

# Isles of Scilly

Naturetrek Tour Report

17 - 24 September 2011

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European Bee-eater



Rock Pipit



Scilly Scene



Solitary Sandpiper

Report compiled by Paul Dukes  
Images courtesy of Pauline Blewitt



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## Day 1

## Saturday 17th September

After travelling to Penzance from various parts of the country the Naturetrek group made their way to the Lighthouse pier bright and early to board the Scillonian 111 ferry. It was a windy and showery autumn morning but a distinct improvement on the preceding week which had witnessed gales and rough seas resulting in the cancellation of the service on one day.

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 the sea was a little rougher than some passengers would have wished. As the sailing progressed, Gannets were plentiful out to sea, and occasionally entertained us by diving close to the vessel, and we were joined from time to time by Fulmars heading purposefully into the distance. A few Manx Shearwaters appeared as we drew opposite the Wolf Rock lighthouse and continued to be seen at intervals for most of the remaining journey although most were quite a long way from the boat. Apart from the usual common duo of gulls (Herring and Greater Black-backed) not much else was seen on the crossing although having to shelter from several heavy showers did not help observations!

The Eastern Isles finally came into view with the distinctive red and white day-mark on St Martin's prominent behind the cluster of islands. The weather had greatly improved and fittingly the sun was valiantly trying to shine as the Scillonian docked at St Mary's. I saw several birding friends as we disembarked and they greeted me with the news of various rarities dotted around the islands which left a dilemma of which to look for later in the afternoon! Both a Northern Waterthrush and Black and White Warbler in the Lower Moors were evidently hard to observe which left a very confiding Solitary Sandpiper in the north of St Mary's as perhaps the best bet.

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 2:45pm and headed to the Town Hall where we caught the 3pm Community Bus to Maypole, within striking distance of a Sandpiper. The eccentricities of the rickety old coach kept us amused during the ten minute journey and I was pleased to see that neither vehicle nor driver had changed since my last visit in the spring. It will be a sad day if the makeshift string arrangement for opening the door is ever replaced!

A short walk to the Newford Duck Pond where the Sandpiper had been living was interrupted in delightful fashion by a European Bee-eater perched in a hedge near Watermill Lane and we gathered around a convenient gate to telescope this beautiful bird. It had been resident on the islands for many weeks but rarely predictable and today seemed intent on giving the best possible views remaining faithful to one almost bare sapling which it repeatedly returned to after a few desultory circuits of the field. Moving further along the lane we were able to watch it at even closer range and through the telescopes see every plumage detail. Elated by this bonus we continued to the duck pond, which contained very little water after a dry summer, but here our luck ran out and there was no sign of the Sandpiper although it had been present earlier.

In high spirits from the Bee-eater encounter, we meandered back to Hugh Town via the Telegraph and Golf Course, enjoying an introduction to some typical Scilly birds which included the first of many Linnets which proved to be abundant everywhere we went. Some other characteristic Scillonian 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 also Wrens were much in evidence with their loud songs resounding on every side even when we couldn't see the singer. At least four Wheatears were in a weedy field near the Telegraph and many Swallows were still hawking insects overhead.

After a tasty evening meal at the Pilot Gig restaurant 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 the islands and we wondered what surprises awaited us during the next few days.

## Day 2

## Sunday 18th September

A pattern for the week was established as I set out at 06:15 on a pre-breakfast walk accompanied by Tony and Sylvia. It was windy and overcast so we decided to investigate the Lower Moors Nature Trail rather than the rather more exposed Peninnis Head which is the usual venue for these walks. Some hopeful birders were in the Lower Moors hides waiting for a 7am appearance by the elusive Northern Waterthrush but it failed to appear at the appointed hour and there was really not much to see on the pools although we did hear a Kingfisher.

The walk did however develop a hearty appetite for breakfast and 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!

Having heard that the Solitary Sandpiper was back at Newford duck-pond we could not resist a second attempt and once again caught the Community bus to Maypole. Much to our surprise the Bee-eater was sat in exactly the same sapling and once again we paused to admire his beautiful bird before continuing a few hundred metres to the partially dry ponds.

This time it was a different script and the handsome little American Sandpiper was busily feeding on the exposed mud in the place it should have been yesterday afternoon. Showing no concern at the little group of observers it approached to within a few metres and posed for some frame-filling photographs. We were just preparing to move away when two young lads approached from the direction of the second roadside pond and asked if we had seen the Blue-winged Teal which they had just flushed. At other times it might be easy to dismiss a duck as an escape but with evidence of an obvious American influx we took it rather more seriously and hastened around to view the small amount of water remaining on the pond. Sure enough the female Teal was indeed on this pool and dodging the attentions of the resident Mallards seemed anxious to feed. It was also inclined to skulk into the waterside vegetation and it was tempting to think that it might have recently arrived from America although there was no way of knowing. Eventually it came into a bay near our position and sat for a while on the bank allowing wonderful telescope views and was even joined at one time by the Solitary Sandpiper!

Three rarities in less than an hour but we had the taste for more and set off to walk through Holy Vale to Porth Hellick. The mighty stands of elms along the Holy Vale Nature Trail provide impressive cover but we could find nothing unusual amid the foliage although we did hear a few crests and a Chiffchaff or two. Competition for hide space forced us to scan Porth Hellick Pool from the beach but from here we could see eleven Greenshanks at the water edge, and a single Snipe was also noted by some of the group. Plenty of Swallows were hawking insects over the bushes and with them a few House Martins.

Following the coastal footpath towards the airport we passed a number of Wheatears in the rough ground beside the track and even more were feeding on the deserted airfield which is closed to flying on Sundays. A good few alba wagtails were also present on the runway margins, and many Linnets but of particular interest for us was a little group of waders comprising four Buff-breasted Sandpipers and a Dotterel. At first the birds were frightened off by the menacing appearance of a big Peregrine soaring over the runway but as the raptor drifted away the waders returned to begin feeding again and made a fine sight on a morning that had already exceeded all expectations.

Lunch at Tolman's Café in Old town was a celebratory affair and afterwards we paid the usual homage to Harold Wilson's grave in the nearby Old town Churchyard. The thickets of brambles at the top of the churchyard are also a good place to find Stick Insects and after a short search we found evidence of leaf damage indicative of these strange insects and sharp-eyed Chris spotted an adult Prickly Stick Insect concealed among the vegetation. Originally imported from New Zealand, these inoffensive vegetarians are always female and live a remarkably unadventurous life rarely moving more than a few metres from the place they are hatched. This one was a positive globe-trotter as Chris took it several feet from the hedge to allow everyone to take photographs before he placed it back in the hedge. Imagine the tales that Stick Insect could tell her children if only she managed to survive the winter!

Returning through the Lower Moors trail we had close views of a Greenshank in front of the hide and then faced a decision as news reached us that the Black & White Warbler was offering reasonable views in the swampy depths of the Lower Moors bushes. To reach the spot involved having to venture along tracks which were under water in places so understandably not everyone elected to end the day with wet feet and some of the group returned to Hugh Town whilst the rest of us went in search of the warbler.

After a surfeit of luck earlier we were perhaps due another failure and despite being at times very close to seeing this rather mobile little warbler we failed to connect and had to settle for views of a Reed Warbler and a Willow Warbler in the canopy. A lifeline was thrown when two birders took us to another spot where they had earlier seen the bird several times but by then it was probably a little too late and we left by a drier route to Old Town and thence back to the Santa Maria. It had been a remarkable day and it was clear that this week was going to have a decidedly American flavour to it!

## Day 3

Monday 19th September

The pre-breakfast choice today was the Garrison Walk which enabled the participants an extra 15 minutes in bed! At 630 we set off around the walk diverting this time to check the belt of pine trees surrounding the camp site. 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. The resident albino Blackbird was hopping around on the path near Morning Point 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 May group and that became their appellation for this week also!

Although botanically a less interesting month than the spring we did see one plant not apparent earlier in the year, the Autumn Ladies Tresses which grow in places along the Garrison Wall. We found about twenty of these small orchids but all were blackened and desiccated having seemingly flowered much earlier in the season. It should be mentioned that everywhere on Scilly was looking extremely dry and clearly rainfall had been very low during the summer. Apart from the flowers, which also included carpets of Hottentot Figs, we observed few birds of interest although some aerial sparring between a Kestrel and a Carrion Crow was entertaining.

Although still a touch windy there was quite a pleasant day in prospect so we headed for Tresco on the first available tripper boat shortly after 10am. A number of Little Egrets were huddled on exposed rocks near the island then landing at New Grimsby we strolled along the edge of the Great Pool in the direction of the Abbey Gardens, pausing to scan the top end of the Pool from the bird hide. Two rather extrovert Water Rails were sauntering about on the open mud along with a small flock of waders which proved to be at least three Pectoral Sandpipers along with Dunlin and Ringed Plovers (although we may have overlooked Curlew Sandpipers seen by others). Rather nearer at the water's edge we could see a Black-tailed Godwit, about 20+ Redshank and some 15+ Greenshank, all either wading in the shallows or resting in the shelter of various reedy bays. Out on the open water Gadwall and Mallard were swimming in the company of Coots and a herd of Mute Swans. Overhead Swallows were catching insects over the water along with a small number of House Martins. Closer to the hide an assorted gang of Pheasants and Red-legged Partridges scuttled about, oblivious of their potential fate during the winter shooting season.

We made our way to the Abbey Gardens passing en route two rather distant Hobbies zooming around the tree-tops, the resident five Canada Geese and a swarm of Linnets on the airfield.

Many of the group elected to take a look around the gardens whilst the rest of us investigated the nearby Abbey Pool which revealed nothing special although a great mass of gulls was splashing and bathing out in the middle including several Black-headed.

Reunited for lunch in the Gardens' restaurant we were amused by the robber gangs of Sparrows and Chaffinches seeking to grab any unguarded scraps but the usual Song Thrushes and Blackbirds were somewhat scarcer, perhaps due to the dry summer conditions. The group members had enjoyed their time in these iconic gardens and reported seeing one of the Golden Pheasants which on other occasions have also exploited the food potential of the restaurant grounds.

After the break we walked along the bottom end of the Great Pool, where a female Wigeon was an interesting find, then along the coastal footpath towards Old Grimsby which affords splendid views across the water towards St Martin's and skirts a pristine ribbon of white sand between Lizard and Rushy Points. Rather surprisingly, a Common Buzzard flew in from the direction of St Martin's passing almost overhead but I later learnt from Will that this resident quite often went to sit on one of the rocks between the two islands, presumably when it wanted some peace from the Tresco crows.

Before reaching the old Blockhouse, we cut 'inland' eventually reaching the Great Pool again via the Island rubbish tip. We saw few new birds but it was a pleasant walk, and apart from the ubiquitous Speckled Woods, the day's butterfly list also included Meadow Brown, Peacock and Small Copper, all encouraged into activity by a warmer afternoon.

The return boat to St Mary's was departing from Carnear at the southern tip of Tresco so a fairly brisk walk ensued, pausing only for a brief scan from the new Swarovski hide. We reached the quay in good time and even had time for a welcome rest before the boat came to collect us and the 60 or so fellow passengers.

During the day that fiendish device, the mobile telephone, had brought news from St Mary's of a Red-eyed Vireo seen in elms along the Garrison Walk so a few of us gave it a try after returning to Hugh Town. We could perhaps be excused for not having found the vireo on the pre-breakfast walk as this particular stretch of trees had been pretty much in darkness when we had passed by but it was galling that this handsome American bird had been so close to our guest house base. A Willow Warbler was soon in view when we reached the elms but the vireo was rather less obliging and it was many minutes before it eventually appeared in the canopy. Even then it was not easy to locate and not everyone managed perfect views although I was fortunate to be standing in the right spot when it sat for a few moments in open view. Arriving slightly later than the rest of us, Clare was even luckier and when we met for the evening meal at the Pilot's Gig she described a nice encounter with the bird just as she was leaving.

## Day 4

## Tuesday 20th September

A day of almost constant light rain provided a climatic contrast to the preceding days and persuaded me to opt for another St. Mary's day. Logic decreed that as we were going to get wet anyway we might as well make it even more uncomfortable by standing around in the Lower Moors swamp waiting for the Black and White Warbler.

Joining various other optimists, some having flown over from the mainland for the day, we duly got drenched as the ceaseless rain contrived to find every gap in the waterproofs but apart from a few *phylloscopus* warblers and another Reed Warbler, met with little success - although some were in the open when a Merlin dashed by and a Raven was heard 'cronking' overhead. It was shaping to be a heroic failure, relieved only by lunch at the Tolman's Café, but after the meal our fortunes improved with a Greenshank and a smart Pectoral Sandpiper in front of the Lower Moors hide and returning to the bushes, Pauline and Robert were the first in our group to finally be rewarded by excellent views of the Black & White Warbler, more or less exactly where we had been standing for so many hours. Fortunately this marked a co-operative spell from this highly prized American rarity and before very long everyone managed to see the warbler as it worked through the foliage, sometimes exploring the underside of branches like a Nuthatch. Loosely in the company of Blue and Great Tits, it was still very mobile and the flock soon moved away leaving newly arrived birders to begin their nervous sojourns in the swamp! Remarkably few species were entered when we went through the day's species after dinner but star billing went to our 6th Nearctic bird of the week, and arguably one of the most impressive!

## Day 5

## Wednesday 21st September

It was back to the Garrison for the dawn patrol and disregarding the black rabbits of doom we went straight to view some hedges above the Woolpack Battery where Bob Flood and Ashley Fisher had found a Baltimore Oriole the previous afternoon. It was a clear sunny morning and despite an unpromising start the oriole did eventually put in an appearance, albeit only briefly and at some distance across a field. Sadly we were obliged to leave in order to get back for breakfast but resolved to return after the day's off-island excursion to St Agnes.

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. Out on the rocky shoreline, Oystercatchers and Curlews were taking a rest and Turnstones busied themselves fulfilling their job descriptions. We watched a Whinchat in the fields by Browarth Point and three pale-bellied Brent Geese bobbing on the sea, remnants of a bigger flock which arrived on the islands during the previous week. Close by, the muddy margins of the 'Big Pool' were frequented by yet another Pectoral Sandpiper, this one looking immaculate with bright juvenile feathering. Two had been around the pool earlier but a thorough search revealed just this singleton. 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, 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. We continued to follow the cliff path, stopping en route to look at the often pictured Troytown turf maze (labyrinth) and more 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 very pleasant morning walk.

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. Many Wheatears flirted their white rumps at us on the downs and coastal footpaths whilst Linnets were typically abundant and Swallows were almost constantly overhead. As we progressed over Wingletang two or three Lapland Buntings flew over calling and pitched in the area we had just come from but sadly these rather poor flight views were the best we could manage. At length we returned to the quay and bade farewell to my favourite island although luckily I would soon be returning for a two week holiday in October!

Back on St. Mary's we hurried to the oriole site and arrived just in time for it to pop into view having been elusive for much of the afternoon. For the next thirty minutes it performed perfectly, sometimes perching in the open preening, then dropping onto a bramble clump to feed. The golden tone to the breast feathers was highlighted by the evening sun and even at a field's width we could see that it appeared to be pretty fit and alert. I hope it manages to survive on this side of the Atlantic and indeed there have been examples of over-wintering with the aid of garden bird-feeders so one can only hope... A fly-over Hobby added a European dimension to our successful late afternoon visit.

## Day 6

## Thursday 22nd September

Having just about dried our footwear after the Black & White Warbler, Tony, Sylvia and I chose to go paddling again with a dawn visit to the small pool not far from the rubbish dump which has been playing host to the Northern Waterthrush over recent days as well as the Solitary Sandpiper. Access involves following a path through a marshy reed bed which the passage of many boots over successive days had converted into liquid mud. Arriving as it got light we found half a dozen birders already in position and within minutes there was great excitement as the waterthrush suddenly appeared from the surrounding reeds and began chasing insects around the edges of the pool. As we were being attacked by eager swarms of ferocious mosquitoes we were quite grateful for its efforts and had to resist the urge to cheer each time it snapped up one of these blood fattened insects! The American warbler was in view for fully ten minutes but eventually we retreated to dry ground and headed back to the Santa Maria for breakfast.

The off-island destination today was Bryher and we enjoyed this delightful little island in near perfect sunny conditions. Arriving at the church quay after dropping passengers on Tresco, we drifted in the direction of the rather comfortable Hell Bay Hotel and sat on the veranda drinking coffee for a pleasant thirty minutes before commencing a walk around the north coast of the island.



The footpath took us along the edge of Hell Bay with the moorland of Shipman Head Downs to our right and Shipman Head itself stretching out into the ocean ahead of us. On a sunny day like this it was a benign scene but winter storms can whip-up spectacular seas crashing against the rocks as evidenced by photographs taken at that season. I climbed up onto the downs to look for migrants but apart from a few Wheatears it seemed very quiet and if any Dotterel were there I failed to see them!

Returning to the imaginatively named settlement known as 'The Town' we stopped for 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!

Robert and Pauline decided to return to St Mary's on the early afternoon boat whilst the rest of us ambled around Samson Hill to Rushey Bay, the walk revealing 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 few Wheatears were noted and plenty of Linnets but nothing more unusual. Time remained for a gentle stroll back to the Anneka Rice Quay to catch the 1645 boat to St Mary's, passing in front of the Hell Bay Hotel once again then following a track beside the island camp site which brought us eventually to The Town opposite Cromwell's Castle on Tresco. Anneka's Quay was constructed as a low-water embarkation point as part of the 'Challenge Anneka' TV series and although subsequently rebuilt it seems destined to always be known as 'Annekey'. 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' and whilst the birdwatching had been unspectacular, our Bryher list included sightings of a Whinchat on the camp site, 3-4 Stonechats, Kestrel and 13 Mute Swans on the pool. Mammals had also been represented by at least three Grey Seals.

Later, I went with Paul and Clare to the Waterthrush Pool where we met the Blewitts who had spent a few unsuccessful hours feeding the mosquitoes. Leaving Paul and Clare to await the evening appearance, I then went with Pauline and Robert to the Lower Moors hide, acting on a hunch that the Waterthrush might have returned to the place it had first been discovered. Our hunch proved to be unreliable as it did eventually appear back on the pool again to entertain Paul, but meanwhile we had excellent views of a Water Rail in front of the hide and a Kingfisher briefly perched nearby. Such is life!!!

## Day 7

## Friday 23rd September

For the first morning of the week, the dawn patrol visited the 'traditional' location of Peninnis Head but we saw few migrants although a large flock of Linnets in a weedy field raised unfulfilled hopes that they have been accompanied by something else. The Blewitts meanwhile had made the trek to the Waterthrush pool for first light and were rewarded by good views of the American warbler although it did not show until ten minutes later than the previous day.

The final boat excursion of the holiday was to the Eastern Isles and St. Martin's, a trip that requires calm seas and pleasant conditions to fully enjoy the hour long cruise around the scatter of rocky islands. Captain for the trip was TV celebrity Fraser Hicks who featured regularly on the 'Island Parish' series and has a nice line in droll comments delivered in a typically laid back manner. After dropping passenger's including Pauline and Robert on St. Martin's, Fraser headed out to the Eastern Isles and took us from isle to isle delivering an erudite commentary which matched any I have heard over the years from other captains. Although most of the seabirds had deserted the islands for the open sea, many Shags were still around, a juvenile Kittiwake surprised us then we had an even greater shock when Fraser casually pointed out a lone Grey Phalarope as we passed it bobbing on the water. The resident pair of Peregrines on Great Ganilly obligingly perched in view on the top of the island and rocks on the way back to St Martin's harboured Oystercatchers and some 20 or 30 Curlews.

One of the big attractions of the Eastern Isles is the population of Grey Seals which are invariably to be found here positively inviting visitors to take lots of pictures as they pose for the cameras. Today they were present in good numbers and we must have seen 70 or 80 animals including one group of almost 40 hauled up on a sheltered beach. It was one of the best Eastern Isles visits that I have made and we all greatly enjoyed the experience.

Disembarking at Higher Town St. Martin's we adjourned for a coffee at the Polreath café before taking a pre-lunch walk out to the edge of the downland which occupies most of the northern half of St. Martin's. As on almost every day of the tour, Wheatears were in evidence and we also saw several Stonechats along with one or two Clouded Yellow butterflies, their appearance indicative of the southerly wind direction. We met Robert and Pauline at the Polreath café when we returned for lunch and spent a pleasant interlude in the sheltered garden enjoying our meal amid various exotic plants such as echiums and proteas. The plan for the afternoon was to explore the west and north of the island but a chance meeting with the resident birdwatcher Viv Jackson at Middle town changed our plans. He told us that an Ortolan Bunting was frequenting fields not far from the settlement of Lower Town and as he had seen it just a short while earlier we decided to go there instead.

The area of rough bracken filled pasture close to the shore looked ideal for such a seed-eating migrant but at first the only bird we found there was a Whinchat although eventually the Ortolan suddenly flew up from close by and dropped frustratingly into the marram grass bordering the beach. Some while later it returned to the path and offered occasional glimpses feeding along the sandy track. It was difficult for everyone to get unobstructed views and many of the group saw it only in flight but it was reluctant to move into a more open location and in the end we had to leave for the 40 minute walk back to the quay. Of all the wonderful birds seen during the week this Ortolan was perhaps the least obliging but at least some of the party were in the right place to obtain reasonable close-ups as it foraged along the side of the track.

Plans to go and look for a Woodchat Shrike back on St Mary's were abandoned when news reached us that it had not been reported since midday so we adjourned for a coffee at Dibble & Grub in Hugh Town before returning to the Santa Maria. Later we enjoyed our final meal at the Pilot's Gig and having spent a week working through the extensive menu it was a chance to repeat a favourite from the previous days or perhaps try a meal that had caught the eye but not yet been sampled. Somehow news had leaked that my birthday was imminent and I was suitably surprised when Bryan brought out a cake and sang 'happy birthday'! What a great place to be on the eve of becoming a pensioner, and what splendid company to share and celebrate the occasion.

## Day 8

## Saturday 24th September

The world didn't seem much different as I looked out on a rather dull and wet birthday morning. There was no pre-breakfast walk today and after we had sorted out departure formalities such as preparing the luggage for collection, we took our leave of the Santa Maria and caught the trusty old Community bus to the now familiar stop a Maypole.

This time I headed in the direction of the footpath around the north coast which we reached via Trenoweth Farm and a track through the belt of ancient pines which form a shelter brake for his end of the island. 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 Whitethroat briefly appeared as we passed Bar Point then continuing around the coastline visited another archaeological site at Bant Carn ancient village. From here we made our way beside the famous St Mary's Golf Course, once beloved by Harold Wilson, to Juliet's Garden café for lunch. 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!

Porthloo Beach on the way back to 'town' was well worth scanning the gull flock at high water as the raft of Black-headed's also included 10 or more Mediterranean Gulls. Earlier in the week up to 19 had been counted, a record for Scilly, and more could well have been present as it was hard to count the tightly packed gulls bobbing on the sea. At least three were adult or sub-adult and the rest juveniles but I suspect a longer inspection would have revealed more.

Our luggage was retrieved from the guest house and then we all followed our own agenda for an hour or so before boarding the Scillonian for the return sailing to Penzance. It was a calm crossing notable for an early brief showing by a Minke Whale and sightings of two Balearic Shearwaters as well as a dozen or so Manx. Approaching Mount's Bay we encountered a big flock of diving Gannets and the hapless fish shoal was also been predated by a number of dolphins. An Arctic Skua also flew by and we saw a flock of Kittiwakes on the sea. Thus ended an amazing week on Scilly and as the group dispersed to guest houses or to collect vehicles I hope they took away happy memories of a truly outstanding tour. Thanks to everyone for being such pleasant company.

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## Species Lists

### Birds

Common Name	Scientific Name	Sightings
Fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>	A few during crossings
Manx Shearwater	<i>Puffinus puffinus</i>	Seen on both crossings
Balearic Shearwater	<i>Puffinus mauritanicus</i>	Two on crossing Sep 24
Gannet	<i>Sula bassanus</i>	Common on crossing and a few around islands
Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	A few around islands
Shag	<i>P. aristotelis</i>	Common around islands
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	7+ on islands off Tesco & Bryher
Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	Seen on 7 days, 1-3 daily
Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	15-20 Treco, 13 Bryher
Canada Goose	<i>Branta Canadensis</i>	Five Treco
Brent Goose	<i>Branta bernecia</i>	Three Pale-breasted St Agnes
Mallard	<i>Anas. platyrhynchos</i>	A few on each island, many Treco
Gadwall	<i>A. strepera</i>	A few Treco & Porth Hellick St Mary's
Blue Winged Teal	<i>A. discors</i>	Female Newford Duck Pond St Mary's
Wigeon	<i>A. penelope</i>	Female Great Pool Treco
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	One Treco
Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	Five singles seen but possibly more
Peregrine	<i>F. peregrinus</i>	One St Mary's, Two Eastern Isles
Hobby	<i>F. subbuteo</i>	Two Treco, one Garrison St Mary's
Merlin	<i>F. columbarius</i>	Fly-over Lower Moors St Mary's
Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	Treco & Garrison St Mary's
Golden Pheasant	<i>Chrysolophus pictus</i>	Male Treco
Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>	Introduced birds on Treco & St Mary's
Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	Treco, St Agnes and St Mary's
Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	Treco, St Agnes and Porth Hellick.
Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>	Two plus Treco, one Lower Moors
Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	Common around coastlines
Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	St Agnes, Treco & St Mary's
Dotterel	<i>C. morinellu</i>	One St. Mary's airfield
Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>	Several in flight near St Martin's (probables)
Dunlin	<i>C. alpina</i>	One 17th St. Mary's, several Treco
Pectoral Sandpiper	<i>C. melanotus</i>	Three Treco, one St. Mary's, one St Agnes
Buff-breasted Sandpiper	<i>Tryngitis subruficollis</i>	Four St Mary's Airfield
Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	One Porth Hellick
Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	One Great Pool Treco
Whimbrel	<i>Numenius. phaeopus</i>	One near Bant Cam Sep 24
Curlew	<i>N. arquata</i>	Seen or heard most days max 25+ St Martin's & St Agnes
Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	11+ Treco, 10+ Porth Hellick, singles Lower Moors etc
Redshank	<i>T. tetanus</i>	Twenty plus Great Pool Treco
Solitary Sandpiper	<i>Tringa solitaria</i>	Superb views of juv. Newford Duck Ponds & Dump Scrape
Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>	A few scattered around island coastlines
Grey Phalarope	<i>Phalaropus fulicarius</i>	One Eastern Isles
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	A few among gull flocks but generally scarce
Herring Gull	<i>L. Argentatus</i>	Common and widespread

Common Name	Scientific Name	Sightings
Great Black-backed Gull	<i>L. marinus</i>	Locally common
Black-headed Gull	<i>L. Ridibundus</i>	Reasonably widespread in small numbers
Mediterranean Gull	<i>L. melanocephalus</i>	At least ten Porthloo St Mary's
Kittiwake	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>	Immature Eastern Isles- a few during crossing 24th
Sandwich Tern	<i>Sterna sandvicensis</i>	Small numbers around islands
Razorbill	<i>Alca torda</i>	One on crossing 17th
Guillemot	<i>Uria aalge</i>	One on crossing 24th
Woodpigeon	<i>C. palumbus</i>	Common and widespread
Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	Seen in small numbers most days and on all islands
Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	One Lower Moors
Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>	Stunning views of immature Watermill St. Mary's
Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	Seen daily but only in generally moderate numbers
House Martin	<i>Delichon urbica</i>	A few on 3 days- max 15+ Tresco
Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	Small/moderate numbers on five tour days
Rock Pipit	<i>A. petrosus</i>	Distributed around coasts in small numbers
Pied/White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	Widely distributed in small numbers mostly on beaches
Grey Wagtail	<i>M. cinerea</i>	One St Mary's
Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	Very common
Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	Common throughout
Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	Common
Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>	Singles St Agnes, Bryher and St Martin's
Stonechat	<i>S. torquata</i>	Pairs/families St Agnes, Bryher & St Martin's, single SM
Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	Plentiful most days with max c50 St Agnes and c30 Bryher
Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	Very common
Song Thrush	<i>T. philomelos</i>	Very common (but perhaps fewer than usual?)
Reed Warbler	<i>A. scirpaceus</i>	Singles Lower Moors, heard Tresco
Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>	One Bar Point St Mary's
Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	A couple seen or heard around islands
Willow Warbler	<i>P. trochilus</i>	Singles Lower Moors & Garrison
Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>	Several Tresco, heard St Mary's
Blue Tit	<i>Parus caeruleus</i>	A few seen during week especially Lower Moors & Garrison
Great Tit	<i>P. major</i>	Several seen and heard during week (six tour days)
Carrion Crow	<i>C. corone</i>	Small numbers most days
Raven	<i>C. corax</i>	1 over Lower Moors and 1 St Martin's
Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	Common
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	Common
Chaffinch	<i>Fringella coelebs</i>	Small numbers St Mary's & Tresco
Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>	A few daily towards end of week
Goldfinch	<i>C. carduelis</i>	Encountered fairly frequently
Linnet	<i>C. cannabina</i>	Very common
Siskin	<i>C. spinus</i>	Porthcressa Beach 19th
Ortolan	<i>Emberiza hortulana</i>	One St. Martin's
Lapland Bunting	<i>Calcarius lapponicus</i>	Two or three seen poorly St Agnes
Black & White Warbler	<i>Miniotilta varia</i>	Lower Moors St Mary's (after much waiting!)
Northern Waterthrush	<i>Seiurus noveboracensis</i>	Dump Pool St Mary's
Red-eyed Vireo	<i>Vireo olivaceus</i>	Garrison (Woolpack Elms)
Baltimore Oriole	<i>Icterus galbula</i>	Garison St Mary's

Common Name	Scientific Name	Sightings
<b>Other Taxa</b>		
Grey Seal	<i>Halichoerus grypus</i>	70+ Eastern Isles, a few around other islands
Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>	Common
Brown Rat	<i>Rattus norvegicus</i>	St Mary's
Common Pipistrelle	<i>Pipistrellus pipistrellus</i>	One near Rubbish Dump St Mary's

### Butterflies

Common Blue	Red Admiral	Speckled Wood
Small Copper	Large White	Peacock
Meadow Brown	Clouded Yellow	

### Invertebrates

Prickly Stick Insect	<i>Acanthoxyla geisovii</i>	Old Town St Mary's
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