



ORIOLE BIRDING



TOUR REPORT WEST CORNWALL 13TH – 19TH OCTOBER 2019

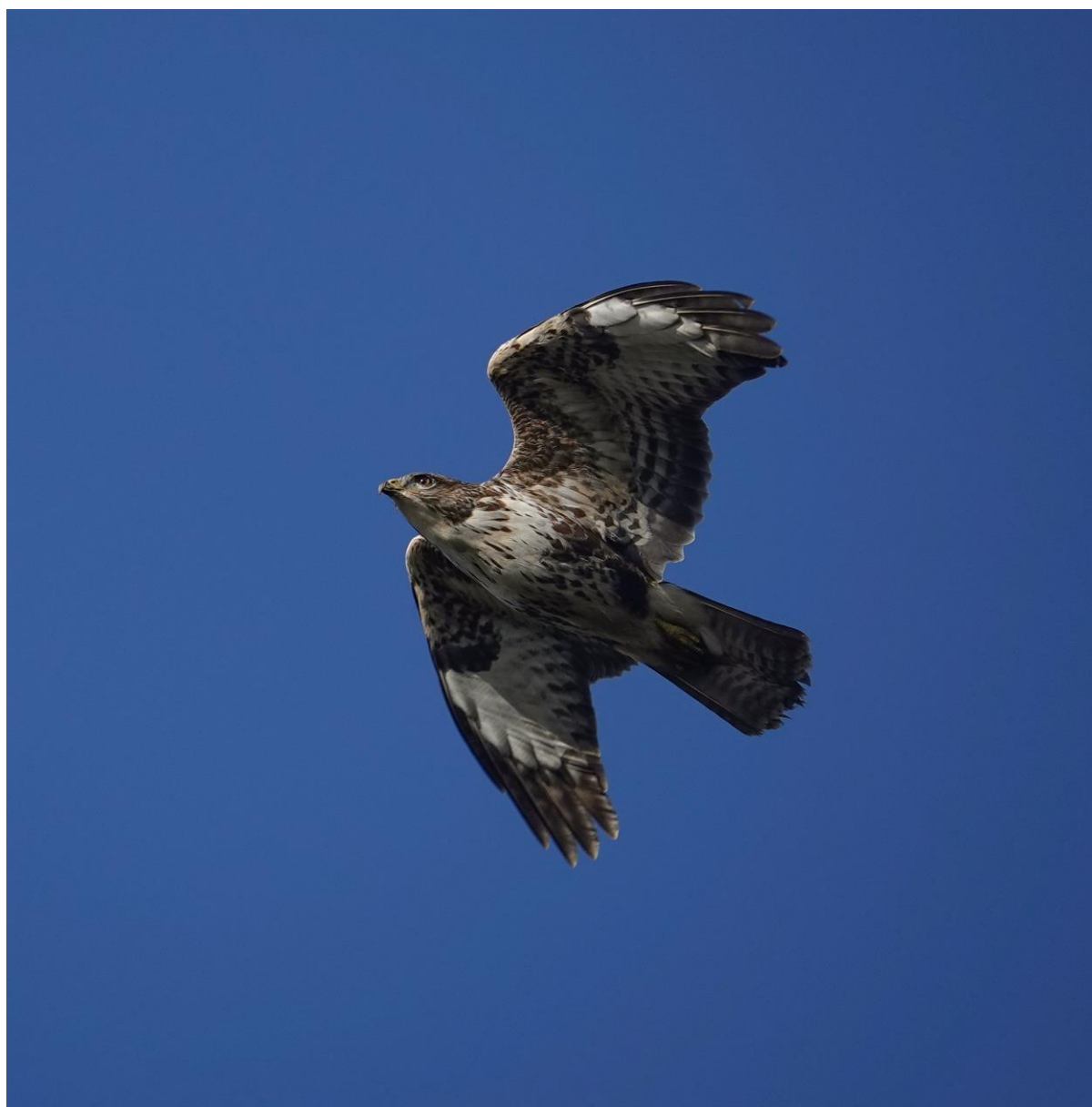
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SUNDAY 13th OCTOBER – *Moderate westerly winds, sunny spells, 16C*

Having checked into our guesthouse, conveniently situated close to many of the west coast locations, we were keen to get out in the field. Nearby Nanquidno Valley was to be our first port of call, where a **Red-breasted Flycatcher** had been present for a few days. Despite knowing the precise location favoured by the bird, it proved to be tricky customer to pin down, with several frustratingly fleeting initial views, as it flitted around the lower branches of an ash. Luckily, and with some persistence, we were able to finally obtain telescope views of it perched in the afternoon sun. A good start to the trip and great teamwork all round. Several European Robins and Eurasian Wrens, which would both prove very frequently seen species during our stay, were also seen noted, while a **Eurasian Sparrowhawk** wheeled overhead. With news of a **Red-eyed Vireo** still being present at Porthgwarra, we chose to spend the rest of the afternoon there, rather exploring Nanquidno more thoroughly.



Common Buzzard

Unfortunately, our search for the irritatingly elusive vireo proved unsuccessful, but we were glad to at least have tried. While here a **Common Buzzard** and two **Common Kestrels** went over, both pursued by Eurasian Jackdaws. A squadron of Great Black-backed Gulls went over to roost and a

Common Raven called unseen. A European Greenfinch perched up on a wire and a Song Thrush was high up the valley slopes, while a Common Chiffchaff was heard only. Further records of birds which would subsequently prove to be common and widespread during the tour included Herring Gull, Common Woodpigeon, Common Magpie, Rook, Carrion Crow, Eurasian Blue Tit, Great Tit, Eurasian Blackbird, Common Starling, Dunnock, Common Chaffinch and House Sparrow. A Red Fox ambled by at close quarters.

With the sun dropping and the temperature suddenly plummeting in the valley bottom, we ended our vigil and headed back to the guest house for a delicious Sunday roast and an early night.

MONDAY 13th OCTOBER – *Moderate southerly winds, cloudy start, some rain, followed by sunny spells, 15C*

A **Grey Wagtail** was seen by the guest house as we gathered to set off. Our first destination today was to be Kenidjack, an open, west-facing valley, a short distance outside of St Just. Heading down towards the sea there we were accompanied by the 'ticking' of European Robins, while a Common Chiffchaff showed briefly in a gorse bush. The willows further down held four Goldcrests, but the bushes were otherwise fairly quiet. A Long-tailed Tit flock moved through, accompanied by Eurasian Blue Tits and Great Tits. A **Grey Wagtail** flew over and a Song Thrush dived into cover. At the seaward end of the valley, a flock of Meadow Pipits went over, a few European Shags were in the bay, Northern Gannets passed by and a pair of Common Ravens was on nearby Cape Cornwall. Heading up the valley we spoke to some other birders who had already worked the upper valley (around the sewage works) without much success and we decided to try our luck instead at the scenic Sennen Cove, which forms a sheltered corner of Whitesand Bay.

Parking at the harbour, we turned our attention to the sea just beyond the Cowloe rocks, where dozens of Northern Gannets were plunge-diving. Surprisingly, a few enormous Atlantic Bluefin Tuna were leaping clear of the water in the melee, presumably attracted to the same bait fish as the Gannets. While comparing Rock and Meadow Pipits around the adjacent houses, two **Red-billed Choughs** flew in, calling noisily. Around four more of these characterful birds were seen shortly after in the vicinity.



Red-billed Chough

The Cowloe held a roost of the three common large gulls – Herring, Great Black-back and Lesser Black-back – plus a Great Cormorant and a gathering of European Shags. Two **Eurasian Curlews** were on nearby rocks, while a group of ten **Mediterranean Gulls** encompassed all age groups. Looking along the bay, we noticed four **Sandwich Terns** on a sand bar.

Following a coffee break, the threatened rain arrived and we decided to drive to Drift Reservoir, where lunch would be taken. A scan of the reservoir produced a fairly meagre fare, namely two Tufted Ducks, one Eurasian Coot, one Canada Goose, one Great Cormorant, a handful of Mallards, plus the expected common gull species. Weighing up our options, we headed for the Hayle Estuary complex, hoping that the rain would soon ease, as was forecast.

The obvious first stop was into the shelter of the hide at Ryan's Field RSPB. The best sighting here was of a **Common Kingfisher**, with a supporting cast of **Little Egret**, **Eurasian Curlew** and Common Moorhen. With the rain now fizzling out, we walked to the causeway (noting Long-tailed Tits and Goldcrests along the river) to view the main upper estuary.

Wildfowl here comprised several hundred Eurasian Wigeon, along with smaller numbers of Eurasian Teal, Mallards and Common Shelduck. Waders were represented by Eurasian Oystercatcher, **Grey Plover** (three), Northern Lapwing (20), Common Ringed Plover (two), **Eurasian Curlew**, **Bar-tailed Godwit** (10), **Black-tailed Godwit** (one), Dunlin (12), **Common Greenshank** (three) and Common Redshank. Little Egrets and Grey Herons were scattered around, while a few **Mediterranean Gulls** were present among the Black-heads.



Western Osprey

The Asda superstore in Hayle town is a convenient parking place to use while exploring Carnsew Pool, a tidal waterbody cut off from the main estuary by an embankment. Five **Little Grebes** were on the pool, with a **European Stonechat** perched up by the track. While watching another **Little Grebe**,

a Common Ringed Plover and a Dunlin on a seaweed-strewn stretch of the estuary we caught sight of a **Western Osprey**, as it dived down out of view. Luckily, it soon reappeared and subsequently put on a great show as it hunted at close quarters, at one point harassed by a **Common Buzzard**. After resting awhile on a wooden post, it once again set off and caught a Grey Mullet, before flying off with its prize up the estuary. What a spectacle! Here we also noted two **Eurasian Sparrowhawks**.

Continuing up the estuary, we next visited Copperhouse Creek. Sightings from the car park half was along the southern shore included two **Spotted Redshanks**, a **Common Greenshank** flying upstream and a flock of **Mediterranean Gulls**. Relocating to the top end of the creek, we caught up with what was probably the same **Common Greenshank**, a Dunlin and various other waders. Four **Pink-footed Geese** (quite scarce in the region) were with the Canadas and a **Grey Wagtail** was present. Here we also added our first Common Linnets, with a few on wires overhead.



Pink-footed Geese

Heading back to base, it wasn't long to wait for dinner, with a **Tawny Owl** heard from the guest house after dark.

TUESDAY 14th OCTOBER – *Moderate to fresh westerly winds, sunny start, clouding over, 15C*

Today we would be heading east through Helston to explore the Lizard, a peninsula where the British mainland's most southerly point is situated.

Parking up in the village green, where a flock of 350 Common Starlings was present, we first made our way down one of the tracks which leads to Caerthillian Cove. Sadly, there was no sign of a **Barred Warbler** which had been present the day before, although the wind was whipping through the area, which can't have helped matters. While searching the area, a **Peregrine** shot past, a Common Moorhen perched quietly by a small pond, a few Common Chiffchaffs were in the hedges and Eurasian Skylarks called frequently overhead.

Back at the green, we then drove the short distance to Church Cove, parking up by the cemetery. A thorough search of the surrounds eventually revealed a **Yellow-browed Warbler**, favouring trees along the lane, although some effort was required to get decent views of the typically hyperactive sprite. A **Willow Warbler** was also noted here, quite a late date for the species. With a very noisy strimming operation having commenced in the church yard, we opted to take a walk down the lane towards the sea, returning via the scrub-filled valley by the disused quarry. The bushes were quiet save for a Goldcrest or two and a **European Stonechat** was by the quarry.

Lizard Point was similarly fairly quiet in terms of migrants, although we did locate a **Northern Wheatear** by the lighthouse, where several Rock Pipits were also observed. A very pleasant visit to Britain's most southerly café saw us sitting outside in the warming afternoon sun, enjoying the antics of some Atlantic Grey Seals, while Northern Gannets passed in numbers and a few Common Ravens 'cronked' nearby. Alas, the Lizard had somewhat underperformed today, with several scarce birds from yesterday's reports seeming to have disappeared overnight, but our visit had not been without value.

Returning back west, we pulled in at Helston Boating Lake. Here, **Common Gull**, Mute Swan and **Northern Shoveler** were new for the trip, with **Mediterranean Gull**, Black-headed Gull, Tufted Duck, Common Moorhen, Eurasian Coot and **Grey Wagtail** among the rest. Walking back over the car park, we took the lane which follows the Loe Valley southwards. There is some good habitat along here and just past the sewage works we hit a burst of activity, where a surprise **Spotted Flycatcher** was the highlight. A large flock of Long-tailed Tits was accompanied by other tit species and several Goldcrests, with a **Great Spotted Woodpecker** also noted. The rest of the one km or so of lane we walked was less productive, but we did record **Eurasian Jay**, a female **Eurasian Sparrowhawk** and several **Great Spotted Woodpeckers**.

With rain now threatening, we continued back to the guest house, arriving just as the heavens opened.

WEDNESDAY 16th OCTOBER – *Moderate westerly winds, mainly sunny, 15C*



Red Deer

Our first destination today was to be Porthgawarra. A few Common Chiffchaffs were in the bushes adjacent to the car park, where a couple of **Eurasian Siskins** flew over. From here we walked up onto the heath to the small pond (usually dry, but now holding water, following recent heavy rain), where we noted **Great Spotted Woodpecker**, **Eurasian Jay**, several Common Chiffchaffs and three **European Stonechats**. A magnificent Red Deer stag – a Monarch – strutted and posed as if he owned the place. Continuing on as far as Carn Trevean, we then headed down towards the coast path, enjoying superb coastal views in the gloriously sunny conditions. Several **Red-billed Choughs**, Common Ravens and a **Common Kestrel** were logged.

Heading back along the coast path, we were surprised to see a **White Stork** fly in and land on a nearby rock, quite an incongruous sight! Although impressive to see, this was not a truly wild bird, but one of the 24 released in Sussex in August as part of a reintroduction project. As such, this individual was ringed, being one of eight also fitted with a GPS tag, this clearly visible on the bird's mantle when it flew off along the coast.



White Stork

While making our way back to the car, news arrived of an American **White-rumped Sandpiper** at Marazion and our next move was decided. The exact location received was somewhat vague and we initially wasted some time searching the flooded channel behind the beach. Realising the directions probably referred to the beach car park area instead, we drove down to be told that the bird had just flown off from the beach, having been flushed by a dog walker. Very frustrating. However, we gambled that the bird might return to the same area and took a break in the beachside café. Thankfully, by the time we had taken our refreshments the bird had done the decent thing and was in seaweed at the top of the beach, right by the car park. This confiding individual had soon attracted quite a crowd of birders and interested public.



White-rumped Sandpiper

Having enjoyed fabulous views of the rare wader, we opted for a stroll along the footpath into Marazion Marsh. Cetti's Warbler and Water Rail were heard here, with three Eurasian Bullfinches also new for the trip. A Long-tailed Tit flock hosted Goldcrests and Common Chiffchaffs, a Eurasian Jay was seen distantly and a Eurasian Sparrowhawk flew over. Once back at the car, a Ruddy Turnstone was seen on the rocks offshore.

Heading back to Penzance, we stopped off at Jubilee Pool, where a Great Northern Diver was on the sea towards Newlyn and a Grey Wagtail was on the shore.

On our way back to base, we had just enough time to call in at Drift Reservoir, where Great Crested Grebe was our latest addition. Overall, quite a varied and interesting day.

THURSDAY 17th OCTOBER – *Fresh south-westerly winds, heavy showers from early afternoon, 15C*

This morning we would visit Cot, a steep-sided valley, just west of our guest house. Parking at the seaward end, we immediately noticed large numbers of Northern Gannets passing and undertook a short seawatch. Four Common Scoters moved south at reasonable proximity, while Black-legged Kittiwakes, Northern Fulmars, Common Guillemots and Razorbills were mostly further out, beyond the rocks known as The Brisons.

Further up the valley, we were pleased to locate two Firecrests in elms, always such a joy to see. Otherwise, this area held Long-tailed Tit and Goldcrest, along with the ubiquitous European Robin, Eurasian Wren and Blackbird. A bright male Grey Wagtail was on a roof and four Eurasian Siskins were in conifers by the houses. Returning along the path which follows the south side of the valley, we noted Red-billed Choughs, Eurasian Sparrowhawk and Common Buzzard.

Heading next to Sennen, we pulled in at the pond in the village, where a **Common Kingfisher** was noted, before dropping down to the cove. Here we again saw Atlantic Bluefin Tuna jumping just beyond Cowloe, surely a good supply of bait fish must have been lingering in the bay. Four **Red-billed Choughs** flew over, too. While taking a coffee break, news arrived of a **Subalpine Warbler** at Cot, found in the scrub near the valley top, above the YHA building.

Having duly returned to Cot, we had a couple of brief views of the elusive 'Subalp', before heavy persistent showers set in and put a dampener on things. A **Merlin** gave an extended flypast down the valley, a **Common Kestrel** was around and a flock of Common Linnets was in an adjacent field. With the rarity seeming to have gone to ground in the challenging weather, we abandoned our vigil and headed to Trevescan, near Land's End, where a flock of **Western Cattle Egrets** had been reported earlier.

Driving the B3315, we were unable to locate the flock and were about to give up when a **Western Cattle Egret** flew alongside the car heading west, although there was no sign of its companions in the general vicinity.

FRIDAY 18th OCTOBER – *Strong south-westerly winds, sunny spells and heavy showers, 14C*

This morning we had intended to more carefully explore Nanquidno Valley, a site where we had previously only scratched the surface. We managed to make it as far as where the valley turns west towards the sea, when a heavy shower appeared imminent, prompting a hasty retreat to the vehicle. At this point we received news that the **Subalpine Warbler** was still at Cot Valley and we opted to take another look there instead. Once on site, we were rewarded with several views of the warbler, although it was highly active, never settling for more than a few seconds. A really tricky bird, for sure, and never subsequently ascribed to race.

Moving on to Porthgawarra, a pair of **Red-billed Choughs** put on a good show in the cove, where a **Grey Wagtail** was also present. A few Goldcrests were all we could find in the bushes by the car park and we drove the short distance to Penwerth Cove, a beautifully sheltered location where lunch was taken. As with elsewhere this morning, there was a general lack of migrant activity in the bushes, although we did enjoy great views of a **Great Spotted Woodpecker**. With the valley locations generally quiet and a lack of news emerging, we decided to spend the afternoon revisiting Drift Reservoir and Hayle Estuary.

The highlight at Drift was an unexpected **Western Cattle Egret**, seen distantly with cows in the fields of Sellan Veor Farm, just to the north-west of the reservoir. Additional sightings here included **Little Egret** and **Grey Heron**, both in the northern arm of the reservoir.

At Hayle, our first stop was made at Ryan's Field RSPB. Looking out from the hide, a commotion among the gulls on the estuary signalled the arrival of the lingering **Western Osprey**, which stayed in view for several minutes. A **Common Greenshank** was the pick of the birds on the scrape.

Moving on to Carnsew Pool, a **Red-breasted Merganser** was diving actively, a new bird for the trip, with a supporting cast of two **Common Kingfishers**, four **Little Grebes**, **Little Egret**, **Grey Heron** and **Common Kestrel**.

The wind was fairly barrelling through at Copperhouse Creek, where the four **Pink-footed Geese** were still present, with two **Greylag Geese** also with the flock of **Canadas**. A flock of several dozen **Mediterranean Gulls** was on the saltmarsh and a **Common Buzzard** was 'hovering' into the stiff breeze. With another sharp shower threatening, we called it a day and headed back to the guest house, anticipating another delicious evening meal.

SATURDAY 19th OCTOBER – *Fairly light north-westerly winds, sunny spells, 14C*

Relieved that the rather strong winds of the last two days had abated, we set off after breakfast to spend our final morning of the tour at Kenidjack Valley. Parking in a lay-by at the top (Nancherrow) end of the valley, we set off in glorious sunshine, noting four Goldcrests by the sewage works. A male **Eurasian Bullfinch** posed on a telegraph wire and two European Greenfinches were nearby, too.

At the lower valley, we took one of the tracks which leads up the northern slopes of the valley towards the cliffs. A male **Eurasian Blackcap**, which appeared on a gorse bush, was our first of the trip and two **European Stonechats** were in the bracken. The views out to sea from the cliffs here were simply stunning; the Isles of Scilly were clearly visible, while thousands of auks (plus smaller numbers of Northern Gannets and **Black-legged Kittiwakes**) streamed past over a deep blue sea. Just as we were about to head back a flock of 20 **Red-billed Choughs** flew over and across the bay, seemingly intent on making landfall at Cape Cornwall.

Making our way back up the valley, two more **Eurasian Bullfinches** were found, along with Long-tailed Tits, two **Common Kestrels** and a **Common Buzzard**. Stopping finally at the sewage works, we located a very showy **Firecrest**, a lovely way to round off our final morning.



Firecrest

Heading back to the guest house, we collected our belongings and some of us said our goodbyes. However, before finally departing Cornwall, a few the group called in at Penzance. Parking by the Jubilee Pool we noted about 25 Ruddy Turnstones on the rocks, with our final new bird of the trip – a **Red-throated Diver** – seen cruising out to sea from the harbour.

SYSTEMATIC LIST

- 1 Pink-footed Goose
- 2 Greylag Goose
- 3 Canada Goose
- 4 Mute Swan
- 5 Common Shelduck
- 6 Northern Shoveler
- 7 Eurasian Wigeon
- 8 Mallard
- 9 Eurasian Teal
- 10 Tufted Duck
- 11 Common Scoter
- 12 Red-breasted Merganser
- 13 Common Pheasant
- 14 Red-throated Diver
- 15 Great Northern Diver
- 16 Little Grebe
- 17 Great Crested Grebe
- 18 Northern Fulmar
- 19 Northern Gannet
- 20 Great Cormorant
- 21 European Shag
- 22 Grey Heron
- 23 Western Cattle Egret
- 24 Little Egret
- 25 White Stork [Introduced]
- 26 Western Osprey
- 27 Eurasian Sparrowhawk
- 28 Common Buzzard
- 29 Water Rail [H]
- 30 Common Moorhen
- 31 Eurasian Coot
- 32 Eurasian Oystercatcher
- 33 Grey Plover
- 34 Northern Lapwing
- 35 Common Ringed Plover
- 36 Eurasian Curlew
- 37 Bar-tailed Godwit
- 38 Black-tailed Godwit
- 39 Ruddy Turnstone
- 40 Dunlin
- 41 White-rumped Sandpiper
- 42 Common Greenshank
- 43 Common Redshank
- 44 Spotted Redshank
- 45 Common Guillemot
- 46 Razorbill
- 47 Black-legged Kittiwake
- 48 Black-headed Gull
- 49 Mediterranean Gull
- 50 Common Gull
- 51 Herring Gull
- 52 Lesser Black-backed Gull
- 53 Great Black-backed Gull

54 Sandwich Tern
55 Rock Dove [Feral Pigeon}
56 Common Woodpigeon
57 Collared Dove
58 Tawny Owl [H]
59 Common Kingfisher
60 Great Spotted Woodpecker
61 Common Kestrel
62 Merlin
63 Peregrine
64 Eurasian Jay
65 Common Magpie
66 Red-billed Chough
67 Eurasian Jackdaw
68 Rook
69 Carrion Crow
70 Common Raven
71 Eurasian Skylark
72 Eurasian Blue Tit
73 Great Tit
74 Long-tailed Tit
75 Eurasian Wren
76 Goldcrest
77 Firecrest
78 Cetti's Warbler [H]
79 Willow Warbler
80 Common Chiffchaff
81 Yellow-browed Warbler
82 Eurasian Blackcap
83 Subalpine Warbler
84 Spotted Flycatcher
85 European Robin
86 Red-breasted Flycatcher
87 European Stonechat
88 Northern Wheatear
89 Eurasian Blackbird
90 Song Thrush
91 Common Starling
92Dunnock
93 Grey Wagtail
94 Pied Wagtail
95 Meadow Pipit
96 Rock Pipit
97 Common Chaffinch
98 Eurasian Bullfinch
99 European Greenfinch
100 Common Linnet
101 European Goldfinch
102 Eurasian Siskin
103 House Sparrow

OTHER WILDLIFE

1 Migrant Hawker
2 Large White

- 3 Red Admiral
- 4 Peacock
- 5 Speckled Wood
- 6 Atlantic Bluefin Tuna
- 7 Slow-worm
- 8 Rabbit
- 9 Red Deer
- 10 Brown Rat
- 11 Grey Squirrel
- 12 Atlantic Grey Seal
- 13 Red Fox