



ORIOLE BIRDING



TOUR REPORT WEST CORNWALL 14TH – 20TH OCTOBER 2018

www.oriolebirding.com

oriolebirding@gmail.com

[twitter](#) 

SUNDAY 14TH OCTOBER – *Light northerly winds and sunshine, 13C*

After driving through some pretty hideous weather on our way south-west to Cornwall today, it was a beautiful day by the time we arrived and had a 'calm after the storm' feeling to it! We quickly checked in at our guest house and then headed straight out into the field, to nearby Nanquidno Valley. This beautiful spot was the ideal introduction to the Cornish valleys that we would be exploring over the coming week, and we enjoyed a pleasant stroll in the sunshine heading down along the mill stream and round the coast. A Blackcap popped up near the parking area and was the first of at least seven noted, with the big clumps of Blackthorn and Ivy by the rocky outcrop proving particularly attractive to these and a number of other small birds in the warm afternoon sunshine. Six Common Chiffchaffs were also noted, as well as three Goldcrest, Song Thrush, Great-spotted Woodpecker and a few tits and other common birds. Down towards the coast, Buzzard and Kestrel were a constant backdrop and a family of Stonechats kept in close company. This is a great place to see **Choughs**, and sure enough we soon had two drift over us and circle a couple of times before disappearing over the ridge with some Jackdaws. A **Common Raven** appeared too, being mobbed by a Carrion Crow for a useful comparison! Offshore we had a brief sighting of a **Harbour Porpoise**, lots of Gannets, Shag and a single adult **Mediterranean Gull**. In the warm sunshine, a number of butterflies were still on the wing too – Red Admiral, Speckled Wood, Comma and Small Copper. We returned to the guest house for an enormous Sunday roast spread and an early night!

MONDAY 15TH OCTOBER – *Cool and overcast in moderate North-easterly winds, 13C*

A red letter day today if ever there was one! We were keen to get into the valleys this morning and see what we could find, with plenty of birds arriving recently on the east coast of Britain, the north-east wind may just have filtered a few things down into the south-west and so Kenidjack was our first port of call for the morning. A gentle amble down the valley produced plenty of common birds with Robins 'ticking' all over the place and about seven Chiffchaff and four Blackcap among the common migrants seen. A couple of **Redwing**, three Goldcrest and a small flock of flyover **Siskin** were also noted, though the highlight were the excellent sightings we had of **Choughs**. We saw six different birds in total, moving around in pairs and calling all the time. On three separate occasions we had a pair fly right over our heads, and in the end we had all six birds together by the parking area. A real treat to see them so easily, and so well, on our first full day. Down at the cove, we stopped to scan the water and noticed a **Black Redstart** had popped up right in front of us – and it was a stunning male! The bird showed really well as it flitted around the rocks below the old ruined mine buildings at the head of the cove, and was soon joined by two females as well. A stoat entertained us, popping out of a pile of rocks and rolling around in the grass scent marking before scurrying off along an old pipe and disappearing into the ruin. Back up at the van, we had a coffee before walking back up the valley a bit to check the sycamores by the tractor shed. We couldn't find a reported Yellow-browed, and had to make do instead with nice views of a pair of **Grey Wagtails**, and several great views of a **Raven**.

Hayle Estuary would be our next stop, and even though the tide would not be rising we knew we would find plenty of waterbirds for the trip list. Parking by Ryan's Field, we saw two smart juvemile **Bar-tailed Godwits** there, closely followed by a very nice juv **Whimbrel**. A juvenile *islandica* **Black-tailed Godwit** was also present here, presumably a late fledged youngster as still pretty well wholly in juvenile plumage and a very smart bird indeed. The causeway provided close views of lots of Teal and Wigeon, and numerous smart **Mediterranean Gulls** among the loafing and bathing gulls in the freshwater channel below the bridge. We could see a great flock of Med Gulls further out on the sand flats, perhaps numbering forty birds or more. A dozen or so Dunlin, twenty Ringed Plover, Shelduck, Lapwing, Curlew, Redshank, Oystercatcher and Little Egret were also seen, with a **Peregrine** flying over. After lunch, we opted to head back to Penwith and try Porthgwarra, as several Yellow-browed Warblers had been seen there in the morning. We stopped at Roskestal Farm on the way down to check the starling flocks, before dropping down the steep road into the valley bottom. It was really quiet here, and we struggled to see much at all. A flock of **Kittiwakes** was off the cove, and there was the odd Chiffchaff in the bushes and trees by the cottages. Eventually we glimpsed an eye brown and two wing bars, as a **Yellow-browed Warbler** moved quickly through some willows, but sadly it

wouldn't cooperate for the whole group. It was just gone 5pm as we left the valley, and once up onto the top Ashley's phone began to ping with several messages. Pulling over to check if it was bird news related, we were gobsmacked to discover that a **Grey Catbird** had been found at Land's End, just ten minutes away! Not knowing the full 'gen', we drove there anyway and immediately found a load of parked cars by the roadside and a small crowd assembled in the fields just north of Treeve Moor House, where the bird had been seen. The only previous UK record of **Grey Catbird** had involved a bird on Anglesey which was not really twitchable to the masses, so the enormity of this record began to sink in as we made haste down the path to join the assembled birders. It had been seen just before we arrived, and was favouring a bramble-filled ditch flanked by dense ivy and three small willow trees. A tense ten minutes elapsed and then the crowd became agitated and binoculars were being raised in unison – someone could see it! We tried to get in a position where we might get a view and there in the willow in front of us was a **GREY CATBIRD** in full view! It soon skulked back out of view, and then it was 45 minutes before it showed again, this time climbing up into the same willow before flying a short distance into the next. It then flicked out and over the ivy, and landed right in the open on a small, bare tree before gliding back down into the brambles. Pretty good views for such a notorious skulker! We left the site about half an hour before dark, as we didn't want to miss dinner [we were already late!]. What a crazy and totally unexpected end to a great day!



Mediterranean Gull at Hayle, 15th October

TUESDAY 16TH OCTOBER – *Overcast with light SW breeze, 13C*

Another extremely good days birding today, following on from yesterdays Catbird excitement! We wanted to stay in Penwith today, as we felt the huge number of birders around would probably unearth something else for us to go and see, but we ended up finding it ourselves! First stop was Sennen Cove, always worth checking early in the morning before too many people are about. We

drove down to the harbour car park at the far end, and set the scope up for a scan out to sea. Right away we could see there was a lot of activity about a mile out to the south, with large numbers of Gannets wheeling around and plunging into the water and lots of gulls circling around. Focussing in, we saw a couple of big **Tuna** leaping right out of the water! No wonder there were lots of birds there! Soon we could also see the dorsal fins of **Common Dolphins**, and among the hundreds of seabirds we picked out a single **Balearic Shearwater** and **Arctic Skua**. Thankfully, the dolphins were coming ever closer and we ended up watching them at close range just in the bay – fantastic views through the scope as they worked a shoal of fish to the surface and occasionally breached right out of the water. Kittiwakes, **Mediterranean Gulls**, **Razorbills**, Guillemots and Shags were all taking advantage of the frenzy, as well as plenty of large gulls – we hoped for a large shearwater, but we couldn't spot one! This whole episode went on for over half an hour – quite a spectacle to start the day!

Next up we drove on to Polgigga, with a circular walk in mind down Bosistow Lane and round to Higher Bosistow Farm where a **Wryneck** had been knocking around for a few days. The lane was quiet, with only a single Chiffchaff, couple of Goldcrests and a Jay noted. As we walked up towards Higher Bosistow, we met another birder also looking for the **Wryneck** – while we were chatting to him, the bird flew past us and into the walled garden of the farm! We headed round to the far side of the farm buildings, but frustratingly couldn't see into the garden. A number of tits and chaffinches were acting in a very agitated manner, so we were sure the bird was still in there. Sure enough, the **Wryneck** popped up onto a lichen covered wall between two sheds, and posed in the open briefly, before dropping back down out of sight. As we waited for another view, a small passerine flew up from behind the farm. It looked like a bunting, but appeared small, almost like a diminutive pipit in flight. It then began to deliver a diagnostic 'tick' call as it flew over us – it was a **Little Bunting**! The bird flew off strongly towards Faraway Cottage, then turned and flew back over us calling again, before dropping out of sight behind the stables. We raced there to check for it, but unfortunately despite an extensive search, we didn't see it again. The **Wryneck** reappeared, in a bush along the stone wall heading east, but was seen off by the attendant tits and this was also the last sighting we had of it. We continued our circuit back along the narrow lanes to the road, and back down to our parking spot where a welcome coffee was on the cards.



Juvenile Rose-coloured Starling at Roskestal Farm, 16th October

Just up the road at Roskestal Farm, the Rose-coloured Starling had been seen again and as we were only moments away, we decided to pop along for another try. With all the twitchers now leaving Land's End having seen the Catbird, the narrow twisty road was now congested with cars going in both directions! We managed to negotiate our way through, and arrived at the farm just in time to see the **Rose-coloured Starling** being flushed by a Sparrowhawk and everything went stratospheric! After missing out once already, we decided to stick it out this time and ate out lunch in the sunshine, waiting for it to reappear. The starling flock was constantly coming and going onto the wires, and we kept checking through them as we munched. Eventually the **Rose-coloured Starling** few in again, and perched quite close to us on the wires so that everyone could get a scope view – brilliant! A stone's throw away was St Levan, a beautiful spot which we knew would be sheltered and fairly devoid of birders. Sadly it was also devoid of birds and despite a nice walk we saw nothing other than a pair of displaying Ravens!

Drift Reservoir was our final port of call today, and proved to be a bit of a masterstroke. It was now a beautiful afternoon, and we enjoyed walking down to the hide even though there wasn't a huge amount on view other than Little and Great Crested Grebes for the trip list and a confiding **Northern Wheatear**. We disturbed two youths from the hide, who had been using it for an afternoon smoke, and subsequently the pungent stench of cannabis was too overpowering to take the group in and we opted to walk a bit further and look back instead! The first birds we clapped eyes on were three interesting *aythya* ducks, among the Mallards and gulls on the water in the north-west corner. They appeared to be young drakes moulting into first-winter plumage, and showed distinctly peaked crowns, warm rusty buff flanks, and a long bill which showed an extensive black 'nail' and distinct white sub-terminal band. All these features added up to an identification as **Ring-necked Ducks**, and our thoughts were confirmed when one of the birds took flight revealing a grey wing bar, unlike the striking white band shown by Tufted Duck. To see three of these Nearctic vagrants together was most surprising, especially at such a well watched spot as this! The birds were still present when we left, and despite having a fly off to Nanquidno just after we left, they returned to Drift before dusk and were seen by some local and visiting birders too. A lovely surprise and great end to another top day!



Trio of Ring-necked Ducks, Drift Reservoir 16th October

WEDNESDAY 17TH OCTOBER – *Sunny spells in light North-easterly winds, 14C*

A very pleasant days birding today down on The Lizard peninsula, where we started off at the most southerly point. Parking in the small car park just before the café, we got out of the van and instantly could hear a **European Serin** calling from the bushes at the entrance to the car park! The bird was calling frequently and presumably had just arrived, as it then flew off towards the tamarisks near the lighthouse. We could still hear it calling even from there, but by the time we had got our stuff together and wandered round there to look for it, there was no further sign. While searching though, we picked up a gorgeous **Whinchat**, single Blackcap and Northern Wheatear, and lots of ‘ticking’ Robins and flocks of Skylarks. It certainly felt as though there were birds about! Heading down onto the coast path, we walked towards Pistil Meadow, picking up our first Turnstones of the trip along the way. The tamarisks in the little valley were quiet, and there were just a couple of Stonechats bombing around the scrub here. Climbing up on to the coastal footpath towards Caerthillian Cove, there were lots of pipits around, and we enjoyed very close up views of Rock and Meadow Pipits together for comparison. A **Merlin** was unfortunately all too brief, and saw us coming before we had seen it, perched on a rock on the clifftop. The rest of the circular walk back to the village was quiet, with only a Grey Wagtail and Reed Bunting of any real note. On the south side of the village though, we had a late **Yellow Wagtail** briefly in the sheep fields, and a female **Black Redstart** on the corner of a barn.

Our lunch stop today would be the idyllic Church Cove on the south-east side of the peninsula, a well wooded spot often good for ‘crests and phylloscs. Soon we could hear a **Yellow-browed Warbler** calling, so after lunch we wandered up into the churchyard to see if we could pin it down. We saw three Yellow-broweds here, but they were difficult – constantly flitting high in sycamore canopy and calling regularly, but often against the light and hard for people to get onto. Most of the group eventually had a good view, but not all! The walk down into the cove and back added two Chiffchaffs and a Blackcap, but the most unexpected sighting was a Great Northern Diver lumbering overhead going high east! Leaving the Lizard behind, we decided to call in at Loe Pool on the way back, near Helston. Heading down the steep track from Degibna car park, we hoped the slog back up the hill would prove to be worthwhile! There was little on the lake itself other than Little and Great Crested Grebes, four Shoveler and a few **Mediterranean Gulls**, but the prize of the afternoon was excellent views of two **Firecrests** in the willows and oaks along the southern shore of the pool. Absolutely dazzling little gems in the dull afternoon light and well worth the walk!

THURSDAY 18TH OCTOBER – *Light North-easterly winds and sunny spells, 14C*

Today was all about visible migration, as the large numbers of Scandinavian migrants which had arrived on the east coast the previous day now made their way down into Cornwall, presumably before continuing their journey south to the continent. We headed straight to Porthgwarra, perhaps Cornwall's most famous birding valley and one where we had only scratched the surface so far. As we set off up the hill to the coastguard cottages, it was immediately apparent that there was a bit of overhead passage going on, with the first groups of Chaffinches and Skylarks passing over, a **Fieldfare** and a couple of Song Thrush. Taking the track across the moorland to the dried up pool, we began to log more and more flocks of Chaffinch, mainly in groups of 20-30 birds but occasionally up to 60. The passage gathered pace, and it was hard to keep up! In the end, we logged 1070 Chaffinch, 135 Skylark, 3 **Brambling**, 4 **Siskin**, 8 **Fieldfare**, 3 **Bullfinch** and 2 **Grey Wagtails**. It really was a remarkable sight seeing flock after flock of Chaffinch heading south following the ridge and then presumably heading out to sea, though we didn't actually see what they were doing after they had passed us. In the bushes, we saw a **Yellow-browed Warbler** and 3-4 Chiffchaffs, but it was quite breezy up by the pool so we returned and dropped back down to the sheltered edge of sixty foot cover. A pair of Stonechats were seen, and two Great-spotted Woodpeckers were bouncing around in the gorse and occasionally perching on the telegraph poles. As we stood and watched the sunny edge of the bushes for movement, a superb **Merlin** dashed right through and over our heads, scattering a big flock of Linnets. After coffee back at the car park, we learned that someone had seen a Red-breasted Flycatcher in sixty foot cover, where we had just been! In order to have any chance of

seeing it, we needed to squelch through a fair bit of mud and clamber through the tangled branches of the copse, which some of us did – to no avail! On the way back, a **Firecrest** was glimpsed, and another Yellow-browed Warbler was heard calling to round off the morning.



Spoonbill at Hayle, 17th October

Hayle and surrounds would be our destination for the afternoon, and after lunch by Ryans Field, we caught up with the adult **Spoonbill** from the hide, feeding in the open on the pool there. The three juvs of Bar-tailed Godwit, **Black-tailed Godwit** and **Whimbrel** were also all still present and showing well in the very nice light. Crossing to the causeway, the tide was high but rather pathetic due to the lunar cycle at the moment, so there wasn't much more to be seen than on our previous visit. We did note three **Common Greenshanks** though, an increase in Lapwing, a solitary Dunlin and plenty of Mediterranean Gulls. Checks of Carnsew Pool and Copperhouse Creek added nothing further, so we carried on to St Gothian NR. This nice site produced our first Mute Swan of the trip, a few Tufted Ducks and Wigeon, Rock Pipit, Grey Wagtail, Reed Bunting, Stonechat and a Wheatear. One of the group saw a **Water Rail**, sneaking across a gap in the reeds. It had been our quietest spell of the trip so far, but we managed to eke something out of the afternoon with a stop at Long Rock on the way back – seven **Common Scoter** gave good views in Mount's Bay, where a **Great Northern Diver** was also seen very distantly. Back to base, for a wash and brush up before another superb dinner!

FRIDAY 19TH OCTOBER – *Light NE winds and overcast, 14C*

A pleasant day today as the benign weather continues – not a drop of rain and no strong winds on an autumn trip to Cornwall is pretty good going, especially since we've had plenty of birds too! We headed down to Sennen Cove this morning, and after a short walk on the common at the top by the school [where we noted a Chiffchaff and our first overhead groups of Chaffinch and Siskin on the day] we dropped down to the harbour car park. There was nothing doing out in the bay today, after our good fortune earlier in the week with the dolphins, so we set off on our planned circular walk

towards Land's End. It was a cracking morning for a walk along the cliffs here, despite being quiet birdwise. A few small groups of Chaffinch were still moving, plus the odd Siskin and Song Thrush, while a Wheatear was on the clifftop with large numbers of Meadow and Rock Pipits. A **Merlin** dashed past along the cliff edge, and a Stock Dove flew inland – our first of the week! Reaching Land's End, we explored the scrub south of the complex but noted only a Goldcrest, and a Little Egret dropping into Swingates. Stonechats accompanied us throughout the walk though, and we picked up the odd Chiffchaff. We really didn't see much else on the whole of the walk back to Sennen, apart from the Torrey Canyon wreck! While having a coffee in the car park, two **Choughs** flew in calling, but despite appearing to drop in very close behind the toilet block, we didn't see them again.



Land's End from Sennen, 19th October

Our afternoon would be spent largely in Cot Valley, which was actually very close to our accommodation on the edge of St Just. It was beautifully sheltered here, with hardly a breath of wind moving the sycamore leaves – great for searching out fast moving *phylloscopus* warblers! Before lunch, we did a circuit of the top end of this wooded valley, and on the southern side we soon found ourselves amongst a small roving party of tits. There were several Coal Tits here, and at least four Chiffchaff and two Blackcap. A **Yellow-browed Warbler** called and then popped into view in the top of a sycamore, where it played hide and seek among the autumn foliage and didn't quite give itself up altogether. Following the flock along the footpath, they emerged into a series of stunted trees which made them easier to view, and we quickly picked out two surprised in the form of a **Garden Warbler** and then a lemon yellow **Willow Warbler**, both rather late records. The **Yellow-browed Warbler** showed again too, at very close range but always in the back of the tree silhouetted! Lunch beckoned, and a chance to regroup before trying again! We headed all the way down the valley to the coast this time, with two **Choughs** up over the ridge and a **Merlin** crossing the valley as we walked back up. With nothing further to show for our efforts, we opted to cross back over the stream and come back along the path which had been productive earlier. More views of Chiffchaffs and Blackcaps followed, and then finally a nailed on view of a **Yellow-browed Warbler**, which dropped nicely into a small hawthorn in one of the gardens and everyone could be finally happy that they had seen all the features! A welcome coffee break followed, and then a plan for the final hour of the day.

Some folk were weary after the 6-7 miles of walking we had put in today, so after a drop off at the guest house, the rest of us decided to go back for seconds on the **Grey Catbird** which was still clinging on in its favoured bushes on Treeve Common. As it was now quite late in the day, there were remarkably only twenty people present when we got to the car park – we had timed it well! The bird had last been seen disappearing into thick blackthorn scrub at the bottom of the car park field, but not seen for about an hour. We waited patiently, filling time watching a pair of **Choughs** feeding in the meadow just beyond – our first ones 'on the deck' despite lots of good flight views. Soon a guy said that he could see the **Catbird**, and everyone moved to his position for a look but it had already dropped back down. Two minutes later, and it flew out of the scrub, and low across towards the willows where we had seen it on the first day. It paused on the top of a bramble and 'mewed' before

flying again and dropping into cover – probably an even better view than we had had before, and it was great to hear it call too! A nice end to our last full day in West Cornwall.

SATURDAY 20TH OCTOBER – *Fine and sunny in light winds, 16C*

For our final morning, we had a couple of hours for birding before setting off on our respective journeys east. With crowds of birders now in most of the valleys with the weekend Catbird twitchers appearing in force, we decided to walk from Trevilley down into Nanjizal Valley, and subsequently didn't see another birder! It was a stunningly beautiful morning, and in the sycamores around the farm we saw a couple of Common Chiffchaffs flitting among the leaves. Dropping down into the scrub-filled valley at the seaward end of Nanjizal, we picked up three Blackcaps, and lots of Robins and Song Thrushes, the latter both in the scrub and flying over. Several small groups of Siskins passed over, and a flock of 'chipping' Common Crossbills flew high overhead unseen. Coming back through the scrub, a Cetti's Warbler was calling and showed briefly across a gap, and a Chough called noisily as it flew across the mouth of the cove. The views out to Scilly were spectacular, and we could see the Scillonian enjoying one of its smoothest crossings of the season, heading out to the islands! It was then time to wrap up what had been a very enjoyable weeks birding, and head back to the guest house to collect cars before getting on our way.



Nanjizal looking towards Scilly Isles, 20th October

SYSTEMATIC LIST

1. Greylag Goose
2. Canada Goose
3. Mute Swan
4. Common Shelduck
5. Northern Shoveler
6. Eurasian Wigeon
7. Mallard
8. Eurasian Teal
9. Tufted Duck
10. Ring-necked Duck
11. Common Scoter
12. Common Pheasant
13. Great Northern Diver
14. Little Grebe
15. Great Crested Grebe
16. Northern Gannet
17. Great Cormorant
18. European Shag
19. Grey Heron

20. Little Egret
21. Eurasian Spoonbill
22. Eurasian Sparrowhawk
23. Common Buzzard
24. Common Moorhen
25. Eurasian Coot
26. Eurasian Oystercatcher
27. European Golden Plover
28. Northern Lapwing
29. Common Ringed Plover
30. Eurasian Curlew
31. Bar-tailed Godwit
32. Black-tailed Godwit
33. Ruddy Turnstone
34. Dunlin
35. Common Snipe
36. Green Sandpiper [H]
37. Common Greenshank
38. Common Redshank
39. Arctic Skua
40. Razorbill
41. Common Guillemot
42. Black-legged Kittiwake
43. Black-headed Gull
44. Mediterranean Gull
45. Common Gull
46. Herring Gull
47. Lesser Black-backed Gull
48. Great Black-backed Gull
49. Stock Dove
50. Woodpigeon
51. Collared Dove
52. Tawny Owl
53. Great-spotted Woodpecker
54. Green Woodpecker
55. Eurasian Wryneck
56. Common Kestrel
57. Merlin
58. Peregrine
59. Eurasian Jay
60. Common Magpie
61. Red-billed Chough
62. Eurasian Jackdaw
63. Rook
64. Carrion Crow
65. Common Raven
66. Eurasian Skylark
67. Barn Swallow
68. Coal Tit
69. Eurasian Blue Tit
70. Great Tit
71. Long-tailed Tit
72. Eurasian Wren
73. Goldcrest
74. Firecrest

75. Cetti's Warbler
76. Common Chiffchaff
77. Willow Warbler
78. Yellow-browed Warbler
79. Eurasian Blackcap
80. Garden Warbler
81. European Robin
82. Black Redstart
83. European Stonechat
84. Whinchat
85. Northern Wheatear
86. Eurasian Blackbird
87. Redwing
88. Song Thrush
89. Fieldfare
90. Common Starling
91. Rose-coloured Starling
92. Dunnock
93. Grey Wagtail
94. Yellow Wagtail
95. Pied Wagtail
96. Meadow Pipit
97. Rock Pipit
98. Common Reed Bunting
99. Little Bunting
100. Common Chaffinch
101. Brambling
102. European Greenfinch
103. European Serin
104. Common Linnet
105. European Goldfinch
106. Eurasian Siskin
107. Common Crossbill [H]
108. House Sparrow
109. Grey Catbird