

# Isles of Scilly

Naturetrek Tour Report

9 - 16 May 2009

---

Report compiled by Paul Dukes

---



Naturetrek Cheriton Mill Cheriton Alresford Hampshire SO24 0NG England

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

F: +44 (0)1962 736426

E: [info@naturetrek.co.uk](mailto:info@naturetrek.co.uk)

W: [www.naturetrek.co.uk](http://www.naturetrek.co.uk)

---

Tour Leader:	Paul Dukes
Participants:	Tricia Atkinson Desmond Cassidi Deborah Cassidi Jim Newell Liz Newell Christopher Spry Marion Spry Phil Page Jean Page

## Day 1

Saturday 9th May

After travelling to Penzance from various parts of the country most of the Naturetrek group made their way to the Lighthouse pier bright and early to board the *Scillonian 111* ferry. It was a rather cool and grey morning following several days of quite windy conditions which threatened fairly rough seas once we left the shelter of Mount's Bay. Eventually the ropes were cast off and we began the three hour sailing to St Mary's. As we made our way parallel with the South Cornish coast various landmarks such as Lamorna Cove and the Minack Theatre could be picked out before we cleared Land's End and entered the more turbulent waters where the Channel and Atlantic meet to create a somewhat 'lumpier' sea! Along the way we saw a few of the many Gannets which were doubtless fishing these fish-rich seas and small numbers of both Guillemots and Razorbills. A dozen or more Manx Shearwaters scudded over the waves at one stage and the occasional Fulmar glided effortlessly in our wake.

Eventually the Eastern Isles came into view with the distinctive red and white day-mark on St Martin's visible behind the cluster of islands. Some of the morning cloud had dispersed and fittingly the sun was valiantly trying to shine as the *Scillonian* docked at St Mary's. Making our way through throng of people at the harbour-side we left the daily chaos and hubbub that greets the arrival of the steamer and walked through Hughtown to Sallyport where we were staying at the Santa Maria Guest House. Introductions were made by the proprietors Jackie and Andy who ran through the daily routine at the establishment and sorted out the room allocation.

After a break for everyone to settle in and purchase lunch in 'town' we reassembled outside the Santa Maria at 3pm to take an afternoon walk around the Garrison headland. A tight squeeze through a low and narrow passageway links Sallyport with the Garrison footpath but we negotiated this without too many groans of complaint and began a clock-wise circuit of the old garrison walls which took us along the coast opposite St Agnes and the adjacent island of Gugh. Some typical Scilly residents also introduced themselves during the walk; the absurdly tame Song Thrushes which are such a feature of the islands, the distinctly orange-billed local Blackbirds, and groups of Oystercatchers noisily displaying on the shore. Most of the gulls were either Lesser Black-backed or Herring but several Greater Black-backs stood around among their smaller relatives looking suitably menacing as befits a bird capable of swallowing Puffins in one gulp!

Great thickets of Hottentot Fig growing on sunny banks were testament to the mild climate which makes Scilly such an attractive place for plants. Three exotic garden species were much in evidence throughout the islands; the tall spikes of Tree Echium, much beloved by bees, rows of purple Whistling Jacks and the strange Giant Herb-Robert (*Geranium maderense*) each plant a mass of pretty flowers supported by a cluster of buttressed roots. An immature Great Northern Diver swimming off Morning Point dwarfed nearby Razorbills and Guillemots and later in the week became a regular sight off Porthcressa beach at high tide where it found a plentiful supply of crabs to eat. Several Kittiwakes were also to be seen plunge-diving in the bay. Other birds noted as we walked around the coast included a Wheatear, Rock Pipits, Stonechats, Linnets and a single Swift arrowing overhead.

We paused finally at the top of Star Castle Hill, which affords superb views of the many islands comprising the archipelago, and spent some time identifying the major islands. Tresco with its abundance of trees, and St Martins with distinctive red & white day-mark were easy to pick out whilst Bryher was partially obscured by the twin hills of Samson from this position. The myriad of uninhabited islands scattered around the larger islands are described in relation to their compass alignment thus those clustered around the tip of St. Martins are known as the Eastern Isles and the jumble of granite outcrops several kilometres beyond St. Agnes are called the Western Rocks, pointing towards the Bishop Rock Lighthouse, standing isolated against the might of the Atlantic breakers. Closer at hand, an immature Iceland Gull swimming in the harbour was brought to our attention by Dan, one of the Scilly Wildlife Trust team who happened to be passing by as we stood admiring the view. This northern gull was one of two remaining from a winter influx and was to appear several more times during the following days. On this occasion it flew around for a while with the harbour Herring Gulls, a spectral white looking bird among the grey of its companions.

After a tasty evening meal at the Santa Maria Guest House we joined a full audience in the Church Hall for Will Wagstaff's talk on the Wildlife of Scilly. His slides depicted the many seasonal natural history delights to be found on Scilly and we wondered what surprises awaited us during the next few days.

## Day 2

## Sunday 10th May

A pattern for the week was established with a 6am pre-breakfast walk around Peninnis Head in the hope of maybe finding a few migrants. Jim, Phil, Desmond and Deborah joined me on this first morning and whilst we did not find any rarities our walk did stimulate appetites for the Santa Maria hearty breakfast fare and the fine spring dawn raised our spirits. A Whimbrel was on Porthcressa beach as we started out and two Jackdaws flew overhead, only to re-appear several times over the next hour as they went backwards and forwards from the Garrison to Peninnis. Jackdaws are not resident on St Mary's and it will be interesting to discover whether these birds are a pair and if so, whether they try to nest. A Cuckoo was also seen on the walk although rather atypically it was silent and we probably would have missed it perched on a rock ledge if another morning birder had not pointed it out to us. Wheatears, Stonechats and a Fulmar gliding past at sea completed the Peninnis walk list.

After breakfast we made our way down to the quay and boarded a tripper boat for a cruise around the Eastern Isles followed by landing on St Martin's. This is an excursion that can be prone to cancellation if weather or tides are unsuitable and my usual policy is to take this trip at the first opportunity. With boatman Gerald as our skipper we set off to navigate around the scatter of islands known as the Eastern Isles. Close up views of Shags, Cormorants, Razorbills, Fulmars and three gull species were all enjoyable but the star performers were undoubtedly the Grey Seals which as usual seemed to play to the audience.

We saw about 40 animals in total, many loafing about on the rocks where they viewed our passing in a mixture of curiosity and mild alarm. Some huge bulls were present but many of the seals were females or immatures. It was an enchanting encounter and after completing a circuit of the last island it was a happy crew of passengers that headed back to land.

Because of the retreating tide we landed at Lower Town close to the rather fine St Martin's Hotel and couldn't neglect the opportunity to have coffee and teas in the garden before beginning our exploration of the island. In pleasant sunshine we made our way from the hotel to the gorse and heather expanse which cloaks the central and northern portions of St Martin's following a footpath which bisected the two habitats with moorland to our left and fields to the right. The scenery was magnificent as we looked down over the white sands and azure sea of Great Bay towards White Island in the distance. Later the views to the south and west were just as impressive as large expanses of white sand were revealed by the retreating tide and it almost looked possible to walk across to Tresco, as indeed it is on certain occasions. Apart from noticeable numbers of hirundines, a few Swifts, the inevitable Linnets and 15-20 Wheatears, we saw few birds but this was a day to just enjoy the island and birds were almost secondary. Despite the sunshine, butterflies were absent apart from Speckled Woods which fluttered around some of the hedges.

We enjoyed a tasty and protracted lunch in the garden of the Poltreith Café at Higher Town after which we said farewell to the Cassidis who returned to St Mary's on a 2.30 boat while the rest of us continued our walk. This time we made our way around the eastern extremity of the island taking in fine views of the Eastern Isles from the land. Again, birds were relatively sparse apart from yet more Wheatears and plenty of hirundines, but we did relish telescope close-ups of two Whimbrel feeding on a beach and the holiday list was augmented by one or two additions such as Greenfinch and Chiffchaff. Whilst waiting at Higher Town jetty for the boat to arrive, several Sandwich Terns flew by but surprisingly the Common Terns, which can usually be seen around St Martin's were not to be found and it is to be hoped they are simply late arriving rather than anything more sinister.

Back on St. Mary's there was news of a Little Bittern seen at Porth Hellick which gave promise of more migrants arriving during the following days.

## Day 3

## Monday 11th May

Today's pre-breakfast walk took us via Old Town to the Lower Moors Nature Trail where I hoped we might find a re-located Little Bittern. Jim and Phil joined me at 6 and we set off at a brisk pace to take in the slightly longer circuit. Sedge and Reed Warblers were singing from the reed beds at Lower Moors and we had good views of the former 'song-fighting' as well as one individual sitting in the open. A washed out looking Yellow Wagtail of uncertain sub-species was the only surprise from the first hide but after we had moved to the south facing hide we almost jumped out of our skins when a female Marsh Harrier suddenly appeared just above the roof and dropped into the reeds just twenty metres away where it remained, wings spread, for a few seconds before flying up again. Whatever it had spotted got away but it was a thrilling encounter for us even if the harrier seemed slightly embarrassed by such a failure. The raptor remained in the Lower Moors area for at least another ten or fifteen minutes, often dodging the attacks of crows as it circled around over the marsh.

With reasonable weather in prospect, albeit a little windy, we headed for Tresco on the first of several morning departures.

Cautiously navigating the channel between Bryher and Tresco we eventually arrived at New Grimsby quay and made our way around to the Great Pool, pausing for a while to scan over the pool but apart from the customary Gadwall and Mallards and a few Canada Geese on the shore, not a lot was apparent but closer inspection of a muddy pool on the shore revealed two splendid Black-tailed Godwits in summer plumage. Despite the imperative to reach the gardens everyone paused to admire these handsome waders and to look at the other occupants of the pool margins which included a newly hatched Moorhen chick and a pair of Pintail of dubious origin. Several Blackcaps gamely sang from the trees beside the track but typically proved remarkably adept at keeping hidden amid the foliage. By popular consensus we hastened to the famous Abbey Gardens where the group opted to spend the remainder of the morning touring the grounds although not before a cup of tea in the restaurant.

Leaving the others to enjoy the sub-tropical plants in the gardens, I continued birding around the nearby Abbey Pool and the southern end of the Great Pool. Many hirundines were skimming the water after insects and among them were a number of Sand Martins, perhaps a dozen or so in total over the Great Pool. Apart from a few Swifts and three immature Black-headed Gulls, I did not see a great deal and eventually met up with everyone in the restaurant for lunch. As usual, the place was quite busy but one by one the group emerged from the gardens after an interesting look around and several opted to return for a further visit in the afternoon. Although they had been focused on the tropical flora the party had also scored a notable butterfly success by photographing a Comma, still a rare butterfly on the islands although seemingly consolidating its status as a recent colonist.

After lunch, those not returning to the gardens ambled around the eastern side of the Great Pool joined by Phil and Jean who had left us earlier at New Grimsby to go on an energetic walk around the island. Once again singing Reed Warblers mostly eluded us but a good few seemed to be present along with smaller numbers of Sedge Warblers. Many hirundines were over the pool and several Swifts also appeared. Whilst sitting in the David Hunt hide watching the wildfowl and swans we were entertained by two Marsh Harriers over the reeds, one probably the Lower Moors individual but the other a slightly more ragged looking bird. Both passed close to our position and at times sparred playfully together. Marsh Harriers amazed everyone by nesting on Scilly a few years ago and have been a more or less constant feature ever since but the male has not been seen this year and it was entirely possible that both our birds were migrants passing through the islands. Their appearance caused some minor panics in the wildfowl and among the more usual Mallard and Gadwall we found a single rather dull looking Wigeon.

It was still quite windy on the return journey to St Mary's and some of the passengers landed at Hughtown a little damper than they started!

## Day 4

**Tuesday 12th May**

Another visit to Lower Moors produced a 'new' male Whitethroat and several singing Willow Warblers but the star was undoubtedly the white immature Iceland Gull sitting on Porth Mellon beach where it allowed approach to within 20 metres. Three Whimbrels were also feeding on the beach and earlier we had seen the lone bird on Porthcressa. For today we were going to stay on St Mary's and duly assembled at the square to catch the 10am Community Bus to the north end of the island. There was quite a throng of passengers and when the bus arrived with some people on board I wondered if we would all get on but in usual Scillonian fashion it all worked out albeit with some standing for the first part of the journey.

We alighted at Holy Vale and gradually made our way along lanes bursting with spring colour to Watermill Cove. A brief stop was made to purchase bulbs at a farm, and we also paused for Blackcaps singing from the elm canopy along Watermill Lane.

A very strong wind was still blowing as we reached the north coast but a Common Blue sheltering in path-side vegetation was the first of the week. Almost as soon as we reached the sea, a small gull could be seen swimming among the breakers and closer inspection revealed it to be an immature Mediterranean Gull. Although this increasingly widespread gull is now a regular visitor to Scilly it is still relatively rare and as one had not been reported for a while I assume this individual had just arrived. We enjoyed nice Telescope views and even saw the distinctive wing pattern as it flew a few metres before dropping once again into the sea. This proved to be the only ornithological find of the walk but we did come upon two fat bodied Oil Beetles and a cultural diversion was provided by the two burial chambers at Innisidgen.

Further around the coast we saw more evidence of Scilly's past at Bant Carn ancient village, and then climbed the steep slope to view the third burial chamber of the morning before continuing along a footpath around the perimeter of the golf course to our lunch stop at Juliet's Garden. Juliet's Garden occupies a splendid position looking out over Hughtown and the harbour. The food and service are both excellent making it one of the most popular eating places on the island. We ate our lunches in the garden, defending our plates from raiding parties of the local birdlife, and among the food consumed (by the humans) were the best crab sandwiches of the week.

The rather cloudy start to the day had improved into a sunny afternoon and while Desmond and Deborah returned into town for a Museum visit the rest of the group joined me for an afternoon walk to Porth Hellick Nature Reserve via Carreg Dhu Community garden. This delightful little garden is a tranquil spot to spend a little time and as we sat enjoying the ambience, families of recently fledged Song Thrushes and Blackbirds were hopping around at our feet being taught the noble art of scrounging tit-bits by their parents, although with us they were having to learn the harder lesson of being disappointed! Moving on to Porth Hellick we listened to Reed and Sedge Warblers and saw plenty of hirundines over the pool but there was nothing unexpected and we drifted back to town, some of us catching the Community bus to rest our weary feet!

## Day 5

Wednesday 13th May

It was back to Peninnis for the pre-breakfast walk which produced a 'new' Whitethroat, along with a single Chiffchaff and Cuckoo. On the return the immature Great Northern Diver was swimming close inshore off Porthcressa beach breakfasting on small crabs, the collection of which entailed long periods underwater. Today's island visit was to St Agnes. This is my favourite island, and in my biased opinion never disappoints, but nevertheless I was glad of reasonable conditions to show it off. Twenty minutes after leaving Hughtown we stepped ashore on the recently renovated Porth Conger quay and began our exploration of this small island by following an anti-clockwise route around the northern coastline. We were one person short as Tricia had gone on another boat which took in Annet for Puffins before dropping passengers off on St Agnes and we planned to meet up for lunch.

Scanning the expanse of seaweed and rocks exposed by the retreating tide in Porth Killier Bay we found that the tideline ribbon of decomposing seaweed was providing insect prey for Rock Pipits and one or two Wheatears as well as such residents as Song Thrush, Blackbird, Robin & Wren.

A small flock of about ten Turnstone, with some in handsome summer plumage were also finding plenty to eat among the weedy rocks and several Whimbrel frequented the beach.

Our studies were interrupted at this point by a telephone message from a friend of mine who had travelled across to look for a Red-throated Pipit seen the previous day and called to confirm that this rare visitor was providing good views at Browarth Point, just a short walk from where we were standing. With a degree of urgency we headed in that direction and a few minutes later were enjoying spectacular telescope views of the summer plumaged pipit as it posed to preen for a while then began foraging through the grasses. It was a lovely little bird and we were grateful to my friend Barry for giving me the news. To avoid disturbing the pipit we retraced our steps to Porth Killier, passing numbers of Swallows and a few House Martins settling on vegetation at the edge of the sea.

Back on the footpath we continued our walk but failed to locate a Lapland Bunting which had also been seen earlier. Crossing the chamomile-scented cricket pitch we briefly checked Periglis beach for waders then skirted the island church and made our way past the camp site which provides occupants with some pretty impressive views as they emerge from their tents each morning. At Troytown Farm, which now supplies milk, dairy products, meat and even ice-cream by way of diversification, we paused to sample a cornet or two before eventually arriving at the wild western extremity of the island characterised by a chaos of granite boulders scattered randomly over the landscape, ranging in size from modest rocks to great monoliths towering twenty or thirty metres above the gorse and bracken. Out to the west, the jumble of uninhabited rocky islands known as the Western Isles, stretched away towards the isolated white finger of the Bishop Rock lighthouse, surely one of the loneliest of postings in the days when the light was manned.

We continued to follow the cliff path, stopping en route to look at the often pictured Troytown maze (labrynth) and more song-fighting Rock Pipits, before rejoining the one concrete road on the island near the historic old lighthouse which is a distinctive feature of St Agnes. Some say that all roads lead to a pub and so it is with the St Agnes A1 which runs through the centre of the island to the quay conveniently leading us to lunch in the Turk's Head. The island hostelry was as busy as ever and although pasties were off the menu today there were plenty of alternatives on offer as we celebrated a triumphant morning. The Santa Maria chef and waitress were among the customers enjoying lunch but unfortunately we had missed Tricia and did not see her again until later in the day.

The onset of rain persuaded a lot of visitors to catch the 1430 return boat but after the meal we ignored the weather and ventured onto Wingletang Downs, the gorse and heather moorland leading to Horse Point, the southern most extremity of the archipelago. Fortunately the shower soon passed over and we had a rain-free walk. A Sedge Warbler singing from bracken near the track to Gugh Bar was undoubtedly a migrant but apart from a number of Wheatears and a lone Spotted Flycatcher on St Werna's cove beach, we did not see many other summer visitors. On Wingletang Downs the scenery becomes even more dramatic with further scatterings of granite boulders and huge outcrops which have been eroded into fantastic shapes. Numerous yellow Grass Eggar caterpillars at the sides of the path were tempting fare for any passing Cuckoo but these most impressive of summer visitors were evidently in short supply again this spring and whereas three or four would normally be a regular May total on Wingletang, the familiar call was not heard today. Earlier however we did hear one near the Lighthouse so our day was not entirely devoid of this archetypal summer sound.

Other birds seen during the afternoon included Razorbills off Gugh, a pair of Common Terns and a Pied Wagtail, the first of the week. Also of interest was a Kittiwake nesting on the below cliffs below the Turk's Head. A small colony on the east side of Gugh has slowly dwindled over the years so it would be good if these elegant gulls could establish themselves close to the pub garden!

Later, we heard about Tricia's day which also included seeing the Red-throated Pipit as well as Puffins on Annet so everyone had been successful on this most pleasant of islands. The Santa Maria does not serve an evening meal on Wednesdays and this gave us the opportunity to eat out in Hughtown. Our venue was the Pilot's Gig near the harbour, a fine restaurant owned by Scillonian birder, and one of the best bird photographers in Britain, Bryan Thomas. A convivial time was had by all and it was an opportunity for us to discuss the week's sightings.

## Day 6

Thursday 14th May

A wet and breezy start to the day encouraged us to stay on St. Mary's which later turned out to be a fortuitous decision. To begin with, a damp walk around the Garrison was not terribly productive although a calling Cuckoo led us a chase through the camp site and the immature Great Northern Diver was again in Porthcressa Bay. At 10am we joined a throng of passengers catching the community bus and alighted at the top of Pelistry Lane. From here we walked down to the sea and followed the footpath around the coastline towards Porth Hellick. The damp, murky morning contrasted with the sunshine of previous days and ensured wet legs as we brushed against the luxuriant vegetation beside the path. As we arrived, a flock of about a dozen Turnstone flew off Pelistry beach and at least two Grey Seals were in the bay.

The previous evening several Red-rumped Swallows and a Great Reed Warbler had been found at Porth Hellick pool so our expectations were high as we finally climbed over the downs and dropped down to the reed fringed pool. A lot of hirundines were swooping over the water but they all appeared to be either Swallows or House Martins and whilst plenty of Reed and Sedge Warblers were singing we had no luck in either seeing or hearing their bigger relative. After this things improved beginning with an appearance by the Great Reed Warbler on the far side of the pool. At first it worked its way along the water's edge showing for periods of a minute or so as it clambered somewhat heavily through the reeds but later it came much nearer eventually posing in a clump of reed just a few metres in front of the hide. It was aptly described as a 'Reed Warbler on steroids' and certainly dwarfed its cousins. Next rarity for the day was one of the Red-rumped Swallows which we caught up with as it chased insects around the canopy of some pines and then later over the bushes near the pumping station. These two unusual visitors continued our run of good fortune but we also enjoyed the other Porth Hellick residents which included several pairs of Gadwall, families of Moorhens and my first ducklings of the year. A Cuckoo was calling nearby but failed to show itself.

Lunch beckoned so we made our way through the magnificent mature elms of Holy Vale to the Longstone Centre which is run by keen lepidopterist and birder Mick Scott. Many other visitors had the same idea but we managed to find tables and celebrated the morning rarities with a variety of lunch choices. Outside the restaurant a Lesser Whitethroat was roaming the garden bushes and trees but whilst we heard him singing his distinctive rattling song from cover we failed to obtain a decent view. As the afternoon weather improved we meandered our way back to Hugh Town pausing at the Lower Moors hides and noting the immature Iceland Gull once again loitering around the edge of the rubbish dump. It had been our worst day for weather but the best for unusual birds so I am sure no-one begrudged that balance!



## Day 7

Friday 15th May

A wet and windy start to the day obliged us to seek the shelter of the Lower Moors hides before breakfast but we saw little of note for our efforts.

With time running out we had to go to Bryher today to complete our quartet of inhabited islands. Fortunately the rainy conditions soon gave way to watery sunshine and it remained pleasant for the rest of our day on this small but charismatic island. After a brief detour to drop visitors on Tresco we landed on the main quay on Bryher, which like Porth Conger on St Agnes had benefited from renovation and repairs during the last year. Once ashore, we meandered to the north coast of the island via a brief stop to look around the church and morning coffee in the rather splendid Hell Bay Hotel. From here we followed the coastal path towards Shipman Head and looked out on a rather tranquil Hell Bay which at times of winter gales receives the full fury of huge breakers rolling in from the Atlantic. It was in a benign mood today and we were content to just admire the scenery without having to dodge the spray. A diversion across the moorland of Shipman Downs did not produce any Dotterel but we did spot a Peregrine gliding along the cliffs which the scattered group all managed to get on to. It is a feature of Bryher that every change of direction brings a new stunning vista into view and so it was that as we turned east to descend from the Downs we were afforded superb views of neighbouring Tresco and the island studded channel stretching away towards St Mary's.

We stopped for lunch at the Vine Café, a slightly less grand venue than the Hell Bay Hotel at the other end of the island but somewhat cheaper and always reliable for good wholesome food. The negative aspect is that the lady who runs the café does all the food preparation herself and this can make lunch a lengthy process as indeed it proved today as the miscellany of sandwiches, soup, chips etc were assembled in strict chronological order. After the last meal had been served, Desmond and Deborah elected to return to St Mary's on a 2.30pm boat while the rest of us took the coastal footpath around the base of Samson Hill. In the rough pasture area maintained by the Wildlife Trust for the preservation of the very rare Dwarf Pansy we resorted to a hands and knees forensic search of the area but felt we deserved rather more than an abundance of rabbit droppings! Fortunately Will Wagstaff had given us a sketch map of where he had seen flowers a few days earlier and our sharp-eyed lady botanists eventually discovered at least two of these diminutive little pansies beside the path. To describe Dwarf Pansies as a small plant is to understate the miniature delicacy of these flowers which really do require a magnifying glass or inverted binoculars to appreciate the characteristic pansy 'faces'.

From here we continued to file around the coastline with the bracken and gorse covered Samson Hill to our left. As so often on Scilly, the walk revealed more stunning vistas of the islands, this time the twin peaks of Samson, the more distant islets of the northern rocks and to the east, the long sandy coastline of Tresco. As the tide receded numerous sandy islets were exposed between islands and large flocks of gulls congregated on these flats along with noisy Oystercatchers which always contribute so much to the atmosphere of a spring day on Scilly.

We arrived back at the main settlement about 40 minutes before the departure time for the last boat to St Mary's but a chance encounter with a birdwatcher we had spoken to earlier in the day put paid to a leisurely wait on the beach. A Woodchat Shrike had been frequenting the camp site area of the island for several days at the beginning of the week but as far as we knew had not been seen since Wednesday. To our surprise the birdwatcher casually mentioned that he had seen the bird again just a few hours earlier and offered to lead us to where he had seen it.

Some of the party elected to relax until the boat arrived but a few of us set off at a brisk pace to try and see the shrike. Fortunately it was exactly where our new friend had left it and with the minutes remorselessly ticking away we enjoyed telescope views of this handsome bird as it used fence posts and bushes as vantage points to swoop down and capture prey from the grasses below. We returned to the quay at a bit of a canter but got back in plenty of time. We had enjoyed the opportunity to explore this small but picturesque north-western island which is well known to many people as the setting for the popular cinema film 'When the Whales Came'. Sadly no whales today, but we had seen Dwarf Pansy and a Woodchat Shrike and some of the group voiced the opinion that Bryher had overtaken St Agnes to become their favourite of the five islands. Friday night is the night for gig racing and after an early dinner most of the group went to watch this weekly contest between inter-island crews which is usually the prelude to a serious drinking session in the pubs.

## Day 8

Saturday 16th May

Our final day, and with the boat not sailing until 1630 it was a chance for almost a full day on St Mary's. Some of the group occupied the morning with shopping or a visit to the excellent museum but most of us travelled back to Porth Hellick for a last look at the pool. Sadly we managed to miss the Red-rumped Swallows which had been seen earlier in the morning but we did manage one addition to our holiday list as a Hobby made several brief appearances dashing over the pines.

We had lunch again at the Longstone Centre then slowly made our way back to Hugh town. Eventually it was time to board the Scillonian and watch the islands recede into the distance as we sailed back to Penzance. Thanks to the recent winds the sea was unseasonably rough, indeed at one point earlier in the day it was rumoured that the Scillonian might be cancelled, but fortunately for us the return sailing is generally more comfortable than the outward and thus it proved today. Despite the impressive waves we survived the crossing without any illness and were rewarded by seeing plenty of Manx Shearwaters along the Cornish coast and in Mount's Bay.

It had been an interesting and varied week with a good scattering of unusual birds as well as all the usual delights that make Scilly so special. I hope everyone enjoyed the trip as much as I did and maybe our paths will cross again on a future occasion.

## Receive our e-newsletter

Join the Naturetrek e-mailing list and be the first to hear about new tours, additional departures and new dates, tour reports and special offers. Visit [www.naturetrek.co.uk](http://www.naturetrek.co.uk) to sign up.

## Naturetrek Facebook

We are delighted to launch the Naturetrek Facebook page so that participants of Naturetrek tours can remain in touch after the holiday and share photos, comments and future travel plans.

Setting up a personal profile at [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com) is quick, free and easy. The [Naturetrek Facebook page](#) is now live; do please pay us a visit!

## Species Lists

### Birds

	Common Name	Scientific Name	Location
1	Great Northern Diver	<i>Gavia immer</i>	One Porthcressa Bay on 3 days
2	Fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>	Numbers during crossings and a few nesting around islands
3	Manx Shearwater	<i>Puffinus puffinus</i>	c50+ on crossings, a few off St Agnes
4	Gannet	<i>Sula bassanus</i>	Common on crossing and a few around islands
5	Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	Nesting Eastern Isles, small numbers elsewhere
6	Shag	<i>P. aristotelis</i>	Common around islands, rafts of several hundred
7	Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	One or two around St Mary's & coast
8	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	c.10 Tresco
9	Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	Five or six Tresco
10	Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	Up to 10, mostly in pairs around coastlines
11	Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>	Tresco, Porth Hellick, Lower Moors & St Agnes
12	Mallard	<i>A. platyrhynchos</i>	A few on each island, many Tresco
13	Wigeon	<i>A. penelope</i>	One Tresco
14	(Pintail	<i>A. acuta</i>	Pair Tresco but of dubious origin)
15	Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	Female Lower Moors and Tresco 11th with second female/immature Tresco same day
16	Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	Possibly 3 St Martin's/St Mary's
17	Hobby	<i>F. subbuteo</i>	One Porth Hellick
18	Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	Tresco & St Mary's
19	Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	Pairs on most island pools
20	Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	Tresco & Porth Hellick
21	Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	Common around coastlines
22	Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	Porth Hellick beach & St Agnes
23	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	Singles St Agnes & St Mary's
24	Sanderling	<i>C. alba</i>	c.10 St Martin's
25	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	Two Great Pool Tresco 11th
26	Whimbrel	<i>N. phaeopus</i>	Up to half a dozen daily, seen on most islands
27	Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>	10+ Pelistry St Mary's, 10+ St Agnes
28	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	Common and widespread
29	Herring Gull	<i>L. argentatus</i>	Common and widespread
30	Great Black-backed Gull	<i>L. marinus</i>	Locally common
31	Iceland Gull	<i>L. glaucooides</i>	Immature seen on 3 days
32	Mediterranean Gull	<i>L. melanocephalus</i>	Immature Watermill Cove 12th
33	(Black-headed Gull	<i>L. ridibundus</i>	2-3 immatures Abbey Pool Tresco on 11th -seen only by PAD)
34	Kittiwake	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>	A number during crossings and also around islands
35	Sandwich Tern	<i>Sterna sandvicensis</i>	Singles St Martin's
36	Common Tern	<i>S. hirundo</i>	Just a few around islands, mostly off Tresco & St Agnes
37	Guillemot	<i>Uria aalge</i>	Plentiful on crossing but just a few around islands
38	Razorbill	<i>Alca torda</i>	Small numbers around islands, especially Eastern Isles
39	Puffin	<i>Fratercula arctica</i>	c20 around Annet seen from boat by Tricia
40	Woodpigeon	<i>C. palumbus</i>	Common and widespread
41	Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	Seen in small numbers most days and on all islands
42	Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>	Decline continues with only 2-3 St Mary's, one St Agnes
43	Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	Garrison, St Martin's (10+) & Tresco
44	Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	Seen daily but only in generally small numbers although influxes recorded on several days and passage evident throughout week.
45	Red-rumped Swallow	<i>H. daurica</i>	One Porth Hellick St Mary's 14th
46	House Martin	<i>Delichon urbica</i>	Up to 20-30 birds per day seen with visible movements over St Martin's & St Agnes.
47	Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	20+ Tresco 11th, c10+ Porth Hellick

Common Name	Scientific Name	Location
48 Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	Nesting Peninnis Head
49 Red-throated Pipit	<i>A. cervinus</i>	One in summer Plumage St Agnes 13th
50 Rock Pipit	<i>A. petrosus</i>	Distributed around coasts in small numbers
51 Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>	One Lower Moors 11th
52 Pied Wagtail	<i>M. alba</i>	One St Agnes & one St Mary's
53 Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	Very common
54 Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	Common throughout
55 Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	Common
56 Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquatus</i>	Pairs and families seen at a number of gorse sites
57 Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	Seen daily- up to 20+ birds on best days
58 Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	Very common
59 Song Thrush	<i>T. philomelos</i>	Very common
60 Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>	One St Agnes, a few heard & seen Lower Moors, Porth Hellick & Tresco
61 Reed Warbler	<i>A. scirpaceus</i>	Heard Lower Moors, Tresco & P Hellick
62 Great Reed Warbler	<i>A. Arundinaceous</i>	One Porth Hellick St Mary's 14th
63 Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>	Singles on four days
64 (Lesser Whitethroat	<i>S. curruca</i>	Heard singing Longstone Centre)
65 Blackcap	<i>S. atricapilla</i>	Heard Tresco & several places St Mary's, also St Agnes
66 Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	A few seen and heard around islands
67 Willow Warbler	<i>P. trochilus</i>	Heard St Agnes & St Mary's
68 Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>	A number heard Tresco
69 Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>	Possibly 3 St Agnes and 1 Bryher
70 Blue Tit	<i>Parus caeruleus</i>	One or two seen during week
71 Great Tit	<i>P. major</i>	Several seen and heard during week
72 Woodchat Shrike	<i>Lanius senator</i>	One Bryher 15th.
73 Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>	Two, St Mary's 10th & 11th
74 Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	A few most days
75 Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	Common
76 House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	Common
77 Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	Small numbers St Mary's & Tresco
78 Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>	Fairly plentiful
79 Goldfinch	<i>C. carduelis</i>	Encountered fairly frequently
80 Linnet	<i>C. cannabina</i>	Numerous everywhere
81 (Lesser Redpoll	<i>Acanthis flammea</i>	One heard Porth Hellick )

## Mammals

Grey Seal	40+ Eastern Isles, a few around other islands
Rabbit	Common
White-toothed Shrew	One seen by some of party on 11 <sup>th</sup>
Brown Rat	St Mary's

## Butterflies

Holly Blue	Common Blue	Red Admiral
Speckled Wood	Small Copper	Large White
Comma (Tresco)	Painted Lady	

## Other taxa

Grass Eggar caterpillar	Oil Beetle	Grey Bush Cricket nymph
-------------------------	------------	-------------------------