninis first today to have a look for a Short-toed Lark that has been reported from here, and as we walk up through the town we see three Swallows as well as a brief view of a flyover Peregrine and Sparrowhawk. As we head out onto the headland we stop to scan a bulb field near the path and bingo, there is the Short-toed Lark! If only birding was always this easy! Amazingly it is literally the only bird in the field and we all get lovely views as it creeps between the furrows in the field. While we are here there are Robins and Goldcrest in the hedges and we see a few Meadow Pipits fly over as well as a small

flock of three Barnacle Geese. What a great start! From here we walk down to Old Town Bay where we get some nice views of a juvenile Little Tern which is just offshore. Little Tern is a scarce bird on the Scillies and for Simon, who has been many times to the islands, it is a welcome island tick!

Also here a Greenshank is seen and there are Turnstones and Oystercatcher along the beach as we make our way around to the cemetery nearby where we shelter from a passing rain shower. After the rain clears, we wander back around to Old Town Bay getting more nice views of the Little Tern fishing just offshore, and the Greenshank, before heading up towards the Airport to look for an Ortolan Bunting that has been sighted there. We find a spot overlooking a weedy field where the bird was last seen, and after a patient wait soon manage to see the Ortolan Bunting furtively feeding on the ground amongst the flocks of Linnets and Goldfinch. Also whilst here two Common Snipe fly over calling before we make our way back down to Old Town to enjoy our lunch in the sun overlooking the bay. During lunch apart from the very tame Scilly House Sparrows we also pick out a Little Egret as well as more Turnstone and Ringed Plover.

After lunch we walk the trail around the coast to Porth Minick, where we get some lovely views of a juvenile Red-backed Shrike perched in the hedgerow and flying out to catch bees on the wing! Making our way back into Old Town we then take the path towards Lower Moors. We stop to take a walk around the Standing Stones field and manage to see a few Chiffchaffs and Goldcrests in the bushes and scrub as well as a very brief Sedge Warbler. Continuing on along the Lower Moors trail we stop at the hide overlooking the scrape and see two female Teal that drop in, and a little further along the trail more Chiffchaffs and Goldcrests. Most unusually we get fantastic views of an Unarmed Stick Insect which has taken quite a liking to Craigs arm!

Day 3

Its a lovely sunny start to the day but with a cooler Northerly breeze as we walk out from the hotel this morning, making our first stop overlooking Porth Mellon beach. It really is a lovely morning to be out and the views are stunning looking out across the bay here. Scanning out we manage to pick out a few Sandwich Terns just offshore as well as seeing some nice close flocks of Turnstone and Oystercatcher feeding along the shore. Walking along the beach we get nice views of three Little Egrets and a huge wreck of Mauve Stinger Jellyfish litter the beach, we also see a huge piece of driftwood that has been washed up and is completely covered in Goose Barnacles!

We walk around the coast enjoying the wonderful views before getting to Porthloo where we see several Stonechats around the beach as well as Rock Pipits and Pied Wagtails and a migrant Clouded Yellow butterfly is seen perched amongst some ivy.

From Porthloo we walk towards Rosehill seeing our first few Redwings flying over and perched in the hedgerows as well as some more Goldcrest and Chiffchaff, before taking the Lower Moors trail towards Old Town. As we walk along the trail more Chiffchaffs are seen and heard along with a brief Reed Warbler and Willow Warbler, and at Old Town we get great views of another juvenile Red-backed Shrike in a field near the bay.

We walk out around the coast from here and out onto the headland at Carn Leh where we have some lunch looking out to sea and enjoying the sun and stunning views from here. There are lots of Meadow and Rock Pipits out on the headland as well as a smart male Stonechat, and two Ring Ouzels are seen flying out across the bay from here.

After lunch we continue around the coast and walk up onto Penninis head, where we get some fantastic views of a juvenile Merlin which perches on top of a large boulder before flying off out to sea! Walking on again we spend some time scouring the headland for a Wryneck that has been reported, and finally after some patient scanning, get some fantastic views of this 'cryptic woodpecker' as it perches on top of the gorse and bramble bushes and also fly's between cover. What a stunning bird!

From the headland we walk back down Porthcressa for some tea and coffee in the sun overlooking the beach, before we make our way out to Sandy Lane. Here we get some brilliant close views of two Jack Snipe bobbing and feeding right out in the open on a small muddy pool, and on the walk back towards the hotel two Prickly Stick Insects are seen in a garden hedge!

Day 4

Today we head over to Tresco, and it's a nice day of sunny spells and showers forecast with a NNW breeze this morning as we wander down to the quay to catch the boat over to the island at 10.00am.

It's only a short crossing by boat, some fifteen minutes or so, but as we cross, we get great views out to the other islands as well as seeing a Great White Egret and Little Egret along the coast just before we land on Tresco at New Grimsby. From here we walk across the island seeing lots of Song Thrushes in the hedges as well as at least three Redwing and lots of Linnets, and two Whinchats are seen. As we approach the lovely sandy beach and bay at Old Grimsby we get good views of an Osprey flying over the bay before it fly's over to the nearby island of St Martins where it gets mobbed by a Peregrine!

As we make our way towards the School and Church, a Hummingbird Hawkmoth is whizzing around in the gardens of the village and near the school we hear, and then briefly see, a Yellow-browed Warbler that is behind the school. As we try and relocate the warbler we are joined by the islands school children who are also out birdwatching and meeting the Speyside group proves to be the highlight of their morning much to the amusement of their teacher!

There are lots of Meadow Pipits in the fields near the church and we also get some nice views of a Black Redstart along the fence line here. Moving on again we drop back down to the coast for some lunch on the shore at Farm Beach in the warm sunshine. A Little Egret is here and a fine Mediterranean Gull is seen just offshore and after lunch and a paddle we walk up towards the Great Pool where we get some nice views of a Firecrest amongst a large flock of Goldcrests that are moving through the bushes.

We make a stop in the hide overlooking the Great Pool just in time to get out of a mighty rain shower that comes in! From the hide and thankfully out of the torrential rain we find a nice selection of wildfowl including, Gadwall, Teal, Coots, Moorhen, Mallards and Mute Swan. A smart Cattle Egret drops in to the far side of the pool and there are also a few waders including two Redshank as well as a flock of 14 Greenshank and a few Snipe tucked into the reeds.

As the rain finally eases off we decide to make our way around to the other side of the pool and walk on through the extensive woodland towards the famous Abbey gardens where the conifer trees are alive with countless Goldcrests. Near the Abbey we locate another two Firecrests which give good views at times before we press to catch the boat back at the quay at Cam Near. While we await the boat another Black Redstart is on the rocks near the slipway and a flock of four Whooper Swans fly over as the boat heads back over to St Marys as another heavy rain shower follows us home.

Day 5

Today its lovely sunny and warm day with a light E/NE breeze as we walk down to catch our boat over to St Agnes. Its a lovely calm crossing and we see three Whooper Swans flying over before we land on the island.

As we make our way around the NW coast of the island we see plenty of Oystercatcher around the bay at Porth Killier as well as Turnstone and Rock Pipits before we arrive at the fantastically named 'bulb dump'! Joining the throng of already assembled birders here we quietly stake out a small patch of rough ground where two Olive-backed Pipits have turned up, and after a short wait we get some good views of these rare asian pipits as they fly around calling and creeping mouse like through the long grass! After all getting some good views of the pipits, we walk on around the coast at Porth Close seeing several Stonechats as well as more Rock and Meadow Pipits, and enjoy the lovely views looking across the beach at Periglis and looking out to the mighty Bishops Rock lighthouse offshore.

Walking up past the St Agnes lighthouse we arrive at the Parsonage where we spend a little time looking into the gardens and Woodland here, and get brief views of Yellow-browed Warbler and Chiffchaff before we wander across and out onto Wingletang Down. Some Dotterel have been seen earlier out here, so we walk out towards the headland at Horse Point and stop for some lunch, where we can have a good view out across the headland in the hopes of picking up the birds again. Sadly the Dotterel fail to be seen but we enjoy the wonderful views anyway looking out to sea during lunch in the warm sunshine. Whilst here we see a single Wheatear as well as plenty of Meadow Pipits and four Redwing flying over and a Little Egret that flies past.

After lunch we decide to have a wander around Wingletang Down and find a large flock of some 50+ Meadow Pipits as well as 5+ Wheatears. A Black Redstart briefly perches amongst some boulders above the sea and a single Whimbrel is also on the rocks here. Not surprising the large numbers of migrants out here also attracts a hunting Merlin that dashes through and fly's over to the nearby island of Gugh where it puts up a big flock of some 100+ Meadow Pipits!

We walk back via Barnaby Lane towards the Parsonage where we get some lovely views of a stunning migrant Short-eared Owl which soars overhead for some time and is mobbed by Crows before we get back to the Parsonage to have another look in the trees here. We see at least two Chiffchaffs whilst here but also get some lovely and much better views of the Yellow-browed Warbler in a Pine tree in the gardens, before we drop down towards Troy Town seeing the Short-eared Owl going over again and enjoying a celebratory Ice Cream! Walking back around the coast via the campsite we get some nice views of waders including Curlew and Ringed Plover as well as four Bar-tailed godwits and two smart juvenile Sanderling on the beach.

On the way back we pass the 'bulb dump' again and enjoy some incredible close views of the two Olive-backed Pipits, feeding both together and creeping through the grass, and crossing the track in front of us in full view! Finally back at the quay and waiting to catch our boat back to St Marys a lovely Peregrine is seen circling overhead before we board the boat back.

Day 6

Its a lovely sunny start again this morning as we head out from the hotel and make our first stop overlooking Porthcressa beach. From here we have a scan out and pick out several Mediterranean Gulls on the rocks offshore as well as a Kingfisher that fly's past. Best of all whilst here a female first winter Black Redstart gives some ridiculously close views above the beach and even fly's right over everyones head to perch on the roof of a nearby cottage at one point!

From Porthcressa we climb up and onto the Garrison and do a circuit of the walls. On the walk out around the Garrison the views are simply stunning looking out across St Marys Sound to Gugh and St Agnes and we see numerous Rock Pipits, Blackbirds, Song Thrush, Goldcrest, Stonechats and a very tame juvenile Wheatear before we drop back down into Hugh Town. Back in town we all have some time to do a little sightseeing and have some lunch before we all meet up again at the hotel a little later.

After lunch we walk out via Salikee Farm and out towards Porthellick beach. Its a lovely warm afternoon in the sun as we walk and at Porthellick we spend some time looking for a reported Rose-coloured Starling. Sadly the Starling has gone missing by the time we arrive, but we do see lots of Swallows hawking overhead here as well as a brief Yellow-browed Warbler. Finally we walk back along the Higher Moors trail seeing at least four Chiffchaffs and more Goldcrests in the bushes along the path here before finally arriving back at the hotel.

Day 7

Today starts cloudy and a little cooler than yesterday with a SSE breeze blowing as we wander down from the hotel this morning to catch a boat over to explore the small island of Bryher. On the crossing we pass Tresco and see the Great White and Little Egrets again along the shore as well as lots of Curlews and Oystercatcher roosting along the coast.

Landing on Bryher we land at Annekas Quay and make our way towards the centre of the island at Apple Tree Glade. There has been an obvious arrival of migrant Chaffinch today on the island and a large and noisy flock of 100+ are seen overhead and in the trees as we walk. At Apple Tree Glade we have a look around the trees and cover here, seeing several Goldcrest and Chiffchaffs as well a single Brambling that is heard flying over, before we make our way up onto Shipman Head down. As we walk out onto the headland, it is a wild and beautiful view that greets us looking out to sea from here, and we see a Whimbrel fly past along the coast as well as a single Wheatear, Meadow Pipits and a single Skylark. We have our lunch looking out to sea at the end of the headland and enjoy the views as a single Little Egret flies over, before we pick our way back down to the coast to enjoy a hot drink at the delightful 'Fraggle Rock' cafe along with some very tame Scilly Sparrows! Walking back to Church Quay to catch our boat back to St Marys, a smart adult Mediterranean Gull is just off the pier.

Arriving back on St Marys we have had news of a Wilsons Snipe at Lower Moors, so make our way there, and hearing a close Yellow-browed Warbler call in the bushes along the trail as we go. From the hide at Lower Moors we get good views of the 'putative' Wilsons Snipe crouched on the far side of the small pool and reed bed and provoking much discussion on the finer i.d points! As well as getting lovely views of another Jack snipe feeding and bobbing nearby.

Day 8

Today is cloudy and still with some slight drizzle falling for our last day on the islands as we follow one of many winding lanes that cross the island and towards Rocky Hills and Sunnyside Farm. As we walk out across the island we gain some height and hear and see lots of migrant Chaffinch flying over and in the hedgerows, as well as Song Thrush and a few continental Blackbirds as we wander. We manage to pick out more Goldcrests as well as a single Redwing feeding on the ground in a bulb field with more Song Thrush and two Grey Heron!

Walking along Sandy Lane we make our way to the wooded gardens at Holy Vale where we get brief views of Pied Flycatcher as well as a male Blackcap which are both new birds for the trip, before we end up at the lovely and sheltered and well wooded Carreg Dhu gardens where we see more Goldcrest, Song Thrush, Blackbirds and Robins.

From here we wander back to the hotel to pick up our bags and whilst here a late Garden Warbler is seen in the garden Sycamore trees, before we make our way down to the quay to catch the Scillonian ferry again for our crossing back to Penzance.

Its a lovely calm day for our crossing back to the mainland and we again see a good selection of seabirds including Gannets, a single late Puffin and Great Skua, as well as more great views of Corys Shearwaters and a couple of Great Shearwaters and Manx Shearwaters.

Three groups of Common Dolphins are sighted include some that come in to bow ride right alongside the boat and giving us spectacular views as they leap clear of the water, and as we approach Lands End a single Sooty Shearwater glides past the boat and two Harbour porpoise surface as we come into Penzance, a nice ending to a wonderful trip to the Scillies

Bird of the Trip

Olive-backed Pipit, Wryneck, Short-toed Lark, Merlin, Yellow-browed Warbler, Little Tern/Red-backed Shrike, Jack Snipe.

Place of the Trip

St Agnes, Tresco, Bryher, Wingletang, Scilly coast walks, Scillies!

Magic Moment

Olive-backed Pipit moment, Short-eared Owl overhead, Jack Snipe in the open, perched Merlin, Beach and a Black Redstart. Landing on Scillies.

BIRDS

Mute Swan
Whooper Swan
Barnacle Goose
Mallard
Gadwall
Teal
Red-legged Partridge
Pheasant
Little Grebe
Manx Shearwater
Great Shearwater
Sooty Shearwater
Cory's Shearwater
Storm Petrel
Gannet
Cormorant
Shag
Little Egret
Cattle Egret
Great Egret
Grey Heron
Osprey
Marsh Harrier
Sparrowhawk
Kestrel
Merlin
Peregrine
Water Rail
Moorhen
Coot
Oystercatcher
Ringed Plover
Golden Plover
Grey Plover
Sanderling
Turnstone
Dunlin
Redshank
Greenshank
Bar-tailed Godwit
Curlew
Whimbrel
Snipe
Jack Snipe
Great Skua
Black-headed Gull

Common Gull
Mediterranean Gull
Herring Gull
Great Black-backed Gull
Lesser Black-backed Gull
Kittiwake
Sandwich Tern
Little Tern
Razorbill
Puffin
Feral Pigeon
Wood Pigeon
Collared Dove
Short-eared Owl
Kingfisher
Wryneck
Skylark
Greater Short-toed Lark
Swallow
Olive-backed Pipit
Rock Pipit
Meadow Pipit
White/Pied Wagtail
Yellow Wagtail
Grey Wagtail
Dunnock
Robin
Black Redstart
Wheatear
Whinchat
Stonechat
Song Thrush
Ring Ouzel
Blackbird
Garden Warbler
Blackcap
Sedge Warbler
Reed Warbler
Willow Warbler
Chiffchaff
Cetti's Warbler
Yellow-browed Warbler
Goldcrest
Firecrest
Wren
Pied Flycatcher

Great Tit
Blue Tit
Red-backed Shrike
Carrion Crow
Starling
House Sparrow
Chaffinch
Brambling
Linnet
Goldfinch
Greenfinch
Ortolan Bunting

MAMMALS

Grey Seal
Common Dolphin
Harbour Porpoise
Rabbit
Brown Rat
House Mouse
Silly Shrew (dead)

BUTTERFLIES

Speckled Wood
Large White
Small White
Peacock
Red Admiral
Painted Lady
Comma
Small Tortoiseshell
Holly Blue
Common Blue

MOTHS

Hummingbird Hawkmoth
Red Underwing
White Speck
Silver Y

DRAGONFLIES

Migrant Hawker
Darter sp

ADDENDA

Prickly Stick Insect
Unarmed Stick Insect
Rose Chafer
Green Shieldbug
Goose Barnacle
Maive Stinger