

SOUTH WALES
29TH AUGUST – 3RD SEPTEMBER
2006



CELTIC BIRD TOURS

TOUR LEADER

Neil Donaghy

PARTICIPANTS

Wendy Davies

Carole Taylor

29TH

As this was a private tour for Carole and Wendy, we met at Bridgend Railway Station at 14.00, which had been pre-arranged beforehand to suit everyone's travel requirements. We soon loaded up and were on our way, but instead of going directly to the hotel, Neil thought it best to take advantage of the calm and sunny conditions to search for migrant passerines, as he forecast didn't seem too promising for the week ahead. We spent the first couple of hours searching the elder bushes and burnt area of gorse at Pant Norton and found several Willow Warblers, a showy Spotted Flycatcher, a brief but well seen Lesser Whitethroat that continued to call for most of our visit, small numbers of Yellowhammers including a juvenile begging for food from a male, a Common Whitethroat and a couple of female Blackcaps. Common residents included Robins, Blackbirds, Blue and Great Tits, Dunnock and large numbers of corvids in a mixed flock. Overhead a few Wood Pigeons passed through, a couple of Ravens croned loudly as they flew over, a calling but heavily moulting Common Buzzard and at least three Sparrowhawks that included a juvenile and female together. We also a hunting Stoat, which judging by the squeals we heard, seemed to have caught a Rabbit.

We then spent half an hour on the Ogmore Estuary in a stiff breeze where a large mixed flock on Portobello Island contained Herring, Black-headed and both Lesser and Great Black-backed Gulls. A Cormorant swam up the river, a male Stonechat perched up nicely and a Pied Wagtail walked along the grassy bank. A Common Sandpiper flew up river, calling loudly, but disappeared quickly into a gully, a couple of Eurasian Curlews loafed on a shingle island and a lone Northern Lapwing posed briefly on the muddy bank before flying off. We checked in to the hotel at approximately 17.00 after which we discussed tomorrow's plan and Neil went home.

30TH

We met at 08.00 and took the hour long drive to the salt marshes of the North Gower Coast and Loughor Estuary in order to bird the high tide. The sky was clear blue, but with a distinct chill in the air as we arrived at Penclawdd. A flock of 33 Common Redshanks and seven Little Egrets was a good start to the day and a lone Common Gull was also present. However, this was not a place to linger as the rising tide would soon fill the creeks, so we headed to Wernffrd a little further west. The tide still had an hour or so to go to reach its full height, but already flocks of Eurasian Curlews, Black-headed Gulls and a few Little Egrets were moving closer. A Peregrine picked out by Carole as we parked, quickly flew off over the estuary, but Neil soon found an Osprey perched on a post and then another on a different post – excellent timing and we enjoyed prolonged, if a little distant views while they stretched and waited for the tide to allow them to begin fishing. The wind began to pick up and it felt distinctly autumnal out on this unsheltered coast. A flock of ten Great Crested Grebes were on the sea, but it was rather quiet, so we moved on to Salthouse Point. Vast flocks of European Oystercatchers here gave a terrific flying display as a Peregrine shot over the top of them; but this bird was travelling to another part of the estuary and not hunting, so their panic was unnecessary but understandable... Three Collared Doves that landed on the track were most unexpected, but a flock of 35 Common Eider enhanced the feel that summer was almost over now.

Our next stop was at Penclawydd Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust reserve, where we enjoyed some superb wader watching. From the British Steel hide it was rather quiet other than a cracking perched Peregrine, lots of Black-headed Gulls and a couple of Ringed Plover. It was also crowded so after a quick look at the pool over the back which held small numbers of Common Teal, Gadwall and Northern Shoveler, we walked around to the freshwater lagoon and after a couple of false starts when we couldn't see any birds through dense vegetation, we finally found a good viewing spot. A flock of twenty plus Greenshanks held three Spotted Redshanks and we spent a long time watching and carefully studying these birds at close range as they roosted on a shingle island – occasionally waking up for tantalisingly brief views initially but then showing well. As we waited we had excellent views of a Kingfisher perched in a Sea Buckthorn Bush before it disappeared from view. A small flock of Long-tailed Tits went quickly through the willows and a couple of Goldfinch perched up briefly. On the water itself, we noted just a single Common Shelduck, a Greylag Goose and a small flock of Common Pochard. By now it was lunchtime, so we retired to the car before heading back to the Millennium Wetland. A flock of 150 or so Black-tailed Godwits were present in a wide range of plumages and we enjoyed exceptionally good views from behind a viewing blind, while listening to their evocative calls – magic! A few Northern Lapwings and Common Redshank were amongst them, while two female Northern Pintail, a group of Tufted Ducks and a few Little Grebes were active on the water, as well as more Gadwall, Shoveler, Mallard and Teal. A Common Chiffchaff showed briefly in some willows and a small group of Chaffinches dropped in just as we were leaving.

Our final stop on the estuary was at Loughor Bridge. Large numbers of Common Shelducks, Little Egrets, Eurasian Curlews and mixed flocks of gulls were present, but were mostly distant, and some smaller waders which were just too far away had to remain unidentified though they were almost certainly Red Knot. Carole then found a couple of partially breeding plumaged Dunlin and just as Neil was about to put his scope away, he found the adult Yellow-legged Gull that was the main reason for coming here and we enjoyed good views while comparing the salient identification features with nearby Herring and Lesser Black-baked Gulls. A few Great Cormorants were resting on a sand bar and a couple of Black-tailed Godwits were also present.

En route back to the hotel, we stopped at Eglwys Nunydd Reservoir, where more Great Crested and Little Grebes and Tufted Ducks were present and where a large gathering of Pied Wagtails were on the stony bank. Good numbers of

hirundines hawked over the water on what was now a dull overcast afternoon, and a female Sparrowhawk shot through the reedy bay putting up a large flock of Blue Tits and a few distant warblers from a willow as it went. A couple of Reed Buntings showed poorly, but were new for the tour, and a Common Sandpiper showed well before seeing us and flying off down the bank and out of sight. As we arrived back at the hotel, it began to spit with rain. It had been a most enjoyable and excellent days birding with great views of the waders that were the most wanted species for Wendy & Carole – more of the same tomorrow!

31ST

We met a little later today, as we had an extra hour before the high tide at Goldcliff Reserve in Gwent, where we continued our wader theme to the tour in breezy and overcast, but pleasantly warm conditions. The first half an hour or so was spent sea watching from the shelter at Porthcawl, but if truth be told it was rather quiet as just a couple of adult Northern Gannets and Northern Fulmars were seen. We quickly moved on and arrived at Goldcliff at approximately 10.30. We had timed it to perfection as good numbers of birds were present on the lagoons. Several Little Egrets, Northern Lapwings, Common Teal and Common Shelduck were busy feeding in the shallow water and were joined by smaller numbers of Mallards and Northern Shovelers, while a couple of Grey Herons stood sentry like and motionless on the waters edge. A juvenile Little Ringed Plover showed very well on one of the stony islands as it fed actively and allowed for excellent comparison with nearby Ringed Plovers that were on an area of sun dried mud; a large flock of Dunlins was also present here having flown in off the beach on the rising tide. Three Common Ravens in total were seen heading n from the sea wall and a couple of Common Kestrels were hunting over the grassy areas. Two Greenshanks were seen wading along the edge of the marsh and we later added a third bird as it remained in the same place after two were seen in flight Three Stock Doves were seen briefly flying over a farm building before dropping out of sight, small numbers of Pied Wagtails fed actively in the marsh and a couple of distant roosting waders woke up just long enough to be identified as Red Knot before they fell asleep again... A bird feeding very close to the viewing platform was an immaculately plumaged Ruff and we later saw a very showy Green Sandpiper alongside it; both birds gave prolonged and excellent views, but the two stars of the show were two Spotted Redshanks that fed constantly. The birds, waded, upended, swam and chased food through the water throughout the whole four hours that we were on site and in the end we had to leave them to it! We have now seen five of this rather uncommon species for South Wales during the tour. We rounded off our stay at this excellent reserve with Wendy finding a Common Snipe, Carole finding a swimming Eurasian Curlew and we also heard, but didn't see a Whimbrel overhead. As we left a Clouded Yellow butterfly flew in front of the viewing platform.

We decided that a nice cup of tea was in order, so we stopped near Ewenny at the Pine Centre, where a large pot was shared between us on what was by now a really humid afternoon. Refreshed, we spent a while at Candleston Bridge where a male Grey Wagtail dropped in and showed briefly before scuttling off down the river bank, Carole found a rather unexpected Common Swift distantly hawking over Newbridge Fields, Bridgend, several Sand Martins fed over the river and eventually a Dipper appeared at the end of the shingle island – a nice way to round off another excellent days birding.

1ST

With the two furthest points of the tour now done, we planned to concentrate on the beaches around the Porthcawl area in our quest for more waders. However, the weather stepped in and with a strong SW gale and some very heavy showers forecast, we decided to spend the first hour sea watching to see what happened. This proved to be a good move as we soon picked up a dashing intermediate phase Arctic Skua that we were able to follow as it flew right along the line of vision before disappearing from view We also had excellent views of sixteen Manx Shearwaters in good light and five Common Scoters were seen a little distantly but were readily identifiable. An adult Shag was unusually seen distantly offshore, as most records from here are of close in birds.

With the tide starting to rise and the sun out, we decided to move on to Sker on what was now a very pleasant, but still breezy morning. As we walked along the path, we were hoping for migrants, but the breezy conditions suggested that everything as keeping low and we saw just a single Common Whitethroat and a flock of approximately 250 Common Starlings in a field and later on wires. A Common Buzzard, a female European Sparrowhawk, two Kestrels and a juvenile Peregrine provided the raptor interest, while Sker Farm produced a flock of 32 Linnets, six Greenfinches and eight Goldfinches. Unfortunately, as we arrived at the shore, the Peregrine re-appeared and shot straight through the wader flock on the rocks, scattering them in all directions – not what we had hoped for. We waited patiently for them to return and counted nineteen Eurasian Curlews, 100 European Oystercatchers and our first three Ruddy Turnstones and 150 Sanderling, which were put up off the beach by a jogger and whirled around for a while in a flock before settling some distance away. A couple of Northern Wheatears were on the rocks, several Small Heath butterflies were on the wing and Carole pointed out Autumn Ladies Tresses which were present in abundance.

By now it was hot and we returned to Porthcawl to search for a Mediterranean Gull that had been reported earlier. Sadly, no joy with that one, but we did find a winter plumaged Sandwich Tern perched on the rocks amongst the many Black-headed Gulls and a couple of Harbour Porpoises close inshore. A sizeable flock of House Sparrows fed close to us, a small flock of Ruddy Turnstones were present too and three Northern Wheatears showed very well just down in front of us. It was a very pleasant interlude in glorious weather and although a little quiet, we all enjoyed relaxing in the sun and watching the antics of the birds above before we concluded the day back at the hotel.

2ND

A very windy, but again warm day, which undoubtedly made birding difficult. Unfortunately for us, the wind was blowing from the south and that meant that sea watching wasn't really an option. The weather almost beat us, but a combination of good fortune and determination meant that we did get a few new birds for the trip.

We began at Nash Point, where small numbers of migrants were present including three European Robins, two Stonechats, two Dunnocks, a couple of Blackbirds and our first two Rock Pipits. Overhead, at least 100 Barn Swallows

were hawking for insects and were joined by a small number of House Martins, while three Northern Fulmars made flying in the increasingly gusty wind look like child's play. A couple of European Goldfinches, Linnets and a single Northern Wheatear were spooked by a hunting Kestrel, but despite our best efforts, we had to concede that birding the valley today was going to be impossible, so we moved on.

The feeding station at Lan Farm had been harvested and limed and produced nothing at all, so we went to the other station at Tyn-y-Caeau Farm, which looked superb with chicory and sunflowers in the sacrificial crop; we walked just a few metres and put up four Yellowhammers, but again the wind made standing never mind birding almost impossible!

News from Steve Moon of a Black-necked Grebe at Kenfig Pool meant that our next destination was decided for us and after lunch in the car park, we walked down to the south pool hide to scan for the bird. Small numbers of Tufted Duck, Common Coot and Common Pochard were sheltering close to the reeds and a single adult Common Gull landed on a post in front of the hide. Two different Water Rails could be heard but neither was seen – sadly also the case with the grebe... We decided to walk up the east pool shore and managed to find a Common Sandpiper and a couple of Meadow Pipits, but the west pool bushes unsurprisingly produced absolutely nothing in the now howling gale. We were on the verge of giving up and calling it a day when a call from Warden Dave Carrington informed us that the bird was showing from the south pool beach. We walked quickly and soon had reasonable views in the scope as the bird sped up and down amongst the Pochard. The bird very occasionally lifted its head allowing us to see the dusky head pattern and the upturned bill, but for the most part it remained steadfastly asleep. We continued to watch the bird for approximately half an hour before we decided it was time to return to the hotel after a tiring, but ultimately rewarding day.

3RD

Our final morning began at Eglwys Nunydd Reservoir, where we soon picked up the Sandwich Tern and quickly after a Common Swift was found. News of a Black-necked Grebe near the entrance reached us and we were rapidly in place to enjoy excellent views of what was almost certainly the same bird as at Kenfig yesterday. After much searching, we picked up the Black Tern that was first found yesterday and we watched this bird for some time as it flew back and forth along the reservoir – a very nice bird indeed. We stopped briefly at the northern end of Kenfig National Nature Reserve where a large flock of Barn swallows were feeding, but principally we looked at flowers enjoying more Autumn Ladies Tresses, as well as Vipers Bugloss, Common Toadflax and Evening Primrose and butterflies that included Grayling, Small Heath and Meadow Brown. We concluded the tour at Bridgend station where we said our farewells after what had been a very successful and enjoyable few days birding.

SYSTEMATIC LIST

- 1 Little Grebe
- 2 Great Crested Grebe
- 3 Black-necked Grebe
- 4 Northern Fulmar
- 5 Manx Shearwater
- 6 Northern Gannet
- 7 Great Cormorant
- 8 European Shag
- 9 Little Egret
- 10 Grey Heron
- 11 Mute Swan
- 12 Greylag Goose
- 13 Canada Goose
- 14 Common Shelduck
- 15 Gadwall
- 16 Common Teal
- 17 Mallard
- 18 Northern Pintail
- 19 Northern Shoveler
- 20 Common Pochard
- 21 Tufted Duck
- 22 Common Eider
- 23 Common Scoter
- 24 European Sparrowhawk
- 25 Common Buzzard
- 26 Osprey
- 27 Common Kestrel
- 28 Peregrine
- 29 Common Pheasant [H]
- 30 Water Rail [H]
- 31 Moorhen
- 32 Common Coot
- 33 European Oystercatcher
- 34 Little Ringed Plover
- 35 Ringed Plover
- 36 Northern Lapwing
- 37 Red Knot
- 38 Sanderling

39 Dunlin
40 Ruff
41 Common Snipe
42 Black-tailed Godwit
43 Whimbrel [H]
44 Eurasian Curlew
45 Spotted Redshank
46 Common Redshank
47 Greenshank
48 Green Sandpiper
49 Common Sandpiper
50 Ruddy Turnstone
51 Arctic Skua
52 Black-headed Gull
53 Common Gull
54 Lesser Black-backed Gull
55 Herring Gull
56 Yellow-legged Gull
57 Great Black-backed Gull
58 Sandwich Tern
59 Black Tern
60 Stock Dove
61 Feral Pigeon
62 Wood Pigeon
63 Collared Dove
64 Common Swift
65 Common Kingfisher
66 Green Woodpecker [H]
67 Sand Martin
68 Barn Swallow
69 House Martin
70 Rock Pipit
71 Meadow Pipit
72 Pied Wagtail
73 Grey Wagtail
74 Dipper
75 Northern Wren
76 Dunnock
77 Stonechat
78 European Robin
79 Northern Wheatear
80 Blackbird
81 Lesser Whitethroat
82 Common Whitethroat
83 Blackcap
84 Willow Warbler
85 Common Chiffchaff
86 Spotted Flycatcher
87 Long-tailed Tit
88 Blue Tit
89 Great Tit
90 Black-billed Magpie
91 Eurasian Jackdaw
92 Carrion Crow
93 Common Raven
94 Common Starling
95 House Sparrow
96 Chaffinch
97 Greenfinch
98 Goldfinch
99 Linnet
100 Yellowhammer
101 Reed Bunting

SELECTED OTHER WILDLIFE

Rabbit
Stoat
Clouded Yellow
Grayling
Speckled Wood
Meadow Brown

Painted Lady
Autumn Ladies Tresses
Evening Primrose
Common Toadflax
Southern Hawker