

Pembrokeshire in Early Summer

Naturetrek Tour Report

13 - 16 June 2016



Adder by Jim Bebbington



Silver-studded Blue by Jim Bebbington



Red-billed Chough by Barry Oxley



Grass Snake by Jim Bebbington

Report compiled by Barry Oxley
Images courtesy of Jim Bebbington and Barry Oxley



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With eight Naturetrek clients

Summary

On this tour we explored both the offshore Islands and coastal flora and fauna found on the beautiful Pembrokeshire coast. Boat trips are always weather dependant and although we were unable to land on Skomer because of strong north-westerlies, we were able to land on Ramsey Island which has a more sheltered harbour. Bosherton and the Stackpole area were as lovely as ever despite cool winds. No outdoor activities were lost because of rain. We also visited St. Davids Cathedral and then on to nearby Dowrog Common, finding a few birds and interesting plants in abundance. Forays to Woolpack Point and Stackpole Quay allowed us great vistas of the scenic coast, and further opportunities to find choughs and explore the history and geography of the area.

Day 1

Monday 13th June

It was cloudy with light drizzle today. After travelling to Pembrokeshire, we all checked in at the Beggars Reach Hotel and met in the bar at 5pm to become acquainted and discuss the itinerary for the next few days. We had a short walk around the garden and lane by the hotel, noting that Barn Swallows were breeding in the workshop basement and a family of Mistle Thrushes were in residence. A small pond contained Water-forget-me-not *Myosotis scorpioides*, Celery-leaved Buttercup *Ranunculus sceleratus* and Marsh Thistle *Cirsium palustre*. The lane was ablaze with Red Valerian and Foxgloves, a sight to be repeated wherever we went in the days to follow. As we returned for dinner we noted Common House Martins nest-building under the eaves of the hotel buildings. The walk was a small taster for our next few days in Pembrokeshire.

Day 2

Tuesday 14th June

Early light rain had cleared by late morning. Our plan today was to go to Skomer. The ferry had been running on previous days so we were hopeful we would be able to cross. We breakfasted at 7am and then made for Martins Haven, stopping on the way to check that the ferry was running, however the wind direction had changed and thus the boat was unable to make the crossing. The captain thought it unlikely it would sail in the next few days as the forecast was similar and indeed this proved to be the case. Disappointed but not disheartened, we resorted to plan B, continuing our journey to Woolpack Point where we left our vehicle in the National Trust (NT) car park and walked up onto the cliff top to look at the flora and fauna.

One of the target birds here was Red-billed Chough and right on cue, two flew into view. We had difficulty finding Northern Wheatear which is a regular breeding bird here, but we eventually succeeded. European Stonechat, Common Linnet and Meadow Pipit were also evident as we walked up to a prominent viewpoint to look across at the Island of Skomer. Here the waves were lashing the bottom of the cliffs, emphasising the reason for the ferry cancellation. Small auks were bobbing on the sea at the base of the cliffs. We managed to hold the telescope still long enough to get distant views of Common Guillemots and the odd Atlantic Puffin and Razorbill. Northern Gannets were fishing in the calmer waters between the two islands; these were probably breeding birds from the Gannetry on the island of Grassholm, twelve miles or so offshore. Northern Fulmars played with the wind and allowed us great views of this charismatic tubenose. We were able to see why it is so called, being a relative of the albatrosses and not a gull. Fulmar is a corruption of “foul-mouth”, due to its

unpleasant habit of squirting stomach contents at the unwary. Thrift *Armeria maritima* had all but finished flowering here but Sheepsbit Scabious *Jasione Montana*, Biting Stonecrop *Sedum acre*, Sea Campion *Silene uniflora* and Sea Plantain *Plantago maritima* flowered among the closely nibbled grasses.

After returning to our vehicle we made for St. Davids, stopping at the Hilton Court Gardens for lunch. We arrived at the city early afternoon for a visit to the marvellous cathedral. The walk to St Davids Cathedral allowed time to view the amazing wall flora in this sheltered valley. Ivy-leaved Toadflax *Cymbalaria muralis* (including a white form), Wall Rue *Asplenium ruta-muraria*, Pellitory of the Wall *Parietaria judaica* and Spleenworts *Asplenium sp.* clung on to exist in the nooks and crannies. While the group explored the cathedral, Barry walked to the RSPB shop in the centre of St. Davids to investigate possibilities for boat trips for the next day, and provisionally booked a boat to the RSPB Island of Ramsey.

Exploration of the cathedral completed, we made for nearby Dowrog Common. A lovely spike of Southern Marsh Orchid *Dactyloretzia praetermissa* was flowering near the entrance, and as we entered a pond held Bogbean *Menyanthes trifoliata*, Ragged Robin *Silene (Lychnis) flos-cuculi* and other water plants in flower. Also a few Four-spotted Chasers had emerged in this sheltered spot. Lousewort *Pedicularis sylvatica* and Cross-leaved Heath *Erica tetralix* mingled with Heath Spotted Orchid *Dactyloretzia maculata* and Yellow Iris *Iris pseudacorus* to create a subtle floral display. Ponies were on the moor to help with grass management and proved to be very friendly, however their electric fencing restricted our movements, and meeting a wet muddy area, we turned back and drove around to the west side of the moor. Here we discovered even better displays of orchids and also a clump of the diminutive Bog Pimpernel *Anagallis tenella* and Bog Asphodels *Narthesium ossifragum* in full flower. Birds were remarkably quiet here apart from Meadow Pipit and Eurasian Skylark so we departed for home and a well-earned dinner.

Day 3

Wednesday 15th June

Early rain cleared to leave a mostly sunny day. As our boat trip was not scheduled until midday we were able to enjoy a relaxed breakfast before leaving about 9am for St Davids, first checking the boat was running. To our relief and delight it was; the Ramsey harbour being more sheltered than that of Skomer. We stopped for a short walk to view the lovely harbour at Solva. We walked along the river edge looking at the flora. Birds were remarkably few apart from the odd loitering gull, but passerines were singing in the bushes, although difficult to see. Eurasian Blackcap, Eurasian Wren and European Robin were in full voice and a family of Common Chiffchaff were seen gleaning the leaves.

Moving on, we arrived in St Davids city centre to buy some sandwiches, and finally moved down to St Justinians where we had trouble parking. The word was out - Ramsey was open and the many visitors who had been diverted from Skomer had arrived. We made our way down to the lifeboat ramp and eventually left about 12.20pm.

After a scramble up some steps on to the island were met by the warden who briefed us on the work the RSPB were doing on the island and what birds there were to see. Arriving at the staff buildings and shop, we stopped for lunch and sat watching numerous Common House Martins building their nests before setting off on the path around the island. As we left the buildings we noticed a pair of Spotted Flycatchers nest building, finding out later that if successful, this would be the first breeding record in the RSPB's 18 year history on the island.

Moving along, we noticed some birdwatchers taking an interest in a standing stone and realised there was a Short-eared Owl sat on top. Although a fair way away, we enjoyed watching this bird search for the Ramsey voles which were apparently abundant here. We were blessed with some reasonable weather at last and enjoyed some spectacular cliff views of the Pembrokeshire islands. As we walked, Northern Wheatears seemed to be everywhere and we watched adults feeding their chicks. European Stonechats perched on the heather and we had to be careful to avoid the burrows of the Manx Shearwaters. Ros later found a skull of this species allowing us to see the long bill, adapted for catching krill and small fish. Two Common Buzzards soared over the sea, two Red-billed Choughs passed by and Northern Ravens 'cronked' while we studied the island flora. Returning, we encountered a small flock of Red Deer, apparently introduced by a previous owner.

We learnt from the RSPB staff that the island was now cleared of rats so Manx Shearwater and Storm Petrel were breeding in good numbers. Encouraging Atlantic Puffins to nest on the island had been unsuccessful so far; clearly they were happy on Skomer. However, there were signs that they would be breeding here in future years. Although the 'sea bird cities' on the island were not easy to access, we watched them from a distance as we made our way back to the boat. It had been a busy day for the boat and we had to wait until 4.20pm for our return, but it was a pleasant afternoon so no one minded too much.

Back at our hotel, the day culminated in completing checklists and another pleasant evening meal.

Day 4

Thursday 16th June

After a leisurely breakfast we left for Bosherton Lily Ponds, saying our goodbyes to Catherine who had an early train to catch. After driving over the Cleddau Bridge, we parked in the official NT car park. We set off and Jim, our guide, caught up with us later.

Crossing the walkways over the western arm of the lake we admired the amazing rafts of White Water Lilies *Nymphaea alba* which were just opening in the sun. Eurasian Blackcap, Garden Warbler, Common Chiffchaff and Eurasian Wren were in full voice, Common Buzzards mewed, a Grey Heron perched obligingly and Mute Swans glided by as we headed towards the dunes. The parasitic Ivy Broomrape *Orobanche hederae* flowered in profusion beside the paths and Speckled Wood butterflies flitted in the shady parts. Arriving at the dunes, we spent some time looking at the flora noting a profusion of Common Spotted Orchid *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* and Pyramidal Orchid *Anacamptis pyramidalis*, Seaside Centaury *Centaureum littorale*, Vipers Bugloss *Echium vulgare*, Columbine *Aquilegia vulgaris* and Burnet Rose *Rosa piminellifolia*. Common Whitethroats were displaying and singing and small flocks of Common Linnets ambled and twittered, looking for seed to eat.

We met Jim and Marilyn, his wife, and they gave us an update on the famous Bosherton Otters. Last year had been a rather disastrous one for them as two cubs had been lost and the adults had then disappeared. However a day or two before our arrival there had been some sightings which bode well for a return to the lakes. Jim and Marilyn led us to the beach to look for tracks and then to the Mere Pool where university students were carrying out a small mammal survey. It was intriguing to see their methodology. Jim was also involved in a reptile survey of the dunes and carefully lifted corrugated iron sheets to check for sheltering reptiles etc., amazingly finding a total of 12 Slow Worms and a male Grass Snake, all taking advantage of the warmth. We had close views of these and we were able to confirm that Slow Worms are, in fact, legless lizards and able to jettison their tails if attacked, re-growing them later. Adders are also found here but they eluded us this time.

Our guides explained the geography of the area, stopping at appropriate ancient and modern historical points of interest as we walked to Stackpole Quay for a welcome cuppa and lunch at the NT café. Barry and Jim left soon after lunch to collect our vehicle, while Marilyn escorted the rest of the group along the cliff tops to the beautiful Barafundle Bay. We then returned to the hotel and after thanking Jim and Marilyn, we said our goodbyes and the tour concluded at 4pm.

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Pyramidal Orchid by Barry Oxley

Species Lists

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

	Common name	Scientific name	June			
			13	14	15	16
1	Northern Fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>		✓	✓	
2	Manx Shearwater	<i>Puffinus puffinus</i>		Corpse		
3	Northern Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>		✓	✓	
4	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>				✓
5	European Shag	<i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i>		✓	✓	
6	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>				1
7	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>				6
8	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	2	2	4	3
9	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>		1	1	
10	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>				1
11	Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>		1	1	
12	European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>		✓	✓	✓
13	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>		✓	✓	✓
14	Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>		1	4	
15	Black-legged Kittiwake	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>		✓	✓	
16	Atlantic Puffin	<i>Fratercula arctica</i>		✓		
17	Common Guillemot	<i>Uria aalge</i>		✓	✓	
18	Razorbill	<i>Alca torda</i>		✓		
19	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
20	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
21	Short-eared Owl	<i>Asio flammeus</i>		2		
22	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	✓			
23	Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	✓	✓		
24	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
25	Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
26	Rock Pipit	<i>Anthus petrosus</i>		1		
27	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>		✓	✓	✓
28	Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba yarrellii</i>	✓	✓	✓	
29	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	✓	✓	h	h
30	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	1			1
31	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓		✓	✓
32	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>		2	c.20	
33	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>		3	2	2
34	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
35	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>		1		h
36	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	2	4	6	
37	Common Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>			h	1
38	Common Grasshopper Warbler	<i>Locustella naevia</i>		h		
39	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>		h		h
40	Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>			2	
41	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>		h	h	4
46	Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>				h
47	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
48	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
49	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
50	Western Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
51	Red-billed Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>		4	2	

	Common name	Scientific name	June			
			13	14	15	16
52	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
53	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
54	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		2	2	
55	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
56	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
57	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
58	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>			6	

Mammals

1	Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>			5	
2	Badger	<i>Meles meles</i>		corpse		
3	Grey Seal	<i>Halichoerus grypus</i>		2	15	
4	Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>		1		

Butterflies

1	Silver-studded Blue	<i>Plebejus argus</i>				3
2	Common Blue	<i>Polyommatus icarus</i>				2
3	Painted Lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>			2	3
4	Small Heath	<i>Coenonympha pamphilus</i>			1	1
5	Meadow Brown	<i>Maniola jurtina</i>				2
6	Speckled Wood	<i>Pararge aegeria</i>				2

Reptiles & Amphibians

Slow Worm

Grass Snake

Common Toad

Dragonflies & Damselflies

Beautiful Demoiselle

Common Blue Damselfly

Four-spotted Chaser

Common Hawker

Plants at the Hotel

Common Water Crowsfoot *Ranunculus aquatilis*

Celery-leaved Buttercup *Ranunculus sceleratus*

Foxglove *Digitalis purpurea*

Water Forget-me-not *Myosotis scorpioides*

Marsh Thistle *Cirsium palustre*

Plants at St. Davids

Red Valerian *Centranthus ruber*

Ivy-leaved Toadflax *Cymbalaria muralis*

Hemlock Water-dropwort. *Conium maculatum*

Pellitory of the Wall *Parietaria judaica*

Wall Rue *Asplenium ruta-muraria*

Spleenworts *Asplenium sp.*

Navelwort *Umbilicus rupestris*

Plants at Dowrog Common

Ragged Robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi*

Southern Marsh Orchid *Dactylorhiza praetermissa*

Heath Spotted Orchid *Dactylorhiza maculata*

Yellow Iris *Iris pseudacorus*

Common Cottongrass *Eriophorum angustifolium*

Fleabane *Pulicaria dysenterica*

Meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*
 Red Campion *Silene dioica*
 Silverweed *Potentilla anserina*
 Water Mint *Mentha aquatica*
 Lousewort *Pedicularis sylvatica*
 Cross-leaved Heath *Erica tetralix*
 Meadow Thistle *Cirsium dissectum*

Alexanders *Smyrniolum olusatrum*
 Red Clover *Trifolium pratense*
 Tormentil *Potentilla erecta*
 Pink Purslane *Claytonia sibirica*
 Common Marsh Bedstraw *Galium palustre*
 Common Sorrel *Rumex acetosa*
 Bog Pimpernel *Anagallis tenella*

Plants on the clifftops and at Ramsey

Sheepsbit Scabious *Jasione montana*
 Foxglove *Digitalis purpurea*
 Thyme *Thymus polytrichus*
 Sea Campion *Silene uniflora*
 Thrift *Armeria maritima*
 Silverweed *Potentilla anserina*
 Tree Mallow *Lavatera arborea*

Cut-leaved Cranesbill *Geranium dissectum*
 Bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*
 Scarlet Pimpernell *Anagallis arvensis*
 Sea Plantain *Plantago maritima*
 Red Campion *Silene dioica*
 Scurvy Grass *Cochlearia officinalis*

Plants at Bosherton Pools, adjoining woods and the dunes

Common Spotted Orchid *Dactylorhiza fuchsii*
 Sea Holly *Eryngium maritimum*
 Yellow Iris *Iris pseudacorus*
 Wild Mignonette *Reseda lutea*
 Burnet Rose *Rosa pimpinellifolia*
 Bugle *Ajuga reptans*
 Common Figwort *Schrophularia nodosa*
 Ivy Broomrape *Orobanche hedereae*
 Common Columbine *Aquilegia hybrids*
 Yellow Rattle *Rhinanthus minor*
 Sun Spurge *Euphorbia helioscopia*
 Seaside Centaury *Centaurium litorale*
 Wild Thyme *Thymus polytrichus*
 Herb Bennet *Geum urbanum*
 Yellowwort *Blackstonia perfoliata*

Pyramidal Orchid *Anacamptis pyramidalis*
 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*
 Eyebrite *Euphrasia ostenfeldii*
 Herb Robert *Geranium robertianum*
 Hart's tongue Fern *Asplenium scolopendrium*
 Valerian *Valeriana officinalis*
 Scarlet Pimpernel *Anagallis arvensis*
 Salad Burnet *Sanguisorba minor*
 Restharrow *Ononis repens*



St David's Cath by Barry Oxley