



**National Coastwatch**  
EYES ALONG THE COAST

## **Gwennap Head NCI - Wildlife Report December 2017**

We witnessed some wonderfully dramatic weather this month especially during the long spell of biting cold north and north-westerly gales. Massive purple blue clouds swept over the sea shedding curtains of rain and hail which were often followed by intensely coloured rainbows as the sun reappeared. One day, the Longships Lighthouse - wave engulfed and spray lashed - was positioned between the arcs of a double rainbow.

There was some wildlife action too. The Stoat has been busy fattening up for the winter. He or she was reported coming up the cliff with a mouse or vole in its mouth. Then it chased a rabbit along the cliff top before going out of sight of the watch-keeper involved in this slight (?) distraction of duty - the outcome unknown until a person came along with news of a rabbit carcass on the path. Probably the Stoat went back for it later unless it was beaten to it by Ravens, Buzzards, Crows and Foxes etc. Who'd be a rabbit? Stoats are very attractive; you have to admire their sleek bodies, cute faces and stealthy ways and they have to eat.

We are one less of our cliff-dwelling pigeons too. Two Peregrines that looked to be a male with the larger female were active over the moor when suddenly there were 3 birds together and a fluff of feathers which dropped onto the heather – a pigeon. This was co-operative hunting although neither bird went to retrieve the prey, instead they put on a superb aerial display before heading off to the north.

There were the usual sightings of small numbers of Harbour Porpoise especially off the seal haul-out. The Grey Seals reached a maximum count of 16 on 3/12. We saw no deer this month but a watch-keeper reported a Red Deer stag (probably the one from here) near his home to the east of Porthgwarra.

Of smaller creatures, and bringing with it a reminder of summer, was a Small Tortoiseshell discovered hibernating on a wall downstairs - the only threat - a dollop of plaster or a paintbrush? It must have since moved to a better place because I can't find it now. A Peacock was in flight on the lane below the headland on 11/12 and a few bumblebees were spotted flying on rare warm sunny days.

Finally, the birds - it was a quiet month, particularly for seabirds, but on 29/12 with winds gusting over 70 mph driving huge white-streaked waves inshore, there were birds out there. The Fulmars were revelling in it, the Gannets perfectly at home, the Kittiwakes struggling, the auks managing but using lots of energy wing flapping and the Shags cumbersome and not going far.

We had sightings of 3 Canada Geese flying over the heath, a Little Egret following the cliff-line south from Land's End, several sightings of a splendid Great Northern Diver feeding offshore, a passing Red-throated Diver, a Black Redstart seen once and a female Chaffinch, determined to be reported in the log, invited itself into the lookout downstairs and waited for me to find it there! A Wren was heard singing from the rocks below the cliff-top and on calm days we had visits from Rock Pipits and Stonechats. The local Buzzards were still arguing with intruders of their own kind while the Ravens performed nonchalant side-flips even in gales.

Down by the gate the first Sweet Violets are in flower.

Looking back over the year 2017 the main highlight was undoubtedly the incredibly lively sea in August with thousands of seabirds of many species, particularly shearwaters, very many Common Dolphins, a Pilot Whale, up to 4 Minke Whales, and last but certainly not least (in size anyway!) 3 Fin Whales, not to



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mention the spectacular shoals of Blue-fin Tuna. All there because of a huge abundance of prey – plankton, small fish, large fish, birds, all up the food chain to the big whales – amazing! Another memorable sight was the flock of 19 Choughs, the most we have seen here. Next years wish – a Blue Whale!

Jean Lawman