

**SOUTH WALES
EARLY AUTUMN MIGRATION
6TH - 10TH AUGUST 2005**



CELTIC BIRD TOURS

TOUR LEADER

Neil Donaghy

PARTICIPANTS

Lourdes Berruezo

Wendy Davies

Carole Taylor

6TH

The group met at the Atlantic Hotel at just after 12.30 and before long we were on our way. Our only stop this afternoon was to be Sker and possibly the Kenfig Rivermouth, depending upon how the weather shaped up. We walked alongside the Royal Porthcawl Golf Course and before long stopped to admire a magnificent female Peregrine that perched obligingly on a fence post, allowing terrific scope views. A couple of Sky Larks flew dangerously close and small numbers of Linnets passed overhead. A Common Kestrel hovered over some overgrown fields and later another was seen near Sker Farm, and a Brown Hare was seen crouching down in the same field. A flock of approximately 100 Canada Geese took off and flew overhead, calling loudly and quite a few juvenile Stonechats were seen flitting along the track or perching on weed heads.

Small numbers of Herring, Black-headed and Great Black-backed Gulls were on the beach and a group of Oystercatchers fed amongst them. A Common Sandpiper on the rocks was unexpected and a Common Scoter flew very distantly up channel. A family party of Northern Wheatears flitted along in front of us and a Common Raven flew overhead.

We decided against the walk to the rivermouth due to a combination of some seriously dark clouds approaching from that direction and also no real sign of a wader flock - quite a bit of disturbance from dog walkers and surfers meant that we almost certainly made the right decision.

We tried our luck at the farm and encountered good numbers of House Sparrows, Starlings and Goldfinches and a pair of Red-legged Partridge was the first that Neil had ever seen at this site! They quickly scurried away and out of sight so we decided to head back, adding more Linnets, Stonechats and a couple of Common Whitethroats before we arrived back at the hotel.

7TH

The weather was very kind today with clear blue skies, warm and a gentle northerly breeze. We spent almost the whole day on the Newport Wetlands Reserve. The high tide was spent watching the scrapes at Goldcliff, where things were a little quieter than anticipated, but we still enjoyed some excellent birding and the company of some local birders. The ever present Little Egrets were around the islands from the first viewing platform and a sizeable flock of Dunlin and Ringed Plovers were roosting on the shingle. Small numbers of juvenile Yellow Wagtails were calling and flitting around on the mown grassy areas and a few Pied Wagtails were with them. Several Shelducks and a few Mallards were loafing around doing nothing in particular and a Grey Heron flew in and landed. We quickly moved on to the second platform, which enabled us to get reasonable views of three Green Sandpipers, but already the heat haze was beginning to make things a little tricky. Small numbers of Common Sandpipers fed alongside them, allowing for a good size comparison between the two species. Small numbers of House Martins and Barn Swallows mobbed a Kestrel and a couple of Common Buzzards included a perched bird that allowed us to scope it. The final viewing platform produced the most birds, which we spent some time studying before an unseen raptor sent all of the birds skywards and off into the distance, never to return! Approximately 100 Black-tailed Godwits included some birds still resplendent in breeding plumage and there were also good numbers of Northern Lapwings, single Common Snipe and Greenshank and eight Pied Avocets. On the water, several Common Teal and Northern Shovelers were present, but we were unable to find any Garganey that had been present recently. We took lunch in the shade by the van, where an unseen Blackcap "chacked" in the wild plum trees.

By the time we reached Uskmouth, it was quite a hot afternoon and we walked slowly around the reed bed. A pair of Mute Swans had three young cygnets and good numbers of young Tufted Ducks were out on the open water, amongst the Coots, Moorhens and quite a few Little Grebes. A Water Rail flew across one of the pools, but was quickly out of sight and a lone Gadwall was rather dowdy in eclipse plumage. Small numbers of Chaffinches and Greenfinches were also seen and a single Dunnock and Reed Bunting showed briefly, while a Sedge Warbler was slightly more obliging. On or two Reed Warblers skulked and called in the dense vegetation and a Cetti's Warbler announced its presence occasionally but remained unseen. We rounded off the visit by watching a Peregrine being mobbed by a large flock of Black-headed Gulls.

Our final stop was a field in Tythegston near Porthcawl, which produced yet another Peregrine seen flying high over the quarry, this time being mobbed by a flock of herring Gulls. Good numbers of Linnets were flocking, but were distant and a lone Stock Dove disappeared quickly into the wood. A Common Buzzard and a few Carrion Crows completed the picture before we drove back into a very busy Porthcawl town.

8TH

We began early in order to arrive on South Gower before the traffic and also to watch any seabird passage as the tide came in. Our first port of call was the stunning bay at Port Eynon, where on a glorious morning; we were able to watch parties of Manx Shearwaters and Northern Gannets gliding past in front of us, despite the offshore breeze. Small numbers of Common Scoter headed west towards Carmarthen Bay, where they will spend the winter, four Common Teal and single Kittiwakes and Common Gulls flew east, while a few Northern Fulmars lingered offshore. Small parties of Ringed Plovers, Ruddy Turnstones and Dunlin roosted on the rocks, while a very vocal Greenshank passed close inshore. Up to four European Shags were on the rocky point and seven Sandwich Terns were found amongst a flock of Black-headed Gulls that also contained a superb adult Mediterranean Gull.

Neil's friend and occasional guide Paul Roberts joined us for a little while pointing out a large male Atlantic Grey Seal and Rock and Golden Samphire, and things were rounded off by a small flock of Jackdaws and then Linnets perched on wires that included one superbly plumaged male.

Tearing ourselves away from this idyllic place, we moved right to the very end of Glamorgan at Rhossilli and Worms Head. The vast golden sands can rarely have looked better and the crystal clear water sparkled like diamonds as the sun reflected on the flat calm sea. A female Sparrowhawk drifted over the cliffs and the usual Stonechats, Jackdaws and House Martins were present in good numbers, but offshore there was little of interest other than a few plunge diving Gannets and Shags flying past. We turned our attention to the gorse and after a while had brief views of a male Dartford Warbler in song flight - very late in the year for this. We later found a family party in another area of gorse that were much more obliging and stayed in view while the female fed the recently fledged juveniles. A couple of Northern Wheatears were on the stone wall and small numbers of Linnets were also present. As the crowds started to arrive, we moved on. The plan was to drive the coast road from Llanrhidian to Penclawdd, but we had to abandon this hastily as the road was blocked by two vehicles stuck in ditches either side of the road, leaving no way through. We did stop briefly at Penclawdd Pill, where there was little of note other than a Little Egret, a few Lesser Black-backed Gulls and a flock of Black-headed Gulls.

We decide to head inland to the Neath Valley and the unofficial raptor watchpoint. Almost immediately, Wendy called a bird that was a Honey Buzzard and we had reasonable, if a bit distant views before it dropped into the woods. Next a Red Kite decided to give a fly by, which was especially enjoyed by Lourdes and then it was Carole's turn to find a Honey Buzzard - which gave better and closer views, before it drifted away over the hill. A few Common Buzzards popped up before Neil chipped in with yet another Honey Buzzard, this time on our side of the road, and which allowed Lourdes to see it through the scope, noting fine plumage detail before it really spiralled high and out of sight. Carole the refound one of the earlier birds and we watched that for a little while before it again dropped from view. Our luck had really held and the two most wanted raptors had duly obliged, so we set off back to Porthcawl, tired but happy after an excellent day in some superb surroundings - magic!

9TH

Another glorious day began with an early start at Kenfig Pool, which proved to be a good decision as birds were definitely on the move and migration was taking place right before our eyes. We walked along the east pool shore and quickly saw the commoner species that can be expected at this site at this time of year such as Canada Goose, Tufted Duck, Coot, Moorhen and Mute Swan, all of which were present in good numbers. Four Great Crested Grebes was the highest count of the autumn so far and a Northern Wheatear was a good marker for migrants. A showy Common Sandpiper bobbed on the rocks and then flew and landed on a post and an unseen Greenshank was heard flying west over the pool. A Little Egret was disturbed by something unseen and flew north over the reeds, a small flock of Sand Martins and Swallows dropped in and dip fed over the pool and small numbers of Pochard were noted, along with a couple of Sky Larks, Meadow Pipits, Pied Wagtails and the now resident female Mandarin Duck - the first at the site for twenty years and a major rarity here only three weeks ago! Two Lesser Redpoll flew over heading south, a Common Snipe dripped in and we had superb views of a Dunlin and winter plumaged Knot that fed together on the shore. Moving on to the bushes, we found small numbers of Reed Buntings and a Redshank flew in to the boathouse as we walked. Much of the west pool was busy with migrants and we stopped several times to watch 30 or so Common Whitethroats, two Lesser Whitethroats, three Blackcaps, a Garden warbler and small numbers of Reed Warblers. We also saw two juvenile Bullfinches, a Wren, a couple of Long-tailed Tits and a Song Thrush, bringing to an end a pretty good start to the day.

Following a well-earned breakfast, three Harbour Porpoises were showing really well and close in off the front at Porthcawl. We moved on to the dipping bridge at Candleston, where Wendy soon picked up a Dipper taking shade under an overhanging tree and a Kingfisher flashed by on a couple of occasions, but try as we might, we couldn't find a Grey Wagtail to complete the set here.

A fairly brief stop at Ogmere Estuary produced a mixed flock of Herring, Lesser Black-backed and Black-headed Gulls, a few soaring Common Buzzards and a more obliging Little Egret, but it was clear that disturbance and a still dropping tide meant that this wasn't going to be our most productive stop of the trip. Another short stop at The Plough and harrow produced House Martins, House Sparrows and Swallows in number, but not the hoped for Tree Sparrows. A drive around the barley field at Lan Farm produced more Buzzards, a few Sky larks, Linnets and a large flock of Rooks, whilst a couple of Northern Wheatears and Stonechats on the dirt tracks were less expected.

We took a late picnic lunch in a mown field at Tyn-y-Caeau Farm, where once again a few Sky Larks kept us company. There were also good numbers of Wood Pigeons, a couple of Kestrels and more linnets and Greenfinches, but if truth be told, it was a bit quiet. A walk along the edge of Norton Woods, Ogmere brought our fourth Peregrine of the trip and we also had very good views of Kestrel and Buzzards, along with a Raven, but a Green Woodpecker that called a couple of times could not be found. Finally, we stopped at the lower flood at The Watermill, but with so little water, the only birds of note were a party of ten Mistle Thrushes.

10TH

A repeat early morning visit to Kenfig pool on a cloudy, but warm morning didn't prove as productive as yesterday with migrants few and far between. A pair of Shoveler flew in as we arrived and once again enjoyed good views of the juvenile Knot and Dunlin that were still present, but otherwise there was nothing really of note either on the pool or the shoreline. The exceptions were a single Common Swift and a juvenile Lesser Redpoll that fed among the stones. The bushes were equally quiet with just a couple of Whitethroats and Reed Warblers of note, though a Reed Bunting sat up nicely and showed well and a couple of stubborn Cetti's Warblers were heard but not seen. Two Pheasants were on a mound, a few Blue Tits were seen in the west pool bushes and a couple of Bullfinches and Chaffinches were also there, with others heard. A Chiffchaff shooed well in the south pool and we had excellent views of two juvenile Water Rails from the hide, while two very showy Sedge Warblers represented a poor total despite the excellent views. En route back for a late breakfast, we stopped at Porthcawl seafront where a juvenile Mediterranean Gull was with a large flock of Black-headed Gulls, and following breakfast, a Common Scoter flew down channel. All too soon it was time for our farewells as Neil took Lourdes and Carole to Bridgend for the train to Swansea, leaving Wendy a little time to try and find the elusive bird of the day!

SYSTEMATIC LIST

- 1/ Great Crested Grebe
- 2/ Little Grebe
- 3/ Northern Fulmar
- 4/ Manx Shearwater
- 5/ Northern Gannet
- 6/ Great Cormorant
- 7/ European Shag
- 8/ Little Egret
- 9/ Grey Heron
- 10/ Mute Swan
- 11/ Canada Goose
- 12/ Common Shelduck
- 13/ Mandarin Duck
- 14/ Mallard
- 15/ Gadwall
- 16/ Northern Shoveler
- 17/ Common Teal
- 18/ Common Pochard
- 19/ Tufted Duck
- 20/ Common Scoter
- 21/ Red Kite
- 22/ Common Buzzard
- 23/ Honey Buzzard
- 24/ European Sparrowhawk
- 25/ Common Kestrel
- 26/ Peregrine
- 27/ Red-legged Partridge
- 28/ Common Pheasant
- 29/ Water Rail
- 30/ Moorhen
- 31/ Common Coot
- 32/ European Oystercatcher
- 33/ Pied Avocet
- 34/ Ringed Plover
- 35/ Northern Lapwing
- 36/ Red Knot
- 37/ Ruddy Turnstone
- 38/ Dunlin
- 39/ Green Sandpiper
- 40/ Common Sandpiper
- 41/ Common Redshank
- 42/ Greenshank
- 43/ Black-tailed Godwit
- 44/ Eurasian Curlew
- 45/ Common Snipe
- 46/ Black-headed Gull
- 47/ Common Gull
- 48/ Mediterranean Gull
- 49/ Herring Gull
- 50/ Lesser Black-backed Gull
- 51/ Great Black-backed Gull
- 52/ Black-legged Kittiwake
- 53/ Sandwich Tern
- 54/ Feral Pigeon
- 55/ Stock Dove
- 56/ Wood Pigeon
- 57/ Collared Dove
- 58/ Common Swift
- 59/ Common Kingfisher

60/ Green Woodpecker [H]
61/ Sky Lark
62/ Sand Martin
63/ Barn Swallow
64/ House Martin
65/ Rock Pipit
66/ Meadow Pipit
67/ Pied Wagtail
68/ Yellow Wagtail
69/ Northern Wren
70/ Dipper
71/ Dunnock
72/ European Robin
73/ Northern Wheatear
74/ Stonechat
75/ Song Thrush
76/ Mistle Thrush
77/ Common Blackbird
78/ Garden Warbler
79/ Blackcap
80/ Lesser Whitethroat
81/ Common Whitethroat
82/ Dartford Warbler
83/ Sedge Warbler
84/ Cetti's Warbler [H]
85/ Reed Warbler
86/ Willow Warbler
87/ Common Chiffchaff
88/ Goldcrest [H]
89/ Great Tit
90/ Blue Tit
91/ Long-tailed Tit
92/ Black-billed Magpie
93/ Eurasian Jackdaw
94/ Rook
95/ Carrion Crow
96/ Common Raven
97/ Common Starling
98/ House Sparrow
99/ Chaffinch
100/ Linnet
101/ Lesser Redpoll
102/ Goldfinch
103/ Greenfinch
104/ Bullfinch
105/ Reed Bunting

MAMMALS

Brown Hare
Rabbit
Atlantic Grey Seal
Harbour Porpoise