

Pembrokeshire in Early Summer

Naturetrek Tour Report

8 – 11 June 2015



Heath Spotted Orchid



Red-billed Chough



Atlantic Puffin



Razorbill

Report & images compiled by Barry Oxley



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Jim Bebbington National Trust guide
And eight Naturetrek clients

SUMMARY

This tour was designed to explore both the offshore islands and coastal flora and fauna found on the beautiful Pembrokeshire coast. The boat trips are very weather dependant but we managed an excellent day on Skomer before the strong westerlies curtailed further boat exploration. Bosherton and the Stackpole area was as lovely as ever, despite cool winds keeping the butterflies and dragonflies grounded; however, we lost no outdoor activities because of rain. We also visited St. David's Cathedral and Dowrog Common, finding birds and interesting plants in abundance. Forays to Woolpack Point and Stackpole Quay allowed us great vistas of the wonderful coast, opportunities to find Choughs and to explore the geology and geography of the area.

Day 1

Monday 8th June

Weather: sunny, with some cloud; strong cool north-westerly wind

After travelling to Pembrokeshire, we all checked in at the Beggars Reach Hotel and met at the bar at 5pm to become acquainted, and discuss the next few days' itinerary. It was a pleasant evening and before our meal we explored the garden, noting and listening to birds by song. We ended up at a small pond where wetland plants such as Water-forget-me-not *Myosotis scorpioides*, Celery-leaved Buttercup *Ranunculus sceleratus* and Marsh Thistle *Cirsium palustre* were in flower. The water surface was sprinkled with the dainty white flowers of Common Water Crowfoot *Ranunculus aquatilis*. As we returned for dinner, we looked at Swallows and House Martins nest-building under the eaves of the hotel buildings: a taster, we thought, for our next few days in Pembrokeshire.

Day 2

Tuesday 9th June

Weather: bright sunny and calm in morning but clouding over with increasing wind.

Our plan today was to go to Skomer. The forecast was good so we breakfasted at 7am, and made for Martin's Haven, stopping to check on the way that the ferry was running. Arriving around 8.30am we noted the N.T. car park was filling rapidly and so dived for the shop and bought tickets for the 11.30am sailing.

We had stopped at the Marloes shop as we passed through for sandwiches but it was under new management; however, we found enough to sustain us on the island and so geared up for an exploration of Woolpack Point while waiting for our sailing. Meadow Pipits were trilling and parachuting everywhere and Linnets twittered and flew purposefully from gorse bush to gorse bush, as we watched Northern Wheatears feeding chicks on the rocky slopes. A Chough whizzed by and we followed it to a point where parents were feeding full grown chicks, giving us great views of this charismatic crow. Thrift *Armeria maritima* had all but finished flowering here but Sheep's-bit *Jasione montana*, Biting Stonecrop *Sedum acre*, and Sea Plantain *Plantago maritima* flowered among the closely nibbled grasses.

Returning to the jetty, we boarded the ferry at 11.30am and sailed across the strait towards Skomer. Apart from a swirling tidal race, the crossing was smooth and, after 15 minutes, we disembarked and climbed the many steps to be met by the assistant warden, who briefed us on the wildlife and where to go. We made for the buildings in

the centre and consumed our lunch in the shelter of some rocks, and then made for the Garland Stone in the north before turning left towards Skomer Head and The Wick. Everywhere Meadow Pipits were singing, together with the odd Skylark, and Great Black-backed Gulls patrolled ominously, on the lookout for seabirds to ambush. Corpses of Manx Shearwaters marked previous successes of this predatory gull, and we noted chicks being fed by parents. The endearing Puffins stood at their burrow entrances, wondering who or what we were, and allowed us to take photos; some were bringing beaks full of sand eels etc., and diving immediately into their burrows before the gulls tried to snatch their bounty. Rabbits here were clearly an important part of the ecosystem, creating a short sward and numerous burrows which were commandeered by the Puffins. It was also hard to imagine that 300,000 Manx Shearwaters were on the island, despite there being numerous holes; none were visible, being away fishing. After numerous photos, we moved along to look at the seabird cities on the Mew Stone. Here lines of Guillemots were nesting together with Razorbills, Kittiwakes and Fulmars, each species occupying a different section of the rock face. Here we could have stayed all day but, all too soon, we had to make for the jetty ready for our return boat at 4pm. The scheduled boat was somewhat late which gave us more time to watch and photograph some conveniently placed Guillemots and Razorbills, near the boat landing steps. The wind had increased considerably, which made for an exhilarating return to Martin's Haven through some choppy seas.

After another enjoyable meal, we did the checklist and made for bed after an inspiring day.

Day 3

Wednesday 10th June

Weather: mostly sunny but with a chill wind.

After watching the return of the bouncing Grassholm rib from Skomer Island yesterday, most opted to avoid the scheduled trip today and, indeed, we found later it did not run because of strong winds: these winds curtailed all further boat trips during our tour.

Today we were scheduled to visit Bosherton to search for otters. This meant an early start and so we left at 5.30am to meet Jim, the local National Trust volunteer and otter expert, at 6am at the Stackpole Centre. After introductions, we made for the lake.

We scanned for the elusive otters as we walked to the eight arch bridge, with Jim narrating the current story of the resident otters; numbers had been depleted by an unexplained death and a road accident but a female had recently arrived with two cubs. We walked up to the one arch bridge and made a short visit to the walled garden to look at the exhibits etc., and Jim explained the history of the site before we returned to the grassy bridge and walking to the sea. The otters had eluded us today so we returned to the car park, said our goodbyes and returned to the hotel for a well-earned breakfast.

The walk around Skomer and the ponds had stacked up some mileage and so we opted for a slightly easier option for the rest of the day. Leaving around 11.30am, we made for St. David's and a light lunch before making a short visit to the Cathedral.

The ancient walls surrounding the Cathedral were draped with some amazing flora and we noted Pellitory of the Wall *Paricateria judaica*, Ivy-leaved Toadflax *Cymbalaria muralis*, various Spleenworts *Asplenium spp.* including Wall Rue *Asplenium ruta-muraria*, and Red Valerian *Centranthus ruber* in an assortment of colour forms. Time did not

allow for too much of an exploration of the magnificent and historic Cathedral; however, we gained a flavour before exiting and heading a mile or two to the north-east of the city, to Dowrog Common. Managed by the West Wales Trust for Nature Conservation, and fed by the diminutive River Arun, we first checked we were able to access the common without wellies before heading out. A fine specimen of Southern Marsh Orchid *Dactylorhiza praetermissa*, flowering near the road, spurred us on to discover many Heath Spotted Orchids *Dactylorhiza maculata* and Lousewort *Pedicularis sylvatica*. Small Heath Butterflies were emerging and an obliging Common Hawker dragonfly allowed good views, together with a Small Red Damselfly. Crows chasing a rather harassed Cuckoo caused some excitement, as we returned to the van and made for home and another hearty meal at the hotel.

Day 4

Thursday 11th June

Weather. Bright and sunny, warmer.

After a more leisurely breakfast this morning, we left again for Bosherton Lily Ponds and, after driving over the Cleddau bridge again, parked in the official N.T. car park. and made for the western arm. As we went, we admired the White Water-lilies *Nymphaea alba* which were just opening in the sun. Blackcap, Chiffchaff and Wren were in full voice, and two Grey Herons sat obligingly on the walkway and posed for a photograph or two, as we headed towards the dunes. Speckled Wood butterflies had emerged, and we spent some time looking at the dune flora noting Common Spotted Orchid *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* and Pyramidal Orchid *Anacamptis pyramidalis*, Common Broomrape *Orobanche minor*, Seaside Centaury *Centaureum littorale*, Vipers Bugloss *Echium vulgare*, Columbine *Aquilegia vulgaris* and Burnet Rose *Rosa spinosissima*. After arriving at the sea, we returned via the southern path, stopping to admire some Early Purple Orchids *Orchis mascula* and Common Twayblades *Neottia ovata* flowering at the side of the path, and arrived back at the car park around 1pm.

Stackpole Quay was our next destination, for a welcome cuppa and lunch at the N.T. café. Pat had a taxi booked to take her to the station here. After saying our goodbyes to her, we climbed the steps for a walk along the clifftops, before returning to the hotel to conclude our tour. The weather had been kind for our short visit to this amazing and beautiful area of Pembrokeshire and, although our boat trips had been cut short, no time was lost in the field because of inclement weather.

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Species Lists

Birds (✓ = recorded but not counted; h = heard only)

	Common name	Scientific name	June			
			8	9	10	11
1	Northern Fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>		3		
2	Manx Shearwater	<i>Puffinus puffinus</i>		corpses		
3	Northern Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>		1		
4	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>			2	2
5	European Shag	<i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i>		2	2	
6	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>				4
7	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>			10	2
8	Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>		25		
9	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	1		15	6
10	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>		1		
11	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	2	2	4	3
12	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>		1	1	
13	Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>		1	1	
14	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>		1		
15	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>			1	2
16	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>			3	2
17	Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>		6		
18	Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>			2	
19	Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>		1	h	
20	European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>		✓	✓	✓
21	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>		✓	1	2
22	Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>		✓		1
23	Black-legged Kittiwake	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>		✓		
24	Atlantic Puffin	<i>Fratercula arctica</i>		100s		
25	Common Murre (Guillemot)	<i>Uria aalge</i>		1000s		
26	Razorbill	<i>Alca torda</i>		100s		
27	Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
28	Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>		6	6	6
29	Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>			1	
30	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>				h
31	Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>		3	6	
32	Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>		3		
33	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	6	20	30c	10
34	Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbica</i>	2	10	10	6
35	Rock Pipit	<i>Anthus petrosus</i>		2		
36	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>		✓	✓	✓
37	Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba yarrelli</i>	2	2	4	
38	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	1	3	h	h
39	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>				1
40	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>			2	3
41	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>			6	
42	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>		3		2
43	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
44	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>				h
45	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	1			
46	Common Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>		6	h	3
47	Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>			h	

	Common name	Scientific name	June			
			8	9	10	11
48	Garden Warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>				1
49	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>			h	h
50	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	h	h	h	`
51	Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>			1	h
52	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>			h	
53	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>			3	2
54	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	1		3	3
55	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>				6
56	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
57	Western Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
58	Red-billed Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>		6		
59	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>				1
60	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>		1	✓	✓
61	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>				1
62	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>		6	✓	10
63	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
64	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>		20		3
65	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	2	6	4	6
66	Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>				h
67	Common Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>		1		2

Mammals & Amphibians

1	Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>		1	1	
2	Badger	<i>Meles meles</i>			1	
3	Atlantic Grey Seal	<i>Halichoerus grypus</i>		2		
4	Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>		6	1	
5	Common Frog	<i>Rana temporaria</i>			2	

Butterflies & Moths

1	Common Blue	<i>Polyommatus icarus</i>			2	
2	Small Tortoiseshell	<i>Aglia urticae</i>			3	
3	Peacock	<i>Aglais (Inachis) io</i>		1		
4	Painted Lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>		10		
5	Small Heath	<i>Ceononympha pamphilus</i>		3	6	
6	Meadow Brown	<i>Maniola jurtina</i>		1		
7	Speckled Wood	<i>Pararge aegeria</i>		2	6	
8	Hummingbird Hawk-moth	<i>Macroglossum stellatarum</i>		1		

Dragonflies

1	Blue-tailed Damselfly	<i>Inchnura elegans</i>			1	
2	Large Red damselfly	<i>Pyrrhosoma nymphula</i>			1	
3	Common Hawker	<i>Aeshna juncea</i>			1	

Plants at the Hotel

Common Water Crowsfoot *Ranunculus aquatilis*

Foxglove *Digitalis purpurea*

White Water-lily *Nymphaea alba*

Common Fumitory *Fumaria officinalis*

Celery-leaved Buttercup *Ranunculus sceleratus*

Water Forget-me-not *Myosotis scorpioides*

Marsh Thistle *Cirsium palustre*

Plants at St. Davids

Red Valerian *Centranthus ruber*
 Hemlock Water-dropwort. *Oenanthe crocata*
 Wall Rue *Asplenium ruta-muraria*
 Navelwort *Umbilicus rupestris*

Ivy-leaved Toadflax *Cymbalaria muralis*
 Pellitory-of-the-Wall *Parietaria judaica*
 Spleenworts *Asplenium sp.*

Plants of Dowrog Common

Ragged Robin *Silene (Lychnis) flos-cuculi*
 Heath Spotted Orchid *Dactylorhiza maculata*
 Common Cottongrass *Eriophorum angustifolium*
 Meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*
 Red Campion *Silene dioica*
 Silverweed *Potentilla anserina*
 Water Mint *Mentha aquatica*
 Lousewort *Pedicularis sylvatica*
 Cross-leaved Heath *Erica tetralix*

Southern Marsh Orchid *Dactylorhiza praetermissa*
 Yellow Iris *Iris pseudacorus*
 Fleabane *Pulicaria dysenterica*
 Alexanders *Smyrniolum olusatrum*
 Red Clover *Trifolium pratense*
 Tormentil *Potentilla erecta*
 Sorrel *Rumex acetosa*
 Common Marsh Bedstraw *Galium palustre*
 Common Sorrel *Rumex acetosa*

Plants recorded on the clifftops and Skomer

Sheep's-bit *Jasione montana*
 Foxglove *Digitalis purpurea*
 Thyme *Thymus polytrichus*
 Sea Campion *Silene uniflora*
 Thrift *Armeria maritima*
 Silverweed *Potentilla anserina*

Cut-leaved Cranesbill *Geranium dissectum*
 Bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*
 Scarlet Pimpernel *Anagallis arvensis*
 Sea Plantain *Plantago maritima*
 Red Campion *Silene dioica*

Plants of Bosherton Pools, adjoining woods and the dunes

Common Spotted Orchid *Dactylorhiza fuchsii*
 Early Purple Orchid *Orchis mascula*
 White Water-lily *Nymphaea alba*
 Black Bryony *Tamus communis*
 Viper's Bugloss *Echium vulgare*
 Self-heal *Prunella vulgaris*
 Sanicle *Sanicula europaea*
 Ramsons *Allium ursinum*
 Kidney Vetch *Anthyllis vulneraria*
 Eyebright *Euphrasia ostenfeldii*
 Herb Robert *Geranium robertianum*
 Hart's-tongue Fern *Asplenium scolopendrium*
 Common Valerian *Valeriana officinalis*
 Scarlet Pimpernel *Anagallis arvensis*
 Salad Burnet *Sanguisorba minor*
 Woodruff *Galium odoratum*

Pyramidal Orchid *Anacamptis pyramidalis*
 Common Twayblade *Neottia (Listera) ovata*
 Yellow Iris *Iris pseudacorus*
 Wild Mignonette *Reseda lutea*
 Burnet Rose *Rosa spinosissima (pimpinellifolia)*
 Bugle *Ajuga reptans*
 Common Figwort *Schrophularia nodosa*
 Common Broomrape *Orobancha minor*
 Common Columbine *Aquilegia hybrids*
 Yellow Rattle *Rhinanthus minor*
 Sun Spurge *Euphorbia helioscopia*
 Seaside Centaury *Centaureum littorale*
 Wild Thyme (pink and white forms) *Thymus polytrichus*
 Herb Bennet *Geum urbanum*
 Yellowwort *Blackstonia perfoliata*