

Isles of Scilly

Naturetrek Tour Report

20 - 27 September 2014

Report compiled by Paul Dukes



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Day 1

Saturday 20th September

It was a rather overcast grey start to the day as we boarded the Scillonian III, but at least the calm conditions promised a flat sea for the crossing. The quay was particularly busy with arriving passengers, many of whom were diverted to the ship from Skybus flights after several days of frustrating cancellations due to persistent fog. This influx, added to the usual complement, meant that the boat was unusually crowded for a September crossing and few empty seats were evident in the saloon. Deck space was also limited but, whilst some of the Naturetrek group opted to relax in the cabin, the rest of us made our way to the stern of the lower deck in readiness for observing seabirds during the journey.

The crowded boat finally set sail, and we headed out into Mount's Bay. In places, the West Cornwall coastline was still shrouded in mist but visibility was initially reasonable, becoming poorer at times as we sailed through thicker patches of fog. They were not ideal conditions for observing birds although, as usual, Gannets were much in evidence for most of the journey, despite the nearest colony being hundreds of miles away. A few auks flew by, and several rather distant Manx Shearwaters, but there was little to set pulses racing although a lone Grey Seal in mid-ocean raised hopes for a few seconds that it might be a whale or turtle!

The sun was warming the day as we disembarked at St Mary's harbour and made our way through the usual chaos of people on the quay; we headed towards the Santa Maria Guest House which was to be our base for the next week. One of the resident island birders, Kris Webb, was among the people waiting for passengers and he told me that a very tame Black-necked Grebe was giving excellent views just a few hundred metres further along the quay, which seemed a tempting reason for a short diversion. Unfortunately, the grebe had somehow vanished in the short interval it took us to reach the spot and, when it became clear that it had moved somewhere else, we continued our progress through Hugh Town to the Santa Maria, where the owner Jackie awaited our arrival. Tony and Shelagh briefly parted company to head for the Mincarlo Guest House on the Strand, where they were staying because we had used our allocation of rooms at the Santa Maria when they booked.

After settling in to their rooms, the group dispersed to find lunch in Hugh Town, where the choice ranges from sandwiches at the Co-op to more substantial meals in the various cafes, pubs and hotels.

We gathered again soon after 3pm, to undertake a birding walk around the Garrison headland, following a clockwise circuit around the coast. Although lacking the bright colours of spring, the exotic Scillonian flora was still much in evidence including *Geranium maderense*, fleshy looking aeoniums and the tall spikes of Tree Echium, some of which still retained flowers, to the delight of many bees and flies. In places, there were carpets of invasive Hottentot Fig, some plants bearing flowers, and we found twenty or more Autumn Lady's Tresses growing along the top of the Garrison walls. This pretty little orchid has usually finished flowering by late September, and the very dry preceding weeks had left most plants in a somewhat desiccated condition, although a few were looking fairly pristine. Only a few species of orchid occur on the islands and, thanks to its late flowering, this is perhaps the one least seen by visiting botanists. It is plentiful along the walls of the Garrison but much harder to find elsewhere.

As we progressed along the walk, absurdly tame Song Thrushes and Blackbirds gave a taste of island birdlife. Scilly has probably the highest density of Song Thrushes in England, and they are a familiar sight throughout the islands, with residents augmented in autumn by even more birds from the Continent. Wrens, Blackbirds and Dunnock are also abundant, adding their own vocal contributions to almost every habitat. Noisy Oystercatchers were conspicuous on the rocks of Porthcressa Bay whilst, out on the water, many Shags were fishing and others were standing around on rocky islets, with at least one Cormorant available for comparison. Earlier, a small flock of Sandwich Terns had flown over the Scillonian, but the tidal conditions were not suitable to permit the usual gathering of terns which congregate in the bay when more rocks are exposed.

Rock Pipits chased one another along the Garrison walls, and we saw a number of Stonechats in the gorse beside the path, a welcome indication of a successful breeding season for these attractive birds. Linnets were characteristically plentiful, and several Wheatears flirted white rumps as they flew ahead of us along the walls. Also present were several White Wagtails, September migrants through the islands, which find plenty of insect life in the seaweed deposits on beaches. Among the numerous Rabbits were at least four of the all black form, which previous Naturetrek groups inexplicably dubbed 'the Black Rabbits of Doom'. It is rumoured that a farmer on St Mary's captured some of these black morphs on the uninhabited island of Samson and released them on the Garrison, but it seems to be a colour form that appears naturally among populations, and probably occurred without human assistance.

As our walk progressed around the Garrison headland, we could see the other islands which form the archipelago, although the most distant of these, St Martin's, was mostly hidden in mist. Plenty of Swallows were hawking over the aged pines which form an extensive, but gradually diminishing, windbreak across the Garrison, and with them we observed several House Martins. Another birdwatcher had reported seeing Spotted Flycatchers and, as we neared Hugh Town, we saw at least one flycatcher chasing insects from a perch just below the Star Castle Hotel.

Unfortunately, news reached us that Valerie and Gill had been stranded in Exeter by the cancellation of their Skybus flight, but the steamship company had arranged an unscheduled Sunday sailing of the Scillonian, and we looked forward to their arrival soon after midday.

Later we enjoyed a tasty meal at the Pilot's Gig restaurant near the Quay, and the group fought off tiredness to attend Will Wagstaff's entertaining slide show on Scilly Wildlife, which whetted appetites for the week ahead.

Day 2

Sunday 21st September

It is my usual practice on Scilly tours to offer an optional pre-breakfast birding walk but, unfortunately, I was still suffering the affects of a foot injury earlier in the year, and thought it prudent to save myself for the main excursion of the day. Several tour members did, however, go out before the meal, and Neil was lucky enough to see a Yellow-browed Warbler in the elms along the Garrison walk, a promising indicator that Eastern migrants had reached the islands.

Staying on St Mary's seemed the best option on this first full day so, after breakfast, we headed north out of Hugh Town in the direction of Holy Vale. The air had a mildness that belied the date, and butterflies such as Speckled Woods and Small Tortoiseshells were on the wing, finding nectar in the late autumn plants still in flower, which included the abundant Ivy foliage along our route. Holy Vale is a charming little cluster of buildings in the centre of the island, now largely used as self-catering tourist accommodation, but once a farming community. Flowers are still grown in the fields surrounding the buildings, and there are some small vineyards, evidence of a recent diversification. We turned towards the coast as we reached Holy Vale and made our way along a narrow footpath, passing through one of the most extensive tracts of Elm forest in Cornwall. The dreaded Dutch Elm disease has not yet reached Scilly, although experts predict that it may only be a matter of time, and it will certainly change the Scillonian landscape if these once familiar trees disappear, as they have done on the mainland.

The enclosed nature of the walk was not conducive for seeing birds, but we did encounter several Chiffchaffs, Blackcaps and a foraging party of tits. Activity in the higher canopy drew our attention to several warblers working their way through the foliage and, rather surprisingly, one of these proved to be a Wood Warbler. These lovely little warblers are, on the whole, rather scarce migrants through Scilly, with only three or four records each autumn, so we were lucky to come across it although, sadly, the very restricted viewing opportunities and the bird's restless behaviour precluded some of the group from obtaining more than a few frustrating glimpses. Rather more obliging were the Chiffchaffs and a single Willow Warbler, catching insects at the edge of a line of sallows bordering the road which divides the Holy Vale track from the Porth Hellick Nature Trail. A lone Whinchat, with several Stonechats, was also in this area, enjoying the harvest of flies.

Continuing along the nature trail towards the sea, we marvelled at the peculiar formations of Tussock Sedge, and checked the numbers of Swallows circling over the reeds for any rarer species. First inspection of Porth Hellick Pools from the Sussex Hide revealed the usual Mallard and a few Gadwall, but the ducks were eclipsed by nine Greenshank standing at the water's edge just a hundred metres in front of the hide. Several smaller waders were visible on a muddy strip at the far side of the pool and, moving around to the beach, we were able to telescope the birds and identify two juvenile Curlew Sandpipers, looking very smart in their buff tinged plumage. A Common Snipe was also frequenting the same strip of mud at the reed edge. A Melodious Warbler was reported to have been mist-netted in a nearby line of bushes earlier in the morning, but had subsequently become elusive, although Neil persisted when the rest of us moved away, and was rewarded by brief views of the warbler.

With lunch a priority, we headed towards Old Town along the coastal footpath, which skirts the end of the airport runway. There is no flying on a Sunday, so we enjoyed the luxury of being able to stand beside the concrete strip and inspect the birds feeding on the airfield grass, which included a number of Wheatears. When suitable conditions have occurred, the airfield can be a reliable spot to see American Buff-breasted Sandpipers, but this year the lack of westerlies had resulted in none being recorded thus far. One wader we did encounter was a Whimbrel, standing among boulders at the edge of the sea but, sadly, it slipped out of sight behind a rock before I could deploy my telescope!

Lunch at the Tolman's café in Old Town was all the more welcome for being a little later than anticipated, and we were glad to find Valerie and Gill waiting to meet us, having finally reached the islands on the boat. Following the meal our first stop was the churchyard at Old Town which can, on occasions, harbour migrant birds, but is rather more reliably the site of Harold Wilson's grave. There is no doubt that the late Prime Minister did a great deal to raise the public profile of Scilly, and it was his wish to be buried on the islands rather than in his native Yorkshire. After paying homage to his rather modest grave, we moved to a bramble hedge at the top of the churchyard, where I have seen Stick Insects on previous occasions. These interesting insects arrived on Scilly with plants imported to the tropical gardens on Tresco, and originate from New Zealand. Three or four species have been identified, and there are three other species on mainland Cornwall, the difference being attributed to nurseries in Cornwall importing their plants from another part of New Zealand. Unfortunately, the insects could not be found on this occasion, but no doubt they were hidden away somewhere in the thickets. On Old Town beach, we spent some time looking at the resident Rock Pipits, and also several White Wagtails which were visitors from further afield. Many of the Continental 'White' Wagtails pass through Scilly in September, several weeks ahead of the British Pied Wagtails, which begin to appear in October when both races are often present on the beaches. An excursion to the nearby Lower Moors Nature Reserve proved to be very rewarding, with excellent views of a fine juvenile Ruff in front of the hides, as well as another Greenshank, three to four female Teal, a Grey Heron and an immature Cormorant. A single Sand Martin was present among the many Swallows and House Martins swooping over the marsh, and another unexpected migrant was the adult male Yellow Wagtail which appeared for a few minutes on one of the muddy islands. Eels and other fish regularly created splashes in the pools, and could be seen as shadowy shapes below the surface, but none appeared to be present in the ditch connecting the pools to Old Town, where they can sometimes be easily observed. A very tame juvenile Heron standing in the ditch was, no doubt, also hoping they would swim into view. From Old Town, we finished the day with a walk around Peninnis Head which produced more Wheatears and many Linnets but, regrettably, no sign of the rare Booted Warbler recorded on the headland the previous day, or the Wryneck which had also been reported.

At the end of the day Geoff's GPS showed that we had walked a total of 6.7 miles and, whilst there had been no great rarities, we had seen a nice variety of birds on this first full day. Among the species seen but not yet mentioned were several Goldcrests in the Rocky Hill area, four Turnstones, Common Sandpiper and a Kestrel. It had been a noticeably warm day, and Small Copper was an addition to our butterfly tally.

We once again enjoyed our evening meal at the Pilot's Gig and contemplated tomorrow's excursion to perhaps the most famous of the Scilly islands, Tresco.

Day 3

Monday 22nd September

Another fine and sunny day continued the spell of calm weather, which seemed more appropriate to mid-summer than autumn! After a typically huge Santa Maria breakfast, we made our way down to the quay and boarded the Britania tripper boat for a 15 minute journey to Carnear, the southern landing stage on Tresco, where a Peregrine welcomed us by gliding overhead soon after we landed. The walk to the famous Abbey Gardens produced several Stonechats of varying ages, further evidence of the successful breeding season, and a number of Meadow Pipits feeding on the former heliport. A Common Redstart was also briefly seen at the edge of the trees. At this juncture some of the group left to enjoy a walk around the tropical gardens, leaving the remainder to continue birding around the Abbey and Great Pools. With the emphasis on waterbirds, we spent an interesting few hours looking from various vantage points, but particularly concentrating at the north end of the Great Pool where a wide strip of mud afforded habitat for waders. Wildfowl on the water included Mute Swans, Canada Geese, Gadwall and Coot, all species usually associated with Tresco; also, with the numerous Mallard and Gadwall, we found several Teal as well as two female Pintail. Telescope scrutiny of the exposed mud revealed a fine selection of waders including Redshank, Greenshank, Dunlin, two Black-tailed Godwit, at least four Ruff, several Curlew Sandpipers and two-plus Little Stints. Moving around to get a different perspective from the Swarovski hide, we added Green Sandpiper and Water Rail to the list, but could find no sign of the Spotted Crane reported here on previous days. Other birds seen during the morning included Grey Wagtail, Little Grebe, Sedge and Reed Warblers.

Soon after midday, the group gradually returned for lunch in the garden restaurant, enthusing about their visit and reporting encounters with one of the very tame Golden Pheasants which solicit tit-bits from visitors. Equally confiding Chaffinches, House Sparrows, Song Thrushes and Blackbirds competed for table scraps, showing great skill at snatching any edible item left unguarded for a fraction of a second. Our lunches were also interrupted, from time to time, by appearances of the introduced Red Squirrels at the hazel nut dispensers, which can be viewed from the garden. Twenty Red Squirrels were released on Tresco in 2013, and are now breeding in the Abbey Gardens. These attractive mammals have become well used to humans and show little fear as they raid the nuts, a trait shared with the less appreciated Brown Rat, which we also saw in this area.

After lunch we returned to scan the southern end of the Great Pool, to allow the rest of the group to have a look at the ducks and waders. At least 30 Greenshank were standing at the edge of the reeds here, and six or more Little Egrets. Leaving the pool, we headed to the coastal footpath along the eastern shore of Tresco. This shoreline affords stunning holiday brochure panoramas of the islands, and the combination of turquoise seas with white stretches of beach must surely rival any stretch of coast in the UK. Birds were not plentiful, but we did encounter many Linnets, and flocks of feral Red-legged Partridges scattered from the paths ahead of us. Stonechats were once again a regular feature, and out on the white sandy beaches Oystercatchers bickered noisily. Large flocks of Shag were fishing in the shallow waters between Tresco and St Martin's, which were also populated by many gulls and several Sandwich Terns.

Our route took us past the discreetly hidden island rubbish tip before dropping down to the Great Pool, where we had time to have another brief scan from the hide. The return pick-up was from New Grimsby at the northern end of Tresco, and it was a change of vessel, with the newer Meridian operating the service. As we sailed back to St Mary's along the picturesque channel separating Tresco from Bryher, we reflected on another

excellent day in Paradise! Our evening meal venue today was the rather utilitarian-looking Kavorna Bistro in the middle of Hugh Town, but the food and service were among the best of the week.

Day 4

Tuesday 23rd September

While I continued to rest my foot, Neil set off before breakfast to try and see a Barred Warbler which had been showing in the area of allotments at the start of the footpath to Peninnis Head. He succeeded in his mission, and returned with tales of this big grey warbler feeding in its favoured apple tree, amid the gardens.

Trippler boats run daily from St Mary's to most of the islands, but the wildlife cruise around the Eastern Isles is subject to weather and tide, so I was glad to see it on offer today combined, as usual, with a landing on St Martin's. We set off on board a half-full Guiding Star, to explore the cluster of rocks which form the Eastern Isles. These uninhabited islands are rich in both wildlife and history although, of course, the breeding seabirds leave in late summer. As the skipper guided the vessel around the islands, we were treated to very close views of Shags, Oystercatchers, Greater Black-backed Gulls and, rather more distantly, a Peregrine perched high on a crag. As always on any Eastern Isles tour, Grey Seals were the star performers for the passengers. At first we encountered only a few bobbing in the sea, but soon the captain found us more animals characteristically draped over exposed rocks, and took the boat as close as possible for the photographers. Many huge bulls were among the seals we passed, but there were also plenty of females, and young from recent seasons. In total, we probably saw 80-100 seals, which was more than enough to bring smiles of satisfaction to our faces.

After touring the islands, we edged our way along the few remaining channels left by the retreating tide, passing feeding Little Egrets before eventually reaching Lower Town quay on St Martin's, where we disembarked in the late morning sunshine. The recently re-opened St Martin's Hotel was too convenient to resist and, before exploring the island, we enjoyed warm drinks and great views from the hotel garden, a pleasure denied visitors for several years. From Lower Town, we walked past the Seven Stones pub, also recently re-opened, and reaching the central spine of the island headed east along a broad footpath, with acres of gorse and bracken to our left and fields to the right. Stonechats, Meadow Pipits and Wheatears were among the more noticeable species occurring along the track and, at Middle Town, where a belt of pines often provides shelter for migrants, we found at least two Pied Flycatchers taking advantage of the cover. Passing the beautiful expanse of sand known as Great Bay, we marvelled at the fantastic scenery before continuing to the originally named Higher Town, for lunch in the garden of the Polreath Café. After this pleasant interlude, we made our way to rejoin the coastal footpath above Little Arthur Farm, which we followed around Chapel Downs back to Higher Town Bay. Neil picked out a pod of dolphins swimming far out to sea but, even with the telescope, it was difficult to make out any detail, although from their uniform appearance I suspect they were Bottlenose Dolphins. Once again Linnets and Stonechats were prominent, but we also observed several Whinchats and a rather unexpected Willow Warbler, in the gorse beside the track. The warm afternoon sun created a heat shimmer around the Eastern Isles, as we looked out towards the rocky islets that we had navigated around just a few hours earlier, and caused more layers of clothing to be shed as we adjusted to the summery atmosphere. Reaching the waters of the Bay, we found a single Sanderling scuttling along the tideline, a rather unusual sighting as these sociable waders normally occur in flocks and this lone individual looked out of place!

We arrived at Higher Town quay in good time for the return boat to St Mary's, but one final surprise awaited in the form of the Black-necked Grebe, which was diving repeatedly just off the end of the jetty. It was nice to

catch up with this scarce Scilly grebe after missing it on our arrival day and, this time, it performed in a most obliging manner giving us excellent views. Thus ended another enjoyable day, and we sailed back to Hugh Town, looking forward to dinner at the Kavorna.

Day 5

Wednesday 24th September

The sunny spell came to a temporary end with an overcast drizzly start to the morning, but it did not deter Neil from returning to the allotments for further views of the Barred Warbler.

A second full day on St Mary's began with a 15 minute ride on the Community bus to Maypole in the north of the island, a delightfully Scillonian travel experience. The 'new' bus, which had been operating for just over a year, seemed almost identical to its predecessor but, whilst the door on the old bus was operated by a string, this new model (so far) has a functioning door mechanism. From Maypole, we made our way towards the north coast, pausing to look for a Wryneck at the Riding Stables and Rose-coloured Starling near Carn Vean café, but neither bird obliged. Pelistry Bay is one of the favourite beaches for holidaymakers on St Mary's during the summer but was mostly deserted today, allowing a Heron to search for fish from the causeway to Toll's Island. We traversed the beach and continued along the coastal footpath towards the Telegraph pylons skirting Watermill Cove, where several Blackcaps could be heard, and a few Chiffchaffs were chasing insects in the canopy. At Innisidgen Burial Chambers, we paused to inspect the pair of 2000 year old tombs, and noted a few Curlew along the rocky shoreline, along with the usual Oystercatchers and gulls. The ancient village site at Halangy Down completed our brief glimpse of Scillonian history, then we obeyed the messages from our stomachs and strode purposefully past the edge of the Golf Course, to the rather splendid Juliet's Garden for lunch. Arguably the best of St Mary's eating establishments, Juliet's is certainly one of the best positioned, perched on a hillside overlooking Hughtown and the harbour, albeit not experienced at its best on this overcast day. After a fine lunch, a few of the tour party headed back to Hugh Town for shopping and relaxation, whilst the rest of the group took advantage of improving weather to re-visit Lower Moors Nature Reserve, where a Bluethroat had been reported. Two Ruff were feeding in front of the hides, and the immature Cormorant provided entertainment by swimming through a carpet of water weed to emerge on land wearing a magnificent green cloak, but it transpired that the Bluethroat had been very erratic in its appearances, with long gaps between sightings. We gradually drifted away from the hides, to end the afternoon with another circuit of Peninnis Head where we met Neil, who had opted to follow his own agenda today, and learnt that he had connected with the Bluethroat earlier in the morning. As we returned to Hugh Town, we saw a number of Wheatears around the headland, and the Kindleysides achieved their ambition by finding a Wryneck in some rough ground, almost at the edge of Porthcressa Beach.

We had a change of venue for our evening meal and the choice of Spero's, overlooking St Mary's harbour, ensured views of a spectacular sunset from the restaurant as well as a tasty meal.

Day 6

Thursday 25th September

Our island destination today was St Agnes, the most southerly of the archipelago, and my personal favourite. I first stayed at the old Bird Observatory in 1966, became hooked on the island, and have returned each October since then. It is compact: just over a mile long and half a mile wide, but supports a flourishing human population

of over 70 and, through farming, fishing and tourism, seems to have achieved a commercial viability that is perhaps lacking on Bryher.

We landed at the island's small quay soon after 10.30, on a largely fine and warm morning. Earlier in the summer, 25 pairs of Kittiwake nested on the low rocky ledges near the Turk's Head pub and, for the first time in many years, managed to fledge a number of youngsters. This new colony has grown with each successive season and, it is hoped, may be the foundation for an increase in numbers, after a long period of decline. The birds had long since departed to sea, but the nests were conspicuous on the cliff. From the quay we progressed on an anti-clockwise route around the coast, pausing at the edge of Porth Killier to telescope the large expanse of seaweed and rocks exposed by the tide. Rock Pipits are particularly easy to observe here, and we took the opportunity to peruse the salient features of these large, boisterous pipits. Ringed Plovers were present on the beach, along with a few Dunlin, Turnstone and one Redshank. Several Herons were feeding in the shallow water, and a few Curlew were standing on the rocks at the far side of the bay, alongside many Oystercatchers.

The footpath between Porth Killier and the 'Big Pool' was strewn with irregular sized stones, evidence of the damage caused by the ferocious winter storms. The pool itself had been inundated by the sea, which presumably had affected the water content, but on this sunny morning it looked healthy enough, and the sedge margins afforded cover for a number of Moorhens and Mallards. The water level was low and, on the strip of mud extending along the seaward side, we saw no less than three Water Rails, giving a remarkably extrovert performance as they wandered up and down probing the surface.

After walking across the chamomile scented turf surrounding the island cricket pitch, we passed the small church at Periglis, and what must be a contender for the most scenic camp site in Britain before reaching Troytown Farm, where delicious home-made ice creams were too inviting to resist. It took a little while to devour our various choices, and we then continued around the coastline. We paused to look out towards the west, where 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. The rugged beauty of the Western Isles was matched by the towering granite formations on St Agnes; some of these were eroded into weird shapes such as the Nag's Head which, with imagination, might be thought to resemble a horse. Apart from the now expected Stonechats, Rock Pipits and a few Wheatears, there was not a lot of birdlife to delay us, although one of three Kestrels seen during the day was hovering over the fields. A less welcome sight, suspended overhead, was a noisy little satellite operated by a photographer nearby, and I trust he was suitably contrite when Shelagh went over to complain about this intrusion into our peaceful morning. We ate lunch at the Coastguards Café, part of a row of buildings which stand testament to a major design error, when they were constructed with the main observation tower facing inland, rather than out to the west!

The afternoon walk took us out amid the wild gorse and heather expanse of Wingletang Downs, leading eventually to Horse Point, the second most southerly headland in England. Here a random chaos of granite boulders is scattered across the landscape, as if tossed by some ancient giant. However, as one continues around the coast, the rocks assume even greater size, becoming towering monoliths 20-30m high sculpted, into fantastic shapes by centuries of erosion. Many are covered with lichens, adding to their unearthly appearance. We found many Rock Pipits and a few more Wheatears during our walk but, on this occasion, the birds were certainly eclipsed by the scenery. All too soon, it was time to complete our circuit of the island and return to the quay for the boat back to St Mary's, but we had been fortunate with the weather, and I was pleased to have shown the

group some of the attributes of my favourite place! A brief appearance by a Harbour Porpoise enlivened the return trip to Hugh Town.

Day 7

Friday 26th September

We assembled on the quay to board a tripper boat for an excursion to Bryher. Boating was a popular activity today, and many holidaymakers were queuing for boats, with Tresco, as usual, the most favoured destination. We were soon threading our way along the narrow channel between Tresco and Bryher, passing crowds of gulls, Oystercatchers and at least six Little Egrets, on the rocky islets that stud the channel. Once ashore on Bryher, we followed a footpath past the Fraggie Rock Café onto Shipman Head Downs, enjoying the dramatic views it afforded of Shipman Head and the aptly named Hell Bay. This stretch of coastline receives the full force of Atlantic storms although, on this tranquil morning, the sea was far from intimidating. Several fly-over Golden Plover were typical of this wild habitat, but the small number reflected the poor wader passage through the islands this autumn. A few Gannets were fishing offshore and a lone Fulmar glided past, the only one seen during the week. After skirting the bay, the footpath gradually descended towards the series of somewhat neglected farm fields, which comprise the central portion of the island. A Whinchat was seen here, as well as several more Stonechats and Whinchats. Our route took us close to the conveniently situated Hell Bay Hotel, and it seemed a suitable moment to seek teas and coffees on the veranda, looking out towards the small brackish pool which was providing temporary refuge for six Canada Geese from Tresco.

After this interlude, we watched a Greenshank feeding in Green Bay, and paid attention to the many Linnets beside the path, in the hope of re-locating a Common Rosefinch seen with them earlier in the week. Several Small Coppers were also noted along the track.

Reaching Rushy Bay, we followed the coast around the base of Samson Hill, and spent a little while unsuccessfully searching for a Wryneck found by Neil on the slopes of the hill. The ebbing tide had revealed large sand banks and islets in the waters between Samson and Bryher, which were now crowded with gulls and Oystercatchers, but regular telescope scans failed to locate any other wader species, although Curlew, Greenshank and Redshank were heard or seen along the Rushy Bay shoreline. Many Carrion Crows were foraging along the tideline and, as we approached the Bryher Boatyard, we picked out two Hooded Crows among them. Hoodies, and their hybrid young, have been Bryher residents for some years, but still have the capacity to startle whenever they appear.

Back in the Bryher settlement, which for lack of any other competition is known simply as 'The Town', we had a little time to relax before the arrival of the tripper boat back to St Mary's.

As something different for our last dinner of the week, we travelled by Taxi to Juliet's Garden, and enjoyed a convivial meal to celebrate our week together on the islands.

Day 8

Saturday 27th September

Valerie and Gill left after breakfast to catch their return Skybus flight to Exeter, leaving the rest of the group to undertake one final morning of birding on St Mary's. We headed back to Lower Moors, and were rewarded by further views of Ruff, Snipe and Grey Wagtail from the hides. The luckier tour members managed to see the

Bluethroat, which suddenly appeared at the back of the pools and showed well but, unfortunately, others, including the writer, had just left the hide and missed this performance. We were reunited for lunch at the Tolman's Café, then drifted back to town for the few hours remaining before the Scillonian sailed. Neil had earlier seen a Yellow-browed Warbler at the Garrison and, hearing of a Red-breasted Flycatcher in the same area, returned with Pat for a second try.

I was not be joining the group on the boat, as I was prolonging my Scilly stay with a longer sojourn on St Agnes, but I had hoped to say farewell on the quay. Regrettably, I could not find any of the group in the queue before I boarded the St. Agnes boat. Apologies for not making contact, but thank you for your company and I hope you enjoyed your visit to these lovely islands. It had not been a very good week for rare species, but this subsequently proved to be one of the quietest of recent autumns on Scilly, and much of October continued without any major surprises (the wind and weather conditions are all important in this regard). We were able to enjoy warm days and calm conditions for most of our stay, and very enjoyable birding, with some good sightings, amidst the stunning scenery and warm hospitality of this island paradise.

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Species List

Birds (✓ = recorded but not counted; Sev = several; h = heard only; **=introduced species)

	Common name	Scientific name	September							
			20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27
1	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>			1					
2	Black-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>				1				
3	Northern Fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>							1	
4	Manx Shearwater	<i>Puffinus puffinus</i>	4+							
5	Northern Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
6	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	1	1	1	Sev	1	1	Sev	Sev
7	European Shag	<i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
8	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>		6+	10+	3+	6+	5+	5+	1-2
9	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>			6+	4	1		6+	
10	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	1		Sev					
11	Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>			6+				6	
12	Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>			2f					
13	Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>		Sev	✓					Sev
14	Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>		3f	✓		Sev			
15	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>		Sev	✓		Sev	Sev		Sev
16	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>		1			3	3	1	1
17	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	1		1	2				
18	Red-legged Partridge (**)	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
19	Ring-necked Pheasant (**)	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>		1	✓	✓	H			
20	Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>			1			3		
21	Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>		✓	✓		✓	2		✓
22	Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>			✓					
23	Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
24	Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>							Sev	
25	Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>				Sev		10+		
26	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>		1	1		1			2
27	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>			1					
28	Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>	1	1		Sev				
29	Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>		1	Sev	Sev	Sev	5+	Sev	Sev
30	Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>		10	30+	H			2-3	
31	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>			10+			1	1	
32	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>		1	1	1				
33	Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>		1						
34	Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>	Sev	4+		Sev	Sev	Sev	10+	
35	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>				1				
36	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>			Sev			5+		
37	Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>		2	Sev			1		
38	Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>		2						
39	Ruff	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>		1	3+		2			1
40	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
41	Kittiwake	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>	Sev			Sev				
42	European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
43	Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
44	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>			Sev	Sev	Sev			
45	Sandwich Tern	<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>	7+		3-4	Sev	Sev	3	Sev	3+
46	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

	Common name	Scientific name	September							
			20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27
47	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
48	Wryneck	<i>Jynx torquilla</i>					1		1	
49	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
50	House Martin	<i>Delichon urbica</i>	Sev	Sev			Sev			
51	Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>		1						
52	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
53	Rock Pipit	<i>Anthus petrosus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
54	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	4+	Sev	Sev	Sev	10+	Sev	Sev	Sev
55	Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>		1	1					
56	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>			1		1	1		2
57	Winter Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
58	Duncock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
59	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
60	Eurasian Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
61	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
62	Bluethroat	<i>Luscinia svecica</i>					1			1
63	Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>			1					
64	Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>		1		Sev		1	2+	
65	Common Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquatus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
66	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	Sev	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
67	Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>	1		1	1				
68	European Pied Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>				2				
69	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>		Sev	Sev			Sev		
70	Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>			2					
71	Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>			1					
72	Melodious Warbler	<i>Hippolais polyglotta</i>		1						
73	Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>		1		1		1		
74	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>		Sev	Sev		Sev			1
75	Wood Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus sibilatrix</i>		1						
76	Yellow-browed Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus inornatus</i>		1						1
77	Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>		1-2						
78	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		Sev		Sev	Sev			
79	Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		Sev	Sev					
80	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
81	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
82	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
83	Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		Sev	Sev		Sev			
84	European Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
85	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
86	Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Mammals

Grey Seal

Harbour Porpoise

Rabbit

Brown Rat

Dolphin spp.

Red Squirrel

Other taxa

Speckled Wood

Peacock

Red Admiral

Small Copper

Small Tortoiseshell

Large White