

SOUTH WALES WETLANDS

AUTUMN MIGRATION

11TH – 17TH SEPTEMBER 2004

TOUR LEADER

Neil Donaghy

PARTICIPANTS

David Elliot

Iain Elliot

11TH

We met at the hotel at 12.45 and after a brief introductory chat, we were on our way. Our first stop was at Candleston Bridge, where a short stop produced a Dipper, which was the target species. We moved on to a windy Kenfig Pool, where a search for the Barred Warbler seen yesterday proved fruitless – shame as it would have been a good bird to start the tour with. However, a Black Tern was watched feeding over the pool and good numbers of House Martins were present. A couple of Blackcaps showed well and a small flock of Linnets were near the reserve centre, but otherwise it was quiet so we moved on to Ogmores Estuary. A small group of Oystercatchers and a couple of Turnstone flew by and two Peregrines were seen flying out to sea. A small fall of Wheatears was on the seafront, along with a couple of Rock Pipits. Moving upstream, good numbers of Black-headed Gulls were present and these were spooked by another Peregrine zooming through the flock, which then came back for a second attempt at a Common Sandpiper. Large numbers of Mallard were on the river and a Raven croaked loudly from a hillside vantage point. Three Stock Doves rounded off the first afternoon, where we also managed to avoid some heavy showers!

12TH

If yesterday's showers were heavy, today's were a monsoon, but somehow we managed to stay dry on a difficult day's birding. Our sea watching plans were shelved as we woke to flat calm and clear skies despite a howling gale overnight!

We began with a quick look at the Ogmores rivermouth, where a pair of Stonechat and large numbers of Jackdaws were present along with a distant Peregrine, but few gulls. Neil managed a very brief view of a Chough, but this was soon lost to view.

We decided to cut our losses quickly and to move on to Cwm Nash. En route, a torrential shower forced us to pull over, but this proved to be advantageous, as a small clump of roadside brushwood held two Lesser and one Common Whitethroat, three Chiffchaffs, a Dunnock, Robin and a couple of Blue and Great Tits – amazing! As we entered the valley following another rain delay, the wind began to pick up again and before long it was blowing hard. Naturally, this meant that viewing passerines was difficult, so all things considered a return of three Coal Tits, a Treecreeper, two Goldcrests, a pair of Bullfinches and a Nuthatch represented a reasonable tally.

Sadly, there was no sign of any Chough on the cliffs, but a few Fulmars were still on the ledges and small numbers of Curlew, Oystercatchers and Herring Gulls were on the beach. Offshore, David and Iain saw a couple of very distant Manx Shearwaters, while Neil received some news from local birders. Moving back up the valley, a couple of Chiffchaff and Blackbirds were noted, along with a Kestrel. We stopped to look at the Plough & Harrow Pub for Tree Sparrows, but despite an extensive search, we could only manage about 100 House Sparrows, a few Chaffinches and a small flock of Linnets. We took lunch at the entrance to Tyn-y-Cae Farm, where after yet more torrential rain, a Common Buzzard flew up the track. Walking the stubble fields produced quite a sizeable Linnet flock that contained a lone Greenfinch, a few Wood Pigeons and Rooks, but once again no Tree Sparrows. Good numbers of Swallows passed over here heading towards Nash Point and out to sea.

By now, the wind was such, that sea watching was the only option left, so we headed to Porthcawl Seafront. A quick stop at St Bride's Duck Pond provided us with a breeding plumaged Dabchick, Moorhen, Coot and surprisingly a pair of roosting Wigeon. Another quick stop at Candleston Bridge produced our first Grey Heron and Sand Martin of the trip, along with Swallows and House Martins.

We settled into the shelter at Porthcawl and soon had good views of small numbers of Manx Shearwaters and Gannets fighting their way back down the channel, at times reasonably close inshore. A Storm Petrel was seen by Neil, but despite frantic directions, the bird went backwards in the wind and was not seen by anyone else. A couple of Arctic Terns passed close in and as Dean Bolt joined us, a first winter Mediterranean Gull flew up channel. Small numbers of Turnstones were pushed off the rocks by the rising tide. We finished off the day by remarkably reaching the van just as more rain came cascading down!

13TH

Once again, the weather threw it's worst at us, but we emerged dry, though somewhat battered by the wind. We began by walking the East Pool shore at Kenfig, where a second winter Mediterranean Gull gave very good views, as it perched on a post at close range. A few Teal, Tufted Duck and Pochard were on the pool, as was our first Great Crested Grebe of the trip. A Grey Wagtail flew over heading north and both Cetti's Warblers and Water Rail were heard but not seen. Otherwise, it was quiet and with the appearance of some

blue sky, we headed east to Goldcliff Pools. We enjoyed a couple of hours of very good birding here, despite the howling SW wind. A Ruff showed at very close quarters and up to seven Little Egrets were around the main lagoon. Calidrid sandpipers proved difficult at distance and in the wind, but we eventually settled on two Dunlin and two Little Stints, but sadly no sign of the recent Pectoral Sandpiper. Three juvenile Little Ringed Plovers fed amongst the juncus, as did a few Common Snipe and Lapwings, and good numbers of Black-tailed Godwit, Knot and Greenshank were also present. Wildfowl included a large flock of Canada Geese, a female Pintail, a few Shoveler, Shelduck, Teal and Gadwall. A single Yellow Wagtail provided the passerine interest and a male Sparrowhawk gave cracking views as it chased it. A Peregrine sent all of the waders skywards and as we walked back to the car David saw a Kingfisher.

We took lunch in a local Tesco car park, before heading back west to Eglwys Nunydd Reservoir, where it belted down on arrival! A Common Tern showed exceptionally well despite the rain and we soon added a second bird. The rain stopped and we soon added a splendid Whinchat to the tour list that was in some docks with a couple of Reed Buntings and a Stonechat. Five Black Terns kept us entertained, but I think the highlight of the day was the totally unexpected appearance of an Osprey that flew right over our heads before crossing the M4 and out of sight – magical!

A Common Sandpiper and Grey Wagtail were spooked by our second male Sparrowhawk of the day, which then gave prolonged views as it perched on a rock.

The day ended with a controversial tern, which all three of us commented upon as looking different. However, I believe the mystery of the black bill and legs were resolved after checking the Terns of Europe & North America on my return and identifying the bird as a second summer Common Tern, which was an unfamiliar plumage to all of us.

14TH

Another formidably windy day, but thankfully no rain. We began at Salthouse Point on North Gower where large numbers of birds were present on the falling tide. Viewing conditions were extremely difficult, but persistence paid off as we added several tour ticks and enjoyed the spectacle of the vast numbers of shorebirds. Approximately 3000 Oystercatchers, 500 Curlew, 150 Black-tailed Godwit were the main species, but there were also single Bar-tailed Godwit, Ringed Plover and Common Redshank and by the usual counts, small numbers of Little Egrets. Unfortunately, there was no sign of the hoped for Great White Egret. Up to 50 Sandwich Terns included many roosting amongst the shorebirds and there were also a few Common Terns and Great Black-backed Gulls. Small numbers of Manx Shearwaters, Kittiwakes and Common Gulls were offshore, as was a totally unexpected Storm Petrel that struggled towards the sea. Once the tide was down, we moved on to Loughor Bridge where we found the resident adult Yellow-legged Gull without any trouble, but the foreshore car park proved impossibly windy and we left after seeing small numbers of Dunlin and Ringed Plover.

Back at Eglwys Nunydd Reservoir, all of the terns from yesterday were still present, but it appears that the controversial tern was actually an Arctic, as the short legs had been seen when it perched. We took lunch before moving on to Kenfig Pool. A Whinchat managed to perch atop a dock without any difficulty, whilst we struggled to stand up! A first winter Mediterranean Gull was on the pool and a steady passage of House Martins were heading west.

We decided to go to Porthcawl, but with the wind now offshore, we managed little other than a couple of Gannets close inshore and feeling a little deflated after this afternoon's lack of birds headed back to the hotel.

15TH

A gloriously sunny day with at last lighter winds, saw us set off early for South Gower. Our first stop was at Mewslade Valley. A large fall of Robins had taken place and a small number of Grey Wagtails and Meadow Pipits passed overhead, along with a lone, unseen Sky Lark that called high overhead. A couple of Goldcrests called and one or two Chiffchaffs flitted around fly catching in the warm sun. A Common Buzzard was mobbed by a large Jackdaw flock, but unfortunately, and despite careful scanning, no Chough were amongst them. A male Sparrowhawk flew over, spooking the hirundine flock and a Peregrine came in off the sea. Blue Tits, Great Tits, Dunnocks, Stonechats, Treecreeper, Nuthatch and Blackcap were all seen, a juvenile Green Woodpecker perched low in a Hawthorn and a Raven cronked it's way down the valley. The Hawthorns also held small numbers of Yellowhammers, Chaffinches and Greenfinches, a Whitethroat and a Song Thrush. Offshore, a drake Common Scoter was in the surf and a couple of Fulmars passed down channel.

Worms Head was abandoned without leaving the car due to masses of tourists, which was a shame as it looked beautiful with the sun glistening off the sea. We moved on to Port Eynon, where once again, we failed to find any Chough, but did add Shag to the tour list. Large numbers of Pied Wagtails were on the beach, along with fifty Sandwich Terns and a couple of Rock Pipits. Stonechat, Linnet, Goldfinch, Buzzard and Kestrel were also noted. Despite there being few birds, the view was magnificent and it was a shame to have to leave.

We took lunch [despite Neil's best efforts to spoil it by forgetting to bring key ingredients and the car parks outrageous prices!] at Oxwich NNR beach. No sign of any hoped for Sanderling, but a couple of Gannets, Oystercatchers, Ravens and a Common Gull were present.

We walked through the scrub to the tower hide, hearing Cetti's Warbler and Water Rail, but seeing neither. We did add a couple of Jays that flew across the hide to the tour list, a Grey Heron skulked in the reeds and a late brood of Moorhens were on the pond. The trees held more Robins and a small tit flock that also contained a Blackcap. A few Stonechats were also seen, but whilst pleasant, it was a little birdless. We made a brief stop at Margam Pond, but no sign of any Mandarin Duck, but once again a late brood of Moorhens were amongst the Mallards. Finally, in keeping with much of the afternoon, we dipped on Dipper at Candleston Bridge!

16TH

The day dawned windy again as we headed to Kenfig Pool. A couple of Dunlin and a Redshank were on the East Pool shore and small numbers of Teal were on the pool. Approximately 25 Meadow Pipits passed over going south and eight Sky Larks headed east. A lone Jackdaw was a very early migrant for the site and a couple of Goldcrests and Chiffchaffs were in the bushes. We joined in a ringing session, where two Cetti's Warblers, four Reed Warblers and a Sedge Warbler were the highlights.

We moved on to Dunraven Walled Garden, which produced some good birding. Good numbers of Chiffchaffs and Goldcrests were present and amongst them David picked out a Firecrest that showed extremely well. A Spotted Flycatcher frustrated by remaining hidden in a conifer most of the time before flying off never to be seen again! At least ten Ravens crouched and displayed over the cliffs and a couple of Peregrines soared on the wind. A Green Woodpecker flew through briefly and several Stonechats were noted. Two Song Thrushes showed well and a few Blackcaps and a Whitethroat were also noted. After four different sites and some frustrating times, we eventually saw the two Choughs that inhabit this stretch of coastline. Unfortunately, the views were distant and lasted about ten seconds before they disappeared out of view over the cliff. Our final stop was back at the Plough & Harrow Pub, where once again the large House Sparrow flock contained no Tree Sparrows. A very nice stony field produced some pristine White Wagtails, a couple of Wheatear and small numbers of Meadow Pipits. Four Red-legged Partridge were also present there and good numbers of Swallows passed through.

17TH

Wind, drizzle, rain and cloud were followed by rain, drizzle and eventually a clear spell that allowed us some repeat birding at Dunraven for the last morning of the tour. Up to twenty Chiffchaffs were noted in the walled garden, along with small numbers of Goldcrests, Coal Tits and Robins. Two Spotted Flycatchers were also there, but no sign of yesterday's Firecrest.

Three Rock Pipits were on the beach and Neil had brief, but good views of the two Choughs, which unfortunately, as they had done all week, promptly disappeared. A Sparrowhawk flew over being mobbed by Jackdaws, as was a Raven and a Wheatear was on the grassy area at the top of the cliffs. Once the rain had stopped, visible migration was in evidence with 54 Sky Larks, 100+ Swallows and smaller numbers of Linnets and Meadow Pipits passing overhead. A Whimbrel was amongst a large flock of Herring Gulls and a calling Redshank remained unseen. Walking back to the car, up to nine Song Thrushes flew across the track and into cover and a Great Spotted Woodpecker was new for the trip. The rain began again and we decided to call it a day and had to the station. En route a brief stop at Ogmere Estuary produced very small numbers of Ringed Plover and Curlew and the high tide had flooded The Watermill, where three Teal and a Lapwing were present amongst a large gathering of Black-headed Gulls and Mallard.

We ended the tour at the station where farewells were said at the end of what had sometimes been a difficult, but nonetheless enjoyable weeks birding.

SYSTEMATIC LIST

- 1 Little Grebe
- 2 Great Crested Grebe
- 3 Northern Fulmar
- 4 Manx Shearwater
- 5 European Storm Petrel
- 6 Northern Gannet
- 7 Great Cormorant
- 8 Eurasian Shag
- 9 Little Egret
- 10 Grey Heron
- 11 Mute Swan
- 12 Canada Goose
- 13 Common Shelduck
- 14 Eurasian Wigeon
- 15 Gadwall
- 16 Common Teal
- 17 Mallard

18 Northern Pintail
19 Northern Shoveler
20 Common Pochard
21 Tufted Duck
22 Common Scoter
23 European Sparrowhawk
24 Common Buzzard
25 Osprey
26 Common Kestrel
27 Peregrine
28 Red-legged Partridge
29 Common Pheasant
30 Water Rail [H]
31 Moorhen
32 Common Coot
33 Eurasian Oystercatcher
34 Little Ringed Plover
35 Ringed Plover
36 Northern Lapwing
37 Knot
38 Little Stint
39 Dunlin
40 Ruff
41 Common Snipe
42 Black-tailed Godwit
43 Bar-tailed Godwit
44 Whimbrel
45 Eurasian Curlew
46 Common Redshank
47 Greenshank
48 Common Sandpiper
49 Ruddy Turnstone
50 Mediterranean Gull
51 Black-headed Gull
52 Common Gull
53 Lesser Black-backed Gull
54 Herring Gull
55 Yellow-legged Gull
56 Great Black-backed Gull
57 Black-legged Kittiwake
58 Sandwich Tern
59 Common Tern
60 Arctic Tern
61 Black Tern
62 Feral Rock Dove
63 Stock Dove
64 Wood Pigeon
65 Collared Dove
66 Tawny Owl [H]
67 Common Kingfisher
68 Green Woodpecker
69 Great Spotted Woodpecker
70 Sky Lark
71 Sand Martin
72 Barn Swallow
73 House Martin
74 Rock Pipit
75 Meadow Pipit
76 Grey Wagtail
77 Pied/White Wagtail
78 Yellow Wagtail
79 Dipper
80 Northern Wren

81 Dunnock
82 Whinchat
83 Stonechat
84 Eurasian Robin
85 Northern Wheatear
86 Blackbird
87 Song Thrush
88 Cetti's Warbler
89 Sedge Warbler
90 Reed Warbler
91 Lesser Whitethroat
92 Common Whitethroat
93 Blackcap
94 Chiffchaff
95 Goldcrest
96 Firecrest
97 Spotted Flycatcher
98 Long-tailed Tit
99 Coal Tit
100 Great Tit
101 Blue Tit
102 European Nuthatch
103 Common Treecreeper
104 Eurasian Jay
105 Black-billed Magpie
106 Red-billed Chough
107 Eurasian Jackdaw
108 Rook
109 Carrion Crow
110 Common Raven
111 Common Starling
112 House Sparrow
113 Chaffinch
114 European Greenfinch
115 European Goldfinch
116 Linnets
117 Northern Bullfinch
118 Reed Bunting
119 Yellowhammer

BUTTERFLIES

Large White
Small White
Red Admiral
Painted Lady
Speckled Wood
Small Tortoiseshell
Small Copper