

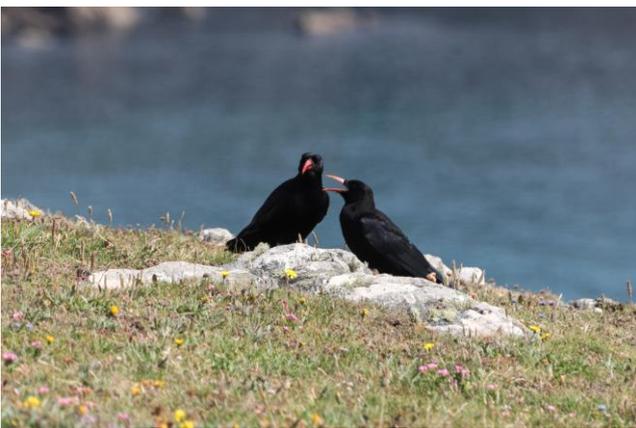
Cornwall: Beavers, Choughs and Cetaceans

Naturetrek Tour Report

27th June – 1st July 2021



Eurasian Beaver



Chough



Sandwich Terns

Tour report by Matt Collis and photos kindly supplied to us by
tour participant, Roger Pritchard



Naturetrek Mingledown Barn Wolf's Lane Chawton Alton Hampshire GU34 3HJ UK

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

E: info@naturetrek.co.uk

W: www.naturetrek.co.uk

Tour Participants: Matt Collis (Leader) with nine Naturetrek clients

Summary

This five day tour of Cornwall attempts to encompass a range of wildlife experiences all centred around our base on the outskirts of Falmouth – home to one of the deepest natural harbours in the world. Blessed with excellent sunny weather for the majority of our trip, we were able to spend significant time exploring the Lizard Peninsula and successfully tracked down Chough, resulting in an amazingly intimate experience with this special bird. Our visit to Woodland Valley Farm was equally successful with an excellent tour around the site, ending with gorgeous views of the adult female Beaver as she ventured out to forage on the stillest of evenings. While we failed to see too diverse a mix of Cetaceans, we had some incredible encounters with other wildlife; notably, large numbers of Manx Shearwaters, Great Skua, Peregrine Falcon and a surprise Common Seal eating a Gurnard.

Day 1

Sunday 27th June

Gathering in the lounge area of the Penmorvah Hotel in the early evening, tour leader Matt welcomed and introduced the group to our stunning location on the edge of Falmouth and the Lizard Peninsula. With a diverse itinerary involving boat trips, farm visits and coastal walking, Matt shared details of our plans for the next few days – giving the odd teaser of the wildlife we might enjoy ahead. On completing the introduction, we were invited to take our seats in the impressive dining room, and were subsequently served a delicious three course meal – something many would comment on very positively at the end of the tour. After a relaxing start to the tour, everyone retired to their rooms in anticipation of our first morning and the wildlife we would hopefully enjoy together.

Day 2

Monday 28th June

Following breakfast, we made our way south along the famous Lizard Peninsula to spend a day exploring the flora and fauna along its coastline. We started at Lizard Point, the mostly southerly point of the peninsula, and slowly made our way west towards Kynance Cove. The cliffs were abloom with wildflowers, most notably Betony, Wild Carrot, Thrift, Kidney Vetch, Sea Campion, Red Campion and Wild Thyme forming the majority of the carpet of colour. In between we found a few speciality species of the Lizard including Thyme Broomrape, Dyer's Greenweed and Long-headed Clover. The appearance of several species of orchid including Green-winged, Common Spotted, Heath Spotted and Southern Marsh were of particular interest to everyone.

After some lunch in Lizard, we headed towards Predannack Head to take another walk along the coast, this time focusing on the butterflies and the birds, with two species particularly in mind. The first was spotted almost immediately – a family of six Chough gliding in to feed on the bare turf along the cliff tops. They gave us spectacular views, coming in as close as 20m, seemingly uninterested in our presence and the young fledglings much more interested in harrying their parents for another grub. We noted one individual had a ring on its leg – a quick email to Cornwall Birdwatching Society revealed we were watching the family of the Southerly Point. The ringed individual was a male, born locally in 2019, who has since taken residence on the Lizard and had successfully fledged four youngsters at his first attempt.

Despite our best efforts, we couldn't track down our target butterfly, the Marsh Fritillary. However, we did get to enjoy several other butterflies including Speckled Wood, Red Admiral, Small Heath and a whole influx of Silver Y-moth which were a continuous presence popping up every few metres. After enjoying long views across the cove, all the way to Penzance, we returned to the vehicles and made our way back to the hotel for the evening.

Day 3

Tuesday 29th June

We spent the day visiting Woodland Valley Farm – an organic pasture-fed cattle farm near Truro and home to the Cornwall Beaver Project. The majority of our day was spent with Sam, an Ecologist, who introduced the farm alongside some of its history to explain how it came to be as it is now. This was followed with two tours around the farm; firstly, to explore some of the regenerating woodlands at the top of the valley where we saw a mighty Beech with the largest Artist's Bracket fungi anyone had ever seen. Then we moved on to see the quite unique strip-based pasture rotation of the small mixed herd of cattle before heading to the Beaver enclosure to see how the animals, introduced in 2017, had dramatically changed the flow of the local stream – creating a series of ponds and new flows behind their impressive dam structures.

After an afternoon walk to explore a local badger sett and to see some organic silage meadows, we then headed off to a local pub for some high-quality food accompanied by Chris, the farm owner and manager. He gave us further insight into the Cornwall Beaver Project, modern farming and further highlighted the dramatic change in approach required in order to reverse the devastating impact of intensive farming for the last 60 years.

We ended our day back in the Beaver enclosure in the hope of spotting some of the seven individuals which currently reside there. It wasn't long before one was spotted gently floating in the middle of a large pond – the adult female – notable for having a notch in her right ear. This Beaver made several more appearances as she foraged around most sides of the pond, occasionally coming in very close to us before giving an all-mighty tail splash, making the other Beavers in the enclosure aware of our presence. After just over an hour, we returned to our transport and headed back to the hotel for the night.

Day 4

Wednesday 30th June

Today we joined AK Wildlife's crew - skipper Chris and deck-hand Georgia - for a day on the sea exploring the coastline of Falmouth and the Lizard Peninsula. Our goal was to get close to some of the abundant wildlife of the peninsula but from the perspective of a boat. The weather was glorious and the sea, protected by the peninsula itself, was like a sheet of glass for the majority of our trip making for excellent wildlife spotting conditions. We travelled a large distance, hugging the coastline all the way to Kynance Cove before looping back towards Falmouth via the open sea a few miles offshore.

We saw some excellent wildlife during our seven-hour voyage; notably an amazing number of Manx Shearwaters, many incredibly close, as they either flew past or rested on the sea in large rafts. We spotted several auk species, mostly Guillemots and a couple of Razorbill who flying past. We stopped to visit an active Peregrine Falcon nest, which proved a challenge to spot on such a vast cliff face, but eventually everyone connected and saw the large

chick - just starting to show its adult plumage amongst its fluffy down. A potential highlight for many was seeing a Common Seal incredibly close to the boat in the process of eating a Gurnard it had caught only moments before. We also had several lovely encounters with Harbour Porpoise, including a mother with two calves, and a potential Minke Whale was seen at distance although we never managed to track it down any closer.

Other wildlife of note included two groups of Sandwich Tern, one quite a large flock of twelve birds, which was unseasonal for here. A Great Skua gave incredible views as it flew close in to the boat harrying a large group of Manx Shearwaters. Finally, a small group of Mediterranean Gulls were spotted including two fantastic looking adults seemingly with one of this year's fledglings. After returning to the dock, we retired to the hotel for our last evening meal of the trip and to catch up on our checklist. After spending a beautiful day on the water, it was time to turn in for the night.

Day 5

Thursday 1st July

For our final day we returned to the Lizard, but this time took a stroll across the open heathland of Lizard Downs before heading to Windmill Farm for a short walk around the area of the reserve close to the entrance. Across the downs we found a good selection of wildlife throughout the walk; butterflies included Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary, Small Copper and Small Heath but still no Marsh Fritillaries. Dragonflies were also recorded in great numbers, particularly enjoyable were several Emperors, Golden-ringed and a potential Ruddy Darter around one especially good pool. Birds were less numerous with the majority seen being a mix of Meadow Pipit, Skylark and the occasional Whitethroat. However, potentially the best sightings of the day were the orchids which included a good number of Heath Fragrant Orchid which many took the opportunity to sniff!

After grabbing some lunch back in Lizard, we then headed off for a short walk at Windmill Reserve to look at the old windmill and to then explore one of the large pools for dragonflies. Black-tailed and Keeled Skimmers were by far the most common and we also noted a whole host of damselflies including Blue-tailed, Emerald, Azure and Variable. Palmate Newt were also spotted as were a few plants, most notably the Lesser Plantain which looked fabulous in flower.

This marked the end of our tour in Cornwall and so we returned back to the hotel for final goodbyes. We enjoyed fantastic weather throughout and shared some brilliant experiences which should hopefully bring smiles to faces in years to come.

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Golden-ringed Dragonfly

Species Lists

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

	Common name	Scientific name	June/July 2021				
			27	28	29	30	1
1	Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	✓	✓			
2	Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>		✓			
3	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>			✓		
4	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>		✓			
5	Northern Fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>	✓		✓		
6	Manx Shearwater	<i>Puffinus puffinus</i>	1		✓		
7	Great Skua	<i>Stercorarius skua</i>			✓		
8	Northern Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>	✓		✓		
9	Eurasian Shag	<i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i>	✓		✓		
10	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	✓		✓		
11	Common Guillemot	<i>Uria aalge</i>			✓		
12	Razorbill	<i>Alca torda</i>			✓		
13	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
14	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>			✓		
15	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>		✓			
16	Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	✓		✓		
17	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	✓		✓		
18	Mediterranean Gull	<i>Ichthyaetus melanocephalus</i>			✓		
19	Black-legged Kittiwake	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>	✓		✓		
20	Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>	✓		✓		
21	European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
22	Sandwich Tern	<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>			✓		
23	Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia 'feral'</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
24	Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>		✓			
25	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>		✓	✓	✓	
26	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>		✓			
27	Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>		H			
28	Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
29	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>		✓			
30	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
31	Red-billed Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>	6				
32	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	✓	✓		✓	
33	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>		✓		✓	
34	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓		✓	✓	
35	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		✓			
36	Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>		✓			
37	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		✓			
38	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		✓			
39	Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	✓	H		✓	
40	Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>					
41	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
42	Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>			✓		
43	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>		H			
44	Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>		✓		✓	
45	Common Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>	✓			✓	
46	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>		✓			

	Common name	Scientific name	June/July 2021				
			27	28	29	30	1
47	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	✓			✓	
48	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>		✓			
49	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓		✓	
50	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓		✓	
51	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>		✓			
52	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>		✓			
53	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>		✓			
54	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	✓			✓	
55	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓			
56	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>		✓		✓	
57	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>		✓			
58	Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba yarrellii</i>	✓	✓			
59	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	✓			✓	
60	Rock Pipit	<i>Anthus petrosus</i>	✓		✓		
61	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		✓			
62	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓			
63	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>	✓				
64	Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>	✓				

Invertebrates

	Common name	Scientific name	Trip
	Butterflies:		
		Lycaenidae	
1	Common Blue	<i>Polyommatus icarus</i>	✓
		Nymphalidae	
2	Small Tortoiseshell	<i>Aglais urticae</i>	✓
3	Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>	✓
4	Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary	<i>Boloria selene</i>	✓
5	Dark Green Fritillary	<i>Speyeria aglaja</i>	✓
		Satyrinae	
6	Small Heath	<i>Ceononympha pamphilus</i>	✓
7	Meadow Brown	<i>Maniola jurtina</i>	✓
	Moths:		
		Geometridae	
1	Common Heath	<i>Ematurga atomaria</i>	✓
		Noctuidae	
2	Silver-Y	<i>Autographa gamma</i>	✓
3	Six-spot Burnet	<i>Zygaena filipendulae</i>	✓
4	Fox Moth	<i>Macrothylacia rubi</i>	✓
5	Yellow Tail	<i>Euproctis similis</i>	✓
	Other Invertebrates:		
1	Broad-bodied Chaser	<i>Libellula depressa</i>	✓
2	Keeled Skimmer	<i>Orthetrum coerulescens</i>	✓
3	Blue-tailed Damselfly	<i>Ischnura elegans</i>	✓
4	Azure Damselfly	<i>Coenagrion puella</i>	✓
5	Speckled Bush-cricket	<i>Leptophyes punctatissima</i>	✓

Other species

	Common name	Scientific name	Trip
Reptiles & Amphibians:			
1	Palmate Newt	<i>Lissotriton helveticus</i>	✓
2	Common Frog	<i>Rana temporaria</i>	✓
Mammals:			
1	Grey Squirrel	<i>Sciurus carolinensis</i>	✓
2	Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>	✓
3	Atlantic Grey Seal	<i>Halichoerus grypus</i>	✓
4	Harbour Porpoise	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i>	✓
5	Eurasian Beaver	<i>Castor fiber</i>	1
6	Wood Mouse	<i>Apodemus sylvaticus</i>	✓
Fish:			
1	Red Gurnard	<i>Chelidonichthys cuculus</i>	✓



Common Seal with a Gurnard