



National Coastwatch
EYES ALONG THE COAST

Gwennap Head NCI - Wildlife Report December 2019

The wild and windy weather continued but there were some short (very short!) breaks and a calmer spell towards the end of the month but with generally poor visibility. The most memorable day was 2/12. It was sunny and dry, warm and, most notably, absolutely calm – the perfect day for seeing dolphins and, miraculously, they appeared. Between 60 and 80 Common Dolphins were spread along the tide race east of the Runnelstone buoy giving a good show with much splashing and leaping, raising the spirits considerably – mine at least. There were seabirds too and a working fishing boat close by indicating a concentration of fish. The dolphins made their way westwards and later a group of 5 came in from the south. 2 Harbour Porpoises were located further out west.

No immense gatherings of feeding seabirds were noted this month although they often happen at this time of year. We saw the usual seabirds - auks, Gannets, Kittiwakes and Fulmars but the only large groups, several hundred strong, were of Kittiwakes and they were several miles to the west often near the Carn Base buoy. In very rough seas, particularly those on 22/12, there were always many Fulmars wheeling over the tumultuous surface with admirable ease and grace. Other species included Great Northern Divers, Common Scoter and some high-flying Cormorants.

Every month, even during rough weather, we always have the company of our cliff nesting Jackdaws which revel in high winds. They are accomplished and acrobatic flyers assisted by those long-fingered wings which create multiple vortices rather than just the one resulting from a pointed wing. Their flying displays enliven the greyest of winter days. Count them as they come and go and it's usually an even number because they are the most faithful and monogamous of birds, sticking together in their pairs all year round. Ravens were seen going two and fro along the cliffs quite often, either one or both birds of the local pair, and they have been observed displaying - flipping over on one wing - which they manage to do so casually.

Our most special corvids - the local Chough pair are alive and well.

The Black Redstart which is spending its time on the cliff slope has been seen several times this month sometimes having a bit of an argument with the local Rock Pipits. On calm, mild days it likes to perch on the compass rose and then trip over to the window sills in the hope of catching the odd insect. Meadow and Rock Pipits, a Pied Wagtail, Chaffinches, a singing Wren and a pair of Stonechats make up the other small birds seen up here this month.

A lone Curlew flew past on 2/12 which was lovely to see but in fact was also rather sad and poignant because these days they are few and far between compared with times past when large numbers wintered in Penwith.

On 15/12, surprisingly, a Fox was outside the lookout in the mid-morning period. It was either a very bold animal or it had been displaced or scared out of its normal range for to be there at that time of day.

Jean Lawman