

Seabirds & Cetaceans of Lyme Bay

Naturetrek Tour Report

1st October 2025



Common Dolphin



Northern Gannet



Balearic Shearwater



Common Minke Whale

Tour report by Pete Stevens



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Tour participants: Pete Stevens (leader) with 12 Naturetrek clients

After gathering on the quay before 8.00am on a fine but cool morning, we met Ross at his cruiser 'Spot-On' on the quay, ready to explore Lyme Bay and its marine mammals and birds. Ross gave us a safety briefing, and then we were off.

Our first sightings were in the Brixham Harbour, where we saw a young Shag, and the local Grey Seals hauled out on a nearby pontoon. Once outside the harbour, Ross brewed up coffee while we all scanned for the sealife. We were soon seeing the southern form of Guillemots (*Uria aalge albionis*). As we sailed around the limestone headland of Berry Head with its Napoleonic Fort, we were able to see a few tens of Guillemot on the cliff ledges where, in the spring, they gather to breed. A little further on, Ross took us into a very narrow gully, where we could see Shag nest sites, ringed with tell-tale splashes of white guano.

Next, we motored out into the bay, passing fishing Cormorants and a small number of Gannets resting on today's mirror calm waters. In the distance a Bonxie, or Great Skua, could be seen over a flock of feeding gulls, and we found our first cetaceans: a pod of Common Bottlenose Dolphins. Soon, we also saw small numbers of Harbour Porpoises, the smallest of our cetaceans.

Just then a tall thin curved dorsal fin briefly cut the water nearby: no identification was possible. However, shortly afterwards, a Risso's Dolphin was spotted, and this was followed by our first of many Common Dolphin. In the distance big splashes indicated one of our largest fishes: Atlantic Blue-finned Tuna. Soon, we were able to see some jumping clear of the water.

As we carried on into the Western part of Lyme Bay we came upon raft after raft of Black-legged Kittiwakes resting on these unusually calm waters. As one small raft lifted off the water, another dainty flier was noted: a Common Tern. The wind conditions were very light today and few shearwaters were on the wing. However, we did disturb one Manx Shearwater off the water as we moved further into the bay and got good views of a small number of others during the trip.

As we moved further west, we came upon more Razorbills and even a single young Puffin. As one shearwater moved off the water, we could see the dusky underparts and dark brown wings confirming it as a Balearic Shearwater, one of the last of these summer visitors to our waters. As we followed the bird with our binoculars one of the group homed in on another, and larger, shearwater: Great Shearwater! Unfortunately, only a couple of the group got onto this bird.

As we moved into the afternoon, the breeze picked up a little, and so did the dolphin action! We were seeing more and more Common Dolphins, and several times pods moved in to bow-ride by the boat. At one stage, we counted twelve only a few metres from the prow.

Late in the afternoon, Ross shouted "Mink!" from his vantage point atop the boat. Soon, we were all looking at the Minke Whale as it circled around and around us, occasionally breaching so that we could see its white underbelly. We watched the whale for nearly half an hour, taking many shots, until it moved off into the distance. Soon afterwards, Pete spotted a distant Arctic Skua, which fortunately moved closer so that the group were able to see all the features.

On the way back in, we noted another Balearic Shearwater and our fourth Bonxie of the day, and then we came across a 'mob' of Gannets on the sea. They took off and circled around us; there were perhaps a hundred of them, both adults and young birds. In the distance, some were fishing, diving like spears from great heights into the still, fairly calm waters.

Lastly, we motored along the cliffs just east of Brixham past a group of five Grey Herons roosting in cliff-side trees. As we arrived back into Brixham Harbour, there was still one lethargic Grey Seal present, and a single Turnstone. We moored up and said our goodbyes, after a super day at sea.

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Species lists

Birds

Common name	Scientific name
Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>
Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>
Black-legged Kittiwake	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>
European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>
Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>
Arctic Skua	<i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>
Great Skua	<i>Stercorarius skua</i>
Atlantic Puffin	<i>Fratercula arctica</i>
Razorbill	<i>Alca torda</i>
Common Guillemot	<i>Uria aalge</i>
Great Shearwater	<i>Ardenna gravis</i>
Manx Shearwater	<i>Puffinus puffinus</i>
Balearic Shearwater	<i>Puffinus mauretanicus</i>
Northern Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>
European Shag	<i>Gulosus aristotelis</i>
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>

Mammals

Common name	Scientific name
Common Minke Whale	<i>Balaenoptera acutorostrata</i>
Risso's Dolphin	<i>Grampus griseus</i>
Common Bottlenose Dolphin	<i>Tursiops truncatus</i>
Common Dolphin	<i>Delphinus delphis</i>
Harbour Porpoise	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i>
Grey Seal	<i>Halichoerus grypus</i>