Isles of Scilly

Naturetrek Tour Report

14th - 21st April 2023





Puffin









Razorbill

Tour report and images by Rob Williams



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Tour participants: Rob Williams (leader) with 10 Naturetrek clients

Day 1

Friday 14th April

We met at Penzance on a blustery morning as the overnight rain passed. It was unseasonably cold and very unspring-like. A male Common Eider and Sandwich Tern passed the Scillonian and a Grey Seal fished nearby, as we waited to sail. The gales of the previous days had blown a lot of birds into the English Channel and as we headed out of Mount's Bay, good numbers of Gannets, Kittiwakes, Manx Shearwaters and Guillemots were joined by a few Razorbills, a single European Storm Petrel and both Black-throated and Great Northern Divers. The trip across to Scilly was a bit lumpy and very refreshing on deck, but we enjoyed the Manx Shearwaters, Fulmars and Gannets that displayed their mastery of such conditions and two distant Puffins were seen. Arriving in St Mary's a Common Kestrel and a Peregrine were both seen.

In the afternoon, in brightening but still blustery conditions we took a walk on St Mary's making a loop around old Town and lower Moors to Porthloo. The highlights were all at one small field of unimproved pasture with cattle grazing. Two Cattle Egrets accompanied them and a female Woodcut Shrike fed actively, presumably making up for lost time of the last days of stormy weather, from the adjacent hedge, and a Tree Pipit flew over calling. Elsewhere, things were quiet as most smaller birds were still within dense cover in the windy conditions.

Day 2 Saturday 15th April

The next morning we awoke to a transformed panorama. A gentle breeze and bright sunshine gave St Mary's a Caribbean feel as we gathered for a boat trip to the Western Rocks. We headed up through the Roads where we saw three Great Northern Divers and a couple of Shelduck. Moving north of Samson, the sea was still quite active and we enjoyed a few minutes marvelling at the power of the waves until we entered the lee of Minicarlo island. Here rafts of auks were mostly Razorbills and Common Guillemots, but we also found good numbers of Puffins with them, and also several Northern Fulmars. We moved south to Annet where a Peregrine was perched, two Purple Sandpipers were on off-shore rocks and numerous Grey Seals were on a beach and the water around the boat.

We went ashore on St Agnes and after a nice lunch at the Turk's Head, we walked to Wingletang Down to search for migrants and some plants. We failed to find the rare Least Adder's Tongue Fern, which had possibly died off for the year, we did however find several other nice flowers. A Heron flushed from Beady Pool and as we watched it fly towards Gugh, we realised it was a Purple Heron. Two migrant male White-Wagtails were with a British subspecies Pied Wagtail on the beach at Porth Askin. Heading north up the western side of the island we found few migrants but enjoyed nice looks at some of the resident species. A few Swallows and a House Martin moved through just before we stopped for a well-earned ice cream.

Day 3 Sunday 16th April

Sunday was overcast and cool in the morning, clearing later. We worked our way around the southern coast of St Mary's noting more migrants in, especially good numbers of Willow Warblers. We found our first Wheatear in Salakee Down and then after a look at the Bronze Age site on Porth Hellick down we spent some time watching a 1st year male Woodchat Shrike at Porth Wreck quarry. We lunched at Care Near tea rooms and then walked

across to Telegraph, the highest point of the islands. Feet were tired and everyone headed back to the hotel for a rest. Rob carried on scouting and refound a Tawny Pipit at the golf course and saw another Woodchat Shrike on the Garrison as well as finding a lot more Wheatears, indicating more migrants were still arriving.

Monday was clear and sunny. We decided to spend the day exploring St Mary's again. We started walking the garrison headland. As well as looking at the coastal defences dating from various periods of conflict, we also enjoyed a fine male Woodchat Shrike and a couple of Wheatears. We then explored Pennines headland with a scattering of common migrants and ended up at Old Town, where a few people paused to find Harold Wilson's grave, before we lunched at a local cafe by the beach. We had some down time before an afternoon walk to Porth Hellick in search of a reported Night Heron; we failed to find it - in fact it was never seen again, but enjoyed the walk and a few common birds and some migrants arriving, including Swallows and Sand Martin.

Tuesday, overcast and windy, saw us head to St Martin's. Landing in Lower Town we found a Common House Martin hawking along the beach with some Swallows. We walked the north side of the island where a couple of the group had a quick look at a Ring Ousel. Otherwise, it was quite from a migrant point of view, with a couple of Wheatear and a Willow Warbler being all we could locate. After a pause for drinks and a snack at the bakery, some of us walked east to find the Pink-footed Goose that was hanging around for the last few days; it looked wary and slightly lonely sitting in a small field on its own. Back on St Mary's we walked around Peninnis Head in the afternoon enjoying several newly arrived Wheatears and some of the resident birds in wonderful sunlight. We did flush a large Pipit that flew off giving a single call that sounded like Richard's Pipit, but in a quick look we could not relocate it.

Wednesday was overcast and blustery but we headed to Tesco and most people chose to visit the Abbey gardens which were enjoyed along with Red Squirrels and both Golden and Lady Amherst's Pheasants being seen. Four of us persisted in birding our way around the Big and Great Pools, adding a few species to the list and noting increased numbers of hirundines and pipits indicating some migrants may be arriving. The highlight was two Blue-headed Wagtails seen at the heliport.

Day 7 Thursday 20th April

Thursday was due to have to lowest and highest tides of the year, so we decided to combine a walk between Tesco and Bryher with the low-tide event on the sands between the islands. It was bright and sunny but cool and still windy. On Tresco we found there were now three Blue-headed Wagtails on the heliport and many more Meadow Pipits than the previous day. The low tide event was fun, and we enjoyed a spot of lunch with live music and some amazing rock-pool creatures on the sand bar before making our way over to Bryher. Heading to Ruchy Bay we spent some time exploring and picked up a few migrants as we went. Most people headed off for a coffee, but persistence was rewarded with a trio of rare plants: Dwarf Pansy, Orange Bird's-Foot and Spring Squill. A female Merlin dashed past and a bright Wood Warbler was feeding in a hedge with a couple of Chiffchaffs.

Day 8 Friday 21st April

Our final day started sunny and slightly less windy. We walked up past Porthloo picking up a Bar-tailed Godwit and a couple of Common Sandpipers on the beach with the Oystercatchers and a couple of Little Egrets. We searched around the golf course and found a few Meadow Pipits and Wheatears. A Fieldfare - a rare bird for Scilly, was loitering in a bulb field along Porthloo Lane. We enjoyed some time in town having lunch and doing some last-minute shopping. As we waited for the Scillonian to sail, four Cattle Egrets could be seen distantly and a Common Swift foraged with hirundines across the bay. The trip back to Penzance was calm and sunny and we enjoyed nice looks at many Gannets, Manx Shearwaters and Guillemots with a few Kittiwakes, a couple of Puffins and a couple of Common Terns adding variety. We saw Common Dolphins a couple of times distantly.

We had enjoyed a good week on Scilly with sunny but slight cold and windy weather. We never had a massive fall of migrants but there was a steady trickle and we teased out some nice birds. Rare migrants seen included: three Woodcut Shrikes, Purple Heron, Tawny Pipit. These were complemented by several scarce migrants including three Blue-headed Wagtails and four White Wagtails.

Birds (H = Heard, I = Introduced)

Common name			3						
	Scientific name	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
Canada Goose - I	Branta canadensis						2		
Mute Swan	Cygnus olor						5		
Common Shelduck	Tadorna tadorna		4				2	2	1
Gadwall	Mareca strepera			√	√	√	√	√	√
Mallard	Anas platyrhynchos	✓	10	√	√	√	√	√	✓
Eurasian Teal	Anas crecca					2			
Common Pochard	Aythya ferina						1		
Common Eider	Somateria mollissima	1							
Golden Pheasant - I	Chrysolophus pictus						2		
Lady Amherst's Pheasant - I	Chrysolophus amherstiae						1		
Common Pheasant - I	Phasianus colchicus	Н	Н	√	√	√	√	√	√
Red-legged Partridge - I	Alectoris rufa					1		2	
Common Swift	Apus apus								1
Rock Dove	Columba livia	✓							
Stock Dove	Columba oenas								
Common Wood Pigeon	Columba palumbus	✓	√						
Eurasian Collared Dove	Streptopelia decaocto	✓	√						
Common Moorhen	Gallinula chloropus		3		2	2	10	5	
Eurasian Coot	Fulica atra						5		
Eurasian Oystercatcher	Haematopus ostralegus	✓	√						
Common Ringed Plover	Charadrius hiaticula					2		1	
Eurasian Whimbrel	Numenius phaeopus						1	5	10
Eurasian Curlew	Numenius arquata								2
Bar-tailed Godwit	Limosa lapponica								1

Common name		April 2023								
	Scientific name	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	
Ruddy Turnstone	Arenaria interpres	✓	20			2	2		2	
Sanderling	Calidris alba		4					2		
Dunlin	Calidris alpina		25							
Purple Sandpiper	Calidris maritima		2							
Common Snipe	Gallinago gallinago					2	1			
Common Sandpiper	Actitis hypoleucos								2	
Common Greenshank	Tringa nebularia			3	2	1				
Black-legged Kittiwake	Rissa tridactyla	✓					2		10	
Great Black-backed Gull	Larus marinus	10	30	√	√	√	√	√	✓	
European Herring Gull	Larus argentatus	✓	√	√	√	√	√	√	✓	
Lesser Black-backed Gull	Larus fuscus	1	20		2		30	2	4	
Sandwich Tern	Thalasseus sandvicensis	2						1	1	
Common Tern	Sterna hirundo								2	
Common Guillemot	Uria aalge	✓	√			10	5	2	√	
Razorbill	Alca torda	10	√		2				2	
Atlantic Puffin	Fratercula arctica		30						2	
Black-throated Diver	Gavia arctica	1								
Great Northern Diver	Gavia immer		3				1			
European Storm Petrel	Hydrobates pelagicus	1								
Northern Fulmar	Fulmarus glacialis	30	20	4	5	10	2	1	5	
Manx Shearwater	Puffinus puffinus	√			1		2		200	
Northern Gannet	Morus bassanus	50	2				2	1	100	
Great Cormorant	Phalacrocorax carbo	2	5	3	2	1	2	1	3	
European Shag	Gulosus aristotelis	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	
Purple Heron	Ardea purpurea		1							
Grey Heron	Ardea cinerea		1	1	1		2	2		
Little Egret	Egretta garzetta		2	1		2	2	1	3	
Cattle Egret	Bubuculus ibis	2					1	4	4	
Common Buzzard	Buteo buteo								1	
Common Kestrel	Falco tinnunculus	1		2	1	1			2	
Peregrine Falcon	Falco peregrinus	1	1	1						
Merlin	Falco colombarius							1		
Woodchat Shrike	Lanius senator	1		2	1			1		
Western Jackdaw	Coloeus monedula	2								
Carrion Crow	Corvus corone	/	√							
Eurasian Blue Tit	Cyanistes caeruleus	2		2	2		2			
Great Tit	Parus major	2		5	1		2		2	
Sand Martin	Riparia riparia				1		5	5	2	
Barn Swallow	Hirundo rustica		5	4	6	4	20	12	10	
Common House Martin	Delichon urbicum		1		-	1	8	8		
Wood Warbler	Phylloscopus sibilatrix						_	1		
Willow Warbler	Phylloscopus trochilus		Н	15	3		2	<u> </u>		

Common name			3						
	Scientific name	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
Common Chiffchaff	Phylloscopus collybita	Н	Н	10	2	1	5	2	1
Sedge Warbler	Acrocephalus schoenobaenus			Н		Н			
Eurasian Reed Warbler	Acrocephalus scirpaceus	Н			Н	Н			
Cetti's Warbler	Cettia certi	Н		Н		Н			
Eurasian Blackcap	Sylvia atricapilla	Н	2	1	1		2		
Goldcrest	Regulus regulus				1		4		
Eurasian Wren	Troglodytes troglodytes	√	✓						
Common Starling	Sturnus vulgaris	√	✓						
Song Thrush	Turdus philomelos	√							
Common Blackbird	Turdus merula	√	✓						
Ring Ouzel	Turdus torquatus						3		1
Fieldfare	Turdus pilaris								1
European Robin	Erithacus rubecula	√							
European Stonechat	Saxicola rubicola	√							
Northern Wheatear	Oenanthe oenanthe		3	4	4	8	2	15	3
House Sparrow	Passer domesticus	√	✓						
Dunnock	Prunella modularis	√	✓						
"Blue-headed" Western Yellow Wagtail	Motacilla flava flava						2	3	
Pied Wagtail	Motacilla alba yarrellii		1		2				
White Wagtail	Motacilla alba alba		2					1	
Tawny Pipit	Anthus campestris			1					
Meadow Pipit	Anthus pratensis		1	6	2	2	25	50	10
Tree Pipit	Anthus trivialis					1	2		
European Rock Pipit	Anthus petrosus	√							
Common Chaffinch	Fringilla coelebs	Н		1	2		1	1	1
European Greenfinch	Chloris chloris	1		1				2	
Common Linnet	Linaria cannabina	√							
European Goldfinch	Carduelis carduelis	/	√						

Mammals (I = Introduced)

Common name		April 2023									
	Scientific name	14	15	16	17	18	19	29	21		
European Rabbit - I	Oryctolagus cuniculus	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	√		
Western European Hedgehog	Erinaceus europaeus					1					
Lesser Shrew	Crocidura suaveolens			1							
Eurasian Red Squirrel	Sciurus vulgaris						✓				
Grey Seal	Halichoerus grypus	2	100	2	5		1	2	2		
Short-beaked Common Dolphin	Delphinus delphis								5		

Butterflies

Common name	Scientific name	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
Small White	Pieris rapae				1				
Holly Blue	Celastrina argiolus				1				
Common Blue	Polyommatus icarus				1				
Speckled Wood	Pararge aegeria		1	1	1		1		
Small Tortoiseshell	Aglais urticae						1	1	1

Notable plants

Dwarf Pansy

Orange Bird's-Foot

Spring Squill

Other wildlife

Notable other wildlife included:

Vagrant Emperor - one seen on Bryher, though a few other brief dragonfly sightings were probably the same species.

Violet Oil Beetle

Green Tiger Beetle

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