

# Isles of Scilly

Naturetrek Tour Report

7 - 14 May 2011



Grey Seal by Colin Brown



Common Snipe by Colin Brown



Razorbills by Colin Brown



St Martins Day Mark by Val Hall

Report compiled by Paul Dukes  
Images courtesy of Colin Brown and Val Hall



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## Day 1

Saturday 7th May

After travelling to Penzance from various parts of the country (and Tasmania in the case of the Morgans!) most of the Naturetrek group made their way to the Lighthouse pier bright and early to board the Scillonian 111 ferry. It was a wet and murky spring morning with poor visibility which represented no problem great for the steamship but threatened to delay the journey of the Poulters who had opted to travel to Scilly by air. 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 the cliffs were still shrouded in mist which however soon began to clear. A lively flock of Turnstones on the Lighthouse Pier included several in summer plumage bound for Arctic nesting sites, and another north-bound migrant was the lone Great Northern Diver seen distantly on the sea as we passed Newlyn. As the sailing progressed, Gannets were plentiful out to sea, and occasionally entertained us by diving close to the vessel, small numbers of Guillemots sped by and we were joined from time to time by Fulmars heading purposefully into the distance. Quite a few Manx Shearwaters appeared as we drew opposite the Bishop Rock lighthouse and birds continued to be seen at regular intervals for most of the remaining journey although many were quite a long way from the boat. Apart from a few Kittiwakes and the usual common trio of gulls (Herring, Lesser Black-back and Greater Black-back) not much else was seen on the crossing although one possible Pomarine Skua briefly crossed our line of vision while we were scanning a distant fishing boat but chose to vanish towards the mainland instead of heading our way.

Eventually the Eastern Isles came into view with the distinctive red and white day-mark on St Martin's prominent behind the cluster of islands. Visibility had greatly improved and fittingly the sun was valiantly trying to shine as the Scillonian docked at St Mary's. Making our way through throngs of people at the harbourside 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 3.15pm to take an afternoon walk around the Garrison headland.

We were joined by Bruce and Diana who had safely made it over by helicopter and Diana soon assumed the much valued role of botanical recorder for the week ably assisted by the other interested members of the group. 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. Blackcaps and Chiffchaff singing in the first stands of elms gave a slightly misleading impression as thereafter we found few migrants apart from reasonable numbers of Swallows and one or two House Martins. We soon however encountered the first of many Linnets which proved to be abundant everywhere we went. Some other typical Scilly residents also introduced themselves during the walk; the absurdly tame abundant 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. Wrens were also much in evidence with their loud songs resounding on every side even when we couldn't see the singer! 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! Another summer plumaged Great Northern Diver was cruising offshore as were a few Shags to give a size comparison. The resident albino Blackbird made a brief, and slightly confusing appearance among the gorse and at the other end of the colour spectrum, several black Rabbits were observed in the open spaces, a common colour morph at places on St Mary's and particularly the Garrison. It is said that they were imported from Samson but black rabbits do occur among island populations at a number of sites around the UK and are by no means peculiar to Scilly. Whatever their origin, they were somehow christened 'the black rabbits of doom' by our group and that became their appellation for the week!

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.

We paused first 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.

A pleasant walk finished back in Hughtown with just enough time to allow us to freshen up before dinner. Rather to my surprise we had not seen the usual Stonechats in the gorse or heard a Cuckoo but the former may have been affected by the very cold winter snap in December and the latter is sadly just getting rarer with each successive spring.

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 8th May

A pattern for the week was established as I set out at 0615 to walk around Peninnis Head in a pre-breakfast search for migrant birds. On this first morning I was accompanied by almost half the group and enthusiasm continued through the week with Val and David joining every one of these early forays. Four Whimbrel on Porthcressa beach made a good start, and posed nicely for photographs, but the rest of the walk failed to turn up very many birds apart from singing Rock Pipits and Linnets although it did develop in us a hearty appetite for breakfast. Helping to satisfy this hunger was the guest house waitress Michaela from Slovakia who made it her mission each day to keep her charges in the dining room supplied with a constant flow of hot food, drinks and toast which she distributed with great alacrity and the odd riposte which indicated a good understanding of British humour! Although the weather was chiefly sunny following an overcast and showery beginning to the day, it continued to be windy and rather than heading to an off-island I thought it better to spend the day exploring the interior and south coast of St Mary's. Our walk took us along Rocky Hill to Holy Vale then down the Porth Hellick Nature Trail finally following the coastal footpath beside the airfield to Old Town where we paused for lunch at the Tolman's Café.

At Holy Vale we heard Blackcaps and Chiffchaffs singing in the canopy as we walked along the nature trail through a belt of mature Elms already well in leaf. In sheltered spots a few Holly Blue butterflies were active and one or two Red Admirals also basked in the sunshine. Thick stands of Hemlock Water Dropwort filled the marshy ground beside the narrow footpath which threaded its way along the valley on a raised embankment, our progress slowed by having to negotiate around the roots and trunks of various trees growing from the trail. Eventually we reached the Lower Moors Nature Trail and passing great mounds of Tussock Grass made our way to the Sussex hide looking out onto Porth Hellick Pool. A few Reed Warblers could be heard singing from the reed bed but the wind was still very strong and clearly inhibiting song. Apart from a few Gadwalls there was not a lot to be seen from the hide, so we continued along to the beach where a scan of the mud exposed by the retreating tide revealed at least one Greenshank and several more Whimbrel. We also noted a single Sand Martin flying with the Swallows and House Martins hawking insects over the bushes at the beach end of Porth Hellick. With lunch time approaching we made our way along the coastal footpath towards Old Town, skirting around the end of the airport runway which being a Sunday was not in use. A Small Copper butterfly landed on the footpath ahead of us and several Wheatears braved the wind on the airport.

Tolman's provided a nice variety of food to suit all appetites and as an additional treat there was a fine array of cakes or Roskilly's ice cream to finish the meal. Afterwards we meandered to nearby Old Town churchyard to see Harold Wilson's grave then entered the Lower Moors Nature Trail where we spent a little time looking out of the hides. A very close Common Snipe was sitting on the mud and a few ducks dabbling in the shallows but once again the wind curbed warbler song and all we heard were a few subdued notes from Reed Warblers hidden from view. At length we decided to drift back to Hughtown at the end of a very pleasant but unspectacular day on St Mary's.

## Day 3

Monday 9th May

The pre-breakfast venue today was the Garrison Walk which enabled the participants an extra 15 minutes in bed! At 0630 we set off around the walk diverting this time to check the belt of pine trees surrounding the camp site.

Once again we were welcomed by a veritable army of black Rabbits and the particular form of doom they had in store for us came in the form of a heavy shower, the only rain of the day! A singing Chiffchaff showed itself near the football pitch whilst several singing Blackcaps remained characteristically hidden. Linnets seemed particularly abundant this morning as did Song Thrushes and Blackbirds, which doubtless enjoyed the rain, but we drew a blank on migrants apart from the inevitable Swallows.

The forecast was for an improving day so we headed for Tresco on the 10am tripper boat. It was a popular destination and at least two other full boats followed when ours reached maximum capacity. Landing was at New Grimsby on the north of the island and from here we made our way to the top of the Great Pool for a brief scan before continuing to the famous Abbey Gardens. On the open water we noted Gadwall, Mallard, Shelduck, Coot and Mute Swans whilst Canada Geese lumbered about on the shore and two Greenshanks could just be seen at the waters edge. Reasonable numbers of Swallows together with a few House Martins and Swifts were hawking insects over the pool and later in the day we witnessed quite a concentration of hirundines over the shallows near the David Hunt hide. Tresco is sadly an island where shooting is a regular winter activity as evidenced by the numerous Pheasants and pairs of Red-legged Partridge which scuttle around the edges of fields unaware of the eventual grim reckoning for the free meals provided by widespread grain dispensers. Several Golden Pheasants also benefit from the seed but they are at least spared the guns and kept for decorative purposes. We heard one calling from thick cover as we continued our walk towards the Abbey and later a splendid male posed for photographers in the Gardens. The inevitable Blackcaps and Chiffchaffs were also heard singing and once or twice a Goldcrest was audible but not seen.

Everyone opted to spend the remainder of the morning taking a look inside the Gardens which on this fine sunny day were filled with visitors. We met again in the restaurant garden at lunchtime and defending our purchases from marauding Thrushes, Chaffinches and Blackbirds, compared accounts on the highlights of the unique collection of plants. The male Golden Pheasant seemed to win many admirers and caused yet more excitement when it wandered into the eating area to see what might be on offer. At length we left the gardens behind and set off on a circuit of the Great Pool pausing to birdwatch along the way. Highlight was probably the displaying Common Buzzard which entertained us by spectacular aerial dives as it circled over the trees. Ten years ago Common Buzzard was a real misnomer on Scilly where Britain's most numerous raptor was only an occasional visitor but in recent times at least one bird has been resident on the islands and this year the appearance of a second individual has raised hopes of breeding. We only saw the presumed male carrying out his display and were suitably impressed but I am sure the Scillonian rabbits, black or brown, would view the potential colonization less favourably! A few Reed Warblers could be heard in the reed beds but once again the strong wind reduced our chances of watching warblers or any other small birds. It was however quite warm in sheltered corners and we did observe several Holly Blue butterflies along with Speckled Woods and one or two Red Admirals. After completing the circuit we made our way to the southern quay at Carnear where the tripper boat collected us for a 1645 return to St Mary's.

## Day 4

Tuesday 10th May

It was back to Peninnis Head on the dawn patrol and in much calmer conditions we found a few Wheatears on the headland after starting the walk with an immature Grey Heron and two Grey Seals in Porthcressa Bay. At least two Razorbills were also visible on the sea.

The smoother seas invited a crossing to St Agnes, perhaps the most exposed island in the archipelago. St Agnes 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 St Agnes and began our exploration of this small island by following an anti-clockwise route around the northern coastline. 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 other residents such as Song Thrush, Blackbird, Robin and Wren. Three Turnstone in handsome summer plumage, and two more Whimbrel were also finding plenty to eat among the weedy rocks. Continuing past the small freshwater pool, which today was covered with bathing and preening gulls, we inhaled the scent of camomile from the short turf around the cricket pitch and some in the group had glimpses of a fast flying Peregrine before it vanished from view. There were many other sights to enjoy; scores, or maybe hundreds of Shags in a typical tightly packed feeding flock, Oystercatchers noisily bickering with each other and numerous Linnets wherever we looked.

We slowly followed the coast past the picturesque island church and skirting what can claim to be one of the most spectacularly sited camp sites in Cornwall, and called at Troytown Farm, which now supplies milk, dairy products, meat and even ice-cream by way of diversification and in this capacity ensured we all had multi-flavoured ice creams to cool us down. After this break we soon arrived 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. As we lay in the grass looking out towards the seabird island of Annet, covered by carpets of pink thrift, we saw plenty of seabird activity but no sign of the nesting Puffins.

We continued to follow the cliff path, stopping en route to look at the often pictured Troytown maze (labyrinth) 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. En route we had good views of a Turtle Dove in a field near the Nag's Head rock, a new species for the week and these days a very scarce bird on passage. 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 very pleasant morning walk. Instead of the usual thrushes and Blackbirds, an adult Herring Gull was eager to devour any scraps from our table and swallowed an impressive amount of food.

After the meal we ventured onto Wingletang Downs, the gorse and heather moorland leading to Horse Point, the southern most extremity of the archipelago. Here 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 sadly these most impressive of summer visitors were evidently in short supply this spring and whereas three or four would normally be a regular May total on Wingletang, the familiar call was not heard today. I have never seen so many Eggar caterpillars and in total we must have seen hundreds varying in size from very small to enormous. Whether the abundance is due to the unusually warm early spring or the lack of predation is difficult to determine but if they survive there should be an awful lot of moths on Wingletang later in the summer.

Birds seen during the afternoon included another sighting of perhaps the same Turtle Dove at Covean, a few Wheatears, an obliging Ringed Plover and the first Meadow Pipit of the week. A few more Small Coppers added their colour to the downs and we were pleased to find a Green Tiger Beetle which had apparently just emerged from a hole at the edge of a path. These ferocious little beetles are often to be seen on sunny days in areas of coastal turf but had been observing a low profile during the recent windy conditions. Another insect found during our walk was a beautifully glossy Rose Chafer on grasses near Covean Bay and butterflies were represented by Holly Blue, Small Copper and Speckled Wood.

Back at the quay for our return boat there was time to telescope the nesting pairs of Kittiwake which have built their nest on a low cliff near the Turk's Head pub after deserting their former stronghold on Gugh. After the initial nest in 2010 two pairs are present this year and it would be great if a small colony can be established here to add their evocative voices for the enjoyment of diners outside the pub.

## Day 5

## Wednesday 11th May

A calm and sunny day began with another pre-breakfast look at the Garrison but nothing new was observed. 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 commentary provided by the skipper, we dropped off day visitors to St Martin's then 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 20+ animals in total, mostly bobbing around in the water around 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 on the quay at Higher Town. Not all the birds seen were seabirds and our Eastern Isles tally also included a lone Peregrine perched high on a crag. We also headed out to sea at a steady rate after concluding the island tour but my hopes of an interesting seabird or even a Basking Shark were dashed when the diversion turned out to be for the purpose of viewing a very old schooner (?) which we duly circled before speeding back to St. Martin's. A few weeks later I heard on the local news that an old ship had run aground off Bryher but I do not know whether it was the same vessel. Also of note during the Eastern Isles trip was a strange cloud formation filtering the light from the sun which gave the appearance of a large poached egg in the sky. It was rather eerie and prompted mention of the Black Rabbits of Doom.

Back on terra firma we made our way around the eastern extremity of the island taking in fine views of the Eastern Isles from the land. Birds were none too plentiful but we enjoyed the walk and an increasingly warm morning brought out a number of Small Coppers to add their colour to the short turf beside the paths. A Raven 'cronked' its way towards the north of the island and one or two Kestrels also put in an appearance as we looked out towards the Cornish mainland clearly visible in the distance. We decided not to divert to the Daymark and skirting Little Arthur Farm returned to Highertown across the fields adding several Speckled Wood and Red Admiral to the day's butterfly list.

A hearty lunch was eaten at the Polreath café in Higher Town, a regular venue for Naturetrek groups where the sheltered garden offers a fine location to relax amid a wealth of proteas, echiums and other exotic plants. After the meal we headed towards the western end of the island where the settlement of Lowertown and the St Martin's Hotel are situated. In pleasant sunshine we made our way from the cultivated southern side of the island 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 right and fields to the left. The scenery was magnificent as we looked down over the white sands and azure sea of Great Bay towards White Island in the distance. An immature Great Northern Diver was cruising in the shallow waters of the bay but there were few people on the pristine beach to observe its progress. Later on the walk 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, the inevitable Linnets we saw few birds but this was a day to just enjoy the island and birds were almost secondary.

At Lowertown we paused for refreshments at the rather excellent Island Hotel before catching the 1645 return boat to St Mary's at the end of another excellent day. It was about this stage in the week when I was introduced by Pat to a new category of creature, namely the 'runny-roundy' a term which applies to all free range farm animals but was soon enthusiastically used by tour members to describe a wide range of creatures. Thanks to Pat whenever I see the description 'free-range' in future it will immediately be transformed to 'runny-roundy' in my head!

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 12th May

The 'dawn patrol' today took us to Lower Moors where several Reed Warblers obliged with views on a calm morning and a second Snipe was sitting alongside the original bird in front of the hide. A recently deceased White-toothed Shrew was also found on the boardwalk and this was to be our only encounter with this island speciality. A runny-roundy individual would have been a nice find!

The main destination for later was the pretty little island of Bryher. Landing at the low-water Aneka Rice Quay we made our way along the shoreline opposite Cromwell's Castle on Tresco and made the fairly steep ascent to Shipman Head Downs, one of the few uphill stretches of footpath in the tour. A summer plumage Golden Plover was our reward for the effort and fine coastal views out into Hell Bay from the cliff-top trail. The ocean was looking fairly benign on this spring morning but it can certainly live up to its name in winter as Atlantic waves crash ashore. A few Wheatears were noted on the downs but few other migrants apart from the almost constant movement of Swallows over the island along with smaller numbers of House Martins. From the rugged grandeur of Hell Bay we made our way to the sheltered heart of the island and retreated for a very civilized refreshment break in the gardens of the splendid Hell Bay Hotel which despite its name is some distance from that stretch of coast.



En route we passed several examples of a rather annoying practice among Scillonian holidaymakers of placing stones from the beach one on top of another. Quite why these rock piles are so popular is a mystery to me but we took pleasure in restoring a few to a more natural appearance by the application of boots.

Next venue was the short turf and grasses of Rushy Bay where habitat has been created for the rare Dwarf Pansy, a species found only on Bryher. This minute plant is always extremely hard to find even when carrying out a forensic search on hands and knees but today our ace botanists soon located a couple of flowers beside the track and these were duly photographed. Viewing the ground at such close range also produced tiny Grey Bush Cricket nymphs which would otherwise have escaped detection... A clump of Sea Holly nearby was another reward for our efforts.

From Rushy Bay 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 temporary refuges. A couple of Wheatears were spotted on the hillside above whilst three or four female Oil beetles were encountered lumbering about on the path.

After returning home I happened to hear a programme about Oil beetles on the radio and having been hitherto ignorant about their extraordinary life-cycle I will digress to give a short account. The female beetle prepares a small pit in the ground into which she lays a large number of eggs. These eventually hatch into tiny larvae which immediately make their way to congregate around the flower head of the nearest convenient Celandine. The larvae have a grasping hook on their legs and these are used to attach themselves to bees visiting the flower but what they are seeking is a particular species of Solitary Bee so the majority are carried away on other hosts and are doomed to perish. The lucky few which find the correct species are taken back to the nest chamber where they perform a Cuckoo act on the rightful occupants and develop into adult beetles to emerge and repeat the process all over again. A very remarkable life story for these slow-moving and rather dopey looking insects!

We stopped for a late lunch at the Vine Café, a more modest establishment 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 but today we were lucky with our timing and the various orders were served fairly quickly. Having been forewarned some of the group had brought sandwiches from St Mary's but we all imbibed tea at the café and I had a delicious toastie! A little earlier we had seen three Jackdaws during the final stretch of the walk and it later transpired that this trio crossed to St Mary's shortly after we had observed them, a good illustration of the inter-island movements which are constantly taking place.

Time remained for a gentle stroll back to the quay to catch the 1645 boat to St Mary's. 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'. Later in the evening some of the group joined Will Wagstaff's 'Shearwater Special' to the waters around Annet where a few Manx Shearwaters were seen at dusk and also a few Puffins, the Scilly Isles icon.

## Day 7

Friday 13th May

The penultimate pre-breakfast walk took us back to Peninnis Head where 3 or 4 Wheatears were seen and a Kestrel but the star of the walk was a near summer plumage Great Northern Diver swimming in Porthcressa Bay.

After breakfast we boarded the rickety old Community Bus outside the Town Hall and travelled to the north end of the island at the start of another day on St Mary's. This service is a real boon to visitors, departing at set times from Hughtown and following a circular route around the island for a very reasonable maximum fare of £1.50. We alighted via the string-operated hi-tech door at Holy Vale and walked down to Watermill Cove, a delightful little sheltered bay which affords access to the coastal footpath. Chiffchaffs were singing from the avenue of mature Elms along the lane and we had brief but good views of two Cuckoos involved in some dispute along a stone wall bordering a field. Mention has been made earlier to the tragic decline of Cuckoos on Scilly so it was particularly pleasing to finally see these enigmatic birds. At Innisidgen we paused to inspect the 2,000 year old burial chambers and tried to imagine what life must have been like in those far distant times but concluded that the cafes were probably better in present day Scilly. A few Razorbills were bobbing on the sea and birds along the rocky shoreline included Shelducks, Oystercatchers and Shags. Moving around the coastline we visited another archaeological site at Bant Carn ancient village, where a singing Whitethroat added bird interest, then made our way beside the famous St Mary's Golf Course, once beloved by Harold Wilson, to Juliet's Garden café for lunch. Another Whitethroat was singing near the café and gave good views in a small pine. This superbly appointed establishment overlooking Hugh Town harbour is arguably the best of all the many eating places on Scilly and certainly the one with the finest outlook. It was pretty crowded but we enjoyed a typically excellent meal served with usual prompt efficiency.

An afternoon excursion took us to Carreg Dhu Community Garden, where an old quarry has been transformed by colourful flowers and exotic foliage into a place of tranquillity where visitors can enjoy the results of the hard work put in by the creators of the garden. From this peaceful setting we headed to Salakee Farm near Porth Hellick where several Golden Orioles had been reported recently but failed to connect with these retiring birds which had the advantage of thick Elm foliage to hide away in. Lots of hirundines were feeding over the adjacent fields including a number of House Martins among the Swallows. The group gradually began to disperse towards Hugh Town at this juncture and thus ended an energetic but enjoyable day in the field on the largest of the islands.

After the evening meal everyone went to Star Castle hill on the Garrison to witness the Friday evening men's gig race which took place between St Agnes and St Marys. This weekly event is appreciated by both locals and visitors and equally traditional was the post-race visit to one of Hugh Towns pubs to celebrate with a few drinks (or a few gallon in the case of the rowers)

## Day 8

Saturday 14th May

Our last day and by popular consensus we paid a visit to the Isles of Scilly Museum. In the space of a single display hall the visitor can travel from 2000BC to the present day and view a range of exhibits from each era. The museum also houses a collection of stuffed birds mostly originating from Tresco and including a number of species that would cause quite a stir if they turned up today.

After touring the museum, Bruce and Diana had to depart for the airfield to catch their return helicopter to Penzance whilst the rest of us meandered through the Lower Moors Nature Trail to have the last crab sandwich of the week in the Tolman's Café at Old Town.

A few hours later it was time to board the Scillonian and watch the islands recede into the distance as we sailed back to Penzance. It was somewhat clearer conditions than the outward journey and the various landmarks on the Cornish coast were easy to see as we headed towards Mounts Bay. Seabirds were sparse but 20-30 Manx Shearwaters were observed, most during the last hour of the sailing.

Once ashore, and through the chaos of luggage collection, we said our goodbyes and once again Alan and Margaret won the prize for the longest homeward journey; Tasmania via Manchester and the Channel Islands!

It had not been the most bird-filled weeks on Scilly, due mainly to the prevailing conditions but I hope everyone enjoyed the week as much as I did. Special thanks are due to Diana who contributed her botanical knowledge to each excursion.

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## Species Lists

### Birds

|                              |                              |  |
|------------------------------|------------------------------|--|
| 1. Great Northern Diver      | <i>Gavia immer</i>           | Singles from Scillonian 111, off Garrison, St Martin's and Porthcressa |
| 2. Fulmar                    | <i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>    | A few during crossings and around islands; nesting Eastern Isles       |
| 3. Manx Shearwater           | <i>Puffinus puffinus</i>     | Seen on both crossings, and some off Annet on evening trip             |
| 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>         | Up to 2 around St Mary's and one St Agnes                              |
| 8. Mute Swan                 | <i>Cygnus olor</i>           | 5-6 Tresco   |
| 9. Canada Goose              | <i>Branta Canadensis</i>     | Four plus Tresco   |
| 10. Shelduck                 | <i>Tadorna tadorna</i>       | Mostly in pairs around coastlines, total 16+                           |
| 11. Gadwall                  | <i>Anas strepera</i>         | Tresco, Porth Hellick, Lower Moors                                     |
| 12. Mallard                  | <i>A. platyrhynchos</i>      | A few on each island, many Tresco                                      |
| 13. Common Buzzard           | <i>Buteo buteo</i>           | One Tresco   |
| 14. Kestrel                  | <i>Falco tinnunculus</i>     | Eight singles seen but doubtless overlap on St Mary's                  |
| 15. Peregrine                | <i>F. peregrinus</i>         | One St Agnes one Eastern Isles   |
| 16. Pheasant                 | <i>Phasianus colchicus</i>   | Tresco & Garrison St Mary's  |
| 17. Golden Pheasant          | <i>Chrysolophus pictus</i>   | 2-3 males Tresco   |
| 18. Red-legged Partridge     | <i>Alectoris rufa</i>        | Introduced birds on Tresco)  |
| 19. Moorhen                  | <i>Gallinula chloropus</i>   | Pairs, some with young, on Tresco, St Agnes and St Mary's              |
| 20. Coot                     | <i>Fulica atra</i>           | Tresco, St Agnes and Porth Hellick.                                    |
| 21. Oystercatcher            | <i>Haematopus ostralegus</i> | Common around coastlines   |
| 22. Ringed Plover            | <i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>  | Singles St Agnes, Bryher & St Mary's                                   |
| 23. Golden Plover            | <i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>   | One summer plumage Bryher  |
| 24. Sanderling               | <i>Calidris alba</i>         | 15+ on rocks near St Martin's  |
| 25. Common Snipe             | <i>Gallinago gallinago</i>   | Two Lower Moors  |
| 26. Whimbrel                 | <i>Numenius. Phaeopus</i>    | Seen or heard most days in two's and threes, total 15+                 |
| 27. Greenshank               | <i>Tringa nebularia</i>      | One Porth Hellick, two Tresco  |
| 28. Turnstone                | <i>Arenaria interpres</i>    | 4+ St Agnes (12+ Penzance)   |
| 29. Lesser Black-backed Gull | <i>Larus fuscus</i>          | Common and widespread  |
| 30. Herring Gull             | <i>L. Argentatus</i>         | Common and widespread  |
| 31. Great Black-backed Gull  | <i>L. marinus</i>            | Locally common   |
| 32. Black-headed Gull        | <i>L. Ridibundus</i>         | immature Tresco  |
| 33. Kittiwake                | <i>Rissa tridactyla</i>      | A few during crossings and also around islands, 2 pairs St Agnes       |
| 34. Guillemot                | <i>Uria aalge</i>            | Plentiful on crossing but just a few around islands                    |
| 35. Razorbill                | <i>Alca torda</i>            | Small numbers around islands, especially Eastern Isles                 |
| 36. Puffin                   | <i>Fratercula arctica</i>    | One seen on Shearwater Special boat trip                               |
| 37. Woodpigeon               | <i>C. palumbus</i>           | Common and widespread  |
| 38. Collared Dove            | <i>Streptopelia decaocto</i> | Seen in small numbers most days and on all islands                     |
| 39. Turtle Dove              | <i>S. turtur</i>             | One, possibly two, St Agnes  |
| 40. Cuckoo                   | <i>Cuculus canorus</i>       | Two seen St Mary's, also heard a few times.                            |
| 41. Swift                    | <i>Apus apus</i>             | A few seen on six of the tour days but no significant numbers          |
| 42. Sand Martin              | <i>Riparia riparia</i>       | One Porth Hellick  |
| 43. Swallow                  | <i>Hirundo rustica</i>       | Seen daily but only in generally small numbers but                     |

|                   |                                |   |
|-------------------|--------------------------------|---|
| 44. House Martin  | <i>Delichon urbica</i>         | influx towards end of week<br>A few from Day 1 but distinct influx later in week when many among Swallows |
| 45. Meadow Pipit  | <i>Anthus pratensis</i>        | One Peninnis Head, 2-3 St Agnes   |
| 46. Rock Pipit    | <i>A. petrosus</i>             | Distributed around coasts in small numbers  |
| 47. Pied Wagtail  | <i>Motacilla alba</i>          | Singles on two days   |
| 48. Wren          | <i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i> | Very common   |
| 49. Dunnock       | <i>Prunella modularis</i>      | Common throughout   |
| 50. Robin         | <i>Erithacus rubecula</i>      | Common  |
| 51. Stonechat     | <i>Saxicola torquatus</i>      | Astonishingly scarce- one male glimpsed Tresco by PAD)  |
| 52. Wheatear      | <i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>       | Small numbers only, no more than 15-20 birds in total   |
| 53. Blackbird     | <i>Turdus merula</i>           | Very common   |
| 54. Song Thrush   | <i>T. philomelos</i>           | Very common   |
| 55. Reed Warbler  | <i>A. scirpaceus</i>           | Heard or seen Lower Moors, Tresco & P Hellick   |
| 56. Whitethroat   | <i>Sylvia communis</i>         | Three singing birds St Mary's   |
| 57. Blackcap      | <i>S. atricapilla</i>          | Heard Tresco & several places St Mary's, also St Agnes  |
| 58. Chiffchaff    | <i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>  | A few seen and heard around islands   |
| 59. Goldcrest     | <i>Regulus regulus</i>         | Several heard Tresco  |
| 60. Blue Tit      | <i>Parus caeruleus</i>         | A few seen during week  |
| 61. Great Tit     | <i>P. major</i>                | Several seen and heard during week  |
| 62. Jackdaw       | <i>Corvus monedula</i>         | Three Bryher were later reported St Mary's  |
| 63. Carrion Crow  | <i>C. corone</i>               | A few most days   |
| 64. Raven         | <i>C. corax</i>                | 1-2 St Martin's   |
| 65. Starling      | <i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>        | Common  |
| 66. House Sparrow | <i>Passer domesticus</i>       | Common  |
| 67. Chaffinch     | <i>Fringilla coelebs</i>       | Small numbers St Mary's & Tresco  |
| 68. Greenfinch    | <i>Carduelis chloris</i>       | Fairly plentiful  |
| 69. Goldfinch     | <i>C. carduelis</i>            | Encountered fairly frequently   |
| 70. Linnet        | <i>C. cannabina</i>            | Numerous  |

### Mammals

|                     |                              |   |
|---------------------|------------------------------|---|
| Grey Seal           | <i>Halichoerus grypus</i>    | 20+ Eastern Isles, a few around other islands |
| Rabbit              | <i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i> | Common  |
| White-toothed Shrew | <i>Crocidura suaveolens</i>  | One dead St Mary's Lower Moors                |
| Brown Rat           | <i>Rattus norvegicus</i>     |   |

### Other Taxa

|               |                         |                         |
|---------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| Holly Blue    | Red Admiral             | Speckled Wood           |
| Small Copper  | Large White             | Peacock                 |
| Cinnabar Moth | Grass Eggar caterpillar |                         |
| Oil Beetle    | Green Tiger Beetle      | Grey Bush Cricket nymph |
| Rose Chafer   |                         |                         |