



TOUR REPORT

CORNWALL 15th – 21st Oct 2023

www.oriolobirding.com

info@oriolobirding.com

Sunday 15th October

After checking in to our accommodation in St Just, the group assembled by the minibus where we said our 'hellos', boarded, and headed off to our first destination of the trip nearby Drift Reservoir. We walked down from the car park onto the dam, immediately noting several Egrets with Cattle on the opposite bank. As suspected, a Cattle Egret was the first bird ID'd, though closer inspection of the others revealed the remainder were all in fact Little Egrets. We took the path that runs along the side of the reservoir, heading towards a small hide positioned to look over the furthest two bays. Periodic scans of the open water on the way produced a pair of Tufted Duck, at least six Little Grebes and a large flock of around fifty Canada Geese. A Great Egret was seen distantly in the corner of the first of the bays we could see into, and a look through the assembled gulls on the water revealed they were largely Lesser Black-backed and Herring. As we were looking a Mediterranean Gull flew in, an adult bird that settled briefly in with its larger cousins. A Great Crested Grebe also appeared, surfacing in the same view behind the gull flock. We saw very little from the hide, the only noteworthy bird being another Great Egret in the second bay.



A distant Great Egret.

We retraced our steps to return to the bus, adding a surprise addition in the form of a Peregrine along the way. The bird flew directly over us, allowing us to note the bird was heavily streaked on the chest, indicating a young bird, with its size indicating it was almost certainly a male.

Our next stop for the afternoon was at Chapel Carn Brae, an area of heath on a large hill, which is said to be the first and last hill in Britain. It offers a fantastic 360-degree view from the summit of the surrounding countryside and coastline and on a clear day, as today was, the Isles of Scilly are also visible. The walk to top produced a pair of Stonechats, a female

Sparrowhawk, several flyover Golden Plovers and a surprise and out of context Great Spotted Woodpecker seen by Simon.

After enjoying the views, we returned to the bus, and as we did the distinct call of a Chough rang through the air. There were in fact two and we stood watching them fly noisily past and away, a fitting end to our first day in Cornwall.

Monday 16th October

Today our plan was to head east along the coast to the Lizard Peninsula. We took a slightly convoluted route which took us to Stithian's reservoir, which is positioned just to the south of Redruth. Distractions on the way included our first Fieldfares, a flock five noted flying parallel with the bus over some roadside fields, and a Jay that flew across the road in front of us. A flock of around 150 Golden Plovers were noted in a roadside field and we were able to pull over and check through them, but unfortunately there were no surprises.

Arriving at the reservoir we headed to the small hide overlooking the southern corner, which looked promising with several areas of exposed mud and shoreline. Wader species present included eleven Dunlin, six Ringed Plover and a Curlew, accompanied by a few Lapwing and Teal, and on the open water we noted both Little and Great Crested Grebes. We crossed back over the road to another hide, which overlooks a small marsh and has bird feeders suspended a short distance in front of it. Several birds were visiting the feeders, the best being a Marsh tit, which made typically brief sorties to collect food and then fly back into the nearby willows. We walked back over the road to have one more look over the southern corner of the reservoir, adding a Snipe to our tally as it flew in and quickly disappeared into one of the muddy channels.

Our next stop was at the village of Coverack, where a Hoopoe had been reported favouring a nearby headland. We walked out to the headland which unfortunately proved fruitless, with no sign of the bird. At least we'd tried and it was a pleasant walk, with as always, some nice scenery and potentially a job for another day should it reappear.

With lunchtime approaching we headed to a small, wooded car park on the Lizard called Church Cove.

Lunch followed then a walk around the carpark and nearby church. The wind was blowing strong, and we drew a blank finding any small birds, so we walked down into the cove itself. A flyover vocal Grey wagtail was a bonus, and several Gannets could be seen out over the sea. We walked back to the car park as we did so a small flock of Long-tailed Tits appeared. We watched them move through the trees looking for any other birds accompanying them. A smaller crest-sized bird caught our eye, and a brief but good view revealed a bold white supercilium, a Firecrest! The bird was typically active, but we all managed reasonable views of it.

We returned to the bus and made the short drive to Lizard village, where we parked on the green and took the path out towards Kynance Cove. We did a circular walk, heading down through an area of scrub towards the Cove and back along the coastal path to return to the car park. A couple of pairs of Stonechats, a Chiffchaff, a showy flock of around forty Linnets and at several Rock Pipits were seen along the way, along with Gannets and Shags on the sea. One hoped for bird here (or promised bird some would say!) was Chough, and we were lucky enough to stumble on a confiding flock of seven birds feeding on the cliff face adjacent to the path.

The day was now drawing to a close, so we headed back towards St Just. We quickly ground to halt just as we left the village, to look at two more Cattle Egrets accompanying cows at the roadside.



One of the roadside Cattle Egrets

One more stop followed on the way back, at a small boating lake in the town of Helston. The site has a long history of attracting unusual birds, but the best it could offer today was a pair of Shoveler and Mute Swans for the trip list.

Tuesday 17th October

We began the day at Marazion RSPB reserve starting with an initial scan over the pools and extensive reedbeds visible from the road. A flock of twenty-five Curlew were the first birds seen followed by a solitary House Martin which was a somewhat unexpected addition. Little Egrets were also immediately obvious, on the edge of one of the smaller pools. The birds were partially hidden amongst the reeds and presumably a roost of sorts, with over twenty birds counted. We walked along the seafront, pausing to look out over the beach. The nearby lines of seaweed revealed a dozen or so feeding Turnstones and both Meadow and Rock Pipits were noted in amongst them, which offered a good opportunity to compare these two similar species. Another addition here was a Wheatear, a species we were surprised to see. We continued onto the reserve itself, and as we did a Snipe flew up at the back of the marsh followed by a second smaller snipe with an obviously shorter bill, a Jack Snipe!

At least two Cetti's Warblers were heard and both Fieldfare and Redwings were noted overflying us in several small flocks. We didn't unfortunately add too much on our walk around the perimeter of the reserve, with the highlight being a smart male Bullfinch.

As we exited to return to the bus a tightly packed flock of Starlings appeared with the reason for their behaviour appearing shortly after, in the form of a Sparrowhawk.

A further look at the beach revealed a mixed flock of Ringed Plover, Dunlin and Sanderling, and two Sandwich Terns were found stood on the tideline.

Returning to the bus, we turned our attention towards the west coast and the valleys, hoping to get some protection for the strong wind that had been battering us all morning, though as is often the case the idea was sound but in practice.....!

We had our lunch by the bus on arrival, noting two Grey Wagtails as we ate. We then walked down along the valley dropping down towards the sea before returning the along cliff tops, completely a loop back to the bus. Whilst conditions were challenging, we did manage to find a much-appreciated Ring Ouzel, plus eight Siskins in two flyover groups, a Peregrine and two more Choughs. The biggest surprise here though was a Kingfisher, flying fast and low past us towards the sea as we approached the bus, not a species we were expecting to see! Our next stop was nearby Kendijack Valley, where a pleasant, if not to a degree frustrating walk followed, with us walking down along the valley and then retracing our steps back to the bus. Birdwise we managed another Grey Wagtail and a Goldcrest, plus calling Chiffchaff and Firecrest, both of which remained hidden from view. We finished the day with a brief visit again to Chapel Carn Brae but again the wind hindered our activities and the best we could manage following a short walk was several Meadow Pipits and a solitary Snipe.

Wednesday 18th October

With Storm 'Babet' forecast to hit our part of the world from first light, we were set for a challenging day ahead! As is often the case with the forecast, things fortunately weren't quite as promised, with the wind having dropped in strength from the previous two days and the heavy rain not falling it was to transpire until mid-afternoon.

We had planned for a wet start, so the Hayle Estuary with the hide overlooking the small marsh known as Ryan's Field, had seemed the most obvious choice. The tide was favourable too, so we headed onto there as planned, arriving just after high tide. Birds seen on our arrival included several Bar-tailed Godwits, Shelducks and a Greenshank. A small group of Little Egrets were watched chasing the feeding Cormorants around the edge of the water in front of us. No doubt trying to benefit from their fishing activities as they disturbed smaller prey items for them. A calling Kingfisher flew in and landing on some nearby brambles, giving nice views to us all.



Whilst the tide was still at its highest, we moved a short distance into the centre of Hayle to view another area, called Copper House creek where again there are several areas where the birds tend to congregate at high tide. Immediately obvious were several hundred Wigeon plus smaller numbers of Teal. Gulls were well represented, the majority Herring Gulls, but also at least 20 Mediterranean Gulls too, which gave the opportunity to examine them more closely particularly the difference in age classes present. Common wader species here included Curlew, Oystercatcher, Dunlin, Ringed Plover, Bar-tailed Godwit and Greenshank with at least six of the latter present. An immature Peregrine appeared flying over the assembled birds causing a degree of panic before it flew over us and away. We returned to Ryan's field where we parked up and walked to view the main part of the estuary itself. The tide had now dropped, and we were met by an impressive range and number of birds. The highlights here over the next 45 minutes or so were 3 Grey Plover and single Pintail, Cattle Egret, Ruff and Sandwich Tern. We returned to the minibus noting a small flock of Siskins in a path side Alder on the way and a confident Greenshank in front of the hide.



A rather smart and confident Greenshank

Our next stop was a small nature reserve called St Gothians, a short drive further along the coast. We had lunch on arrival, then walked out on the reserve with our focus on a large freshwater pond positioned in the dune system there. The site has a reputation of attracting unusual birds, but today wasn't to be that day, with us having to settle for a dozen or so Mediterranean Gulls, plus Curlews, Tufted Duck and Teal.

We headed back towards Penzance with a quick look at Marazion Marsh again on the way. We looked out over the marsh initially seeing little of note, then our luck changed. We'd noted several Common Snipe, but as we turned to walk back to the bus, a casual look had revealed another snipe in amongst the reed base. As we watched the bird started 'bobbing' up and down confirming its identity as a Jack snipe, allowing a far better view than our

previous one the day before! Pleased with our success we walked on, pausing at a spot where Simon had just glimpsed a Water rail. Initially there was no sign then Jo picked the bird out further along, where it proceeded to also give us some very nice views.



Water Rail

Our next stop was in the centre of Penzance at the Harbour where a pair of Eider had been reported. Once again luck was on our side with us finding the birds almost immediately and obtaining nice views.



A sleeping drake Eider

The weather at this stage had deteriorated with heavy rain now falling, which resulted in several of the group asking to be returned to the guesthouse early. The rest of us headed onto nearby Pendeen Church to search for a Black Redstart that had been reported. We drew a blank with the Redstart but did manage several Goldcrests and a Chiffchaff plus a new bird for the trip, Song Thrush. We returned towards our base with the intention of heading on once again to finish the day at Chapel Carn Brae. Whilst the rain had now stopped, we had now been enveloped by a thick fog, so it was decided to call a halt to the day and have a slightly early finish.

Ironically the day didn't quite finish there, as a chance glance out the window by Vince and Cheryl as they were readying themselves for the evening, revealed a Hen Harrier flying past their window, seemingly heading off down into the valley! A call to Gary saw him rush outside with Vince but the bird had already disappeared, and they had to settle for another new bird for the trip, a Green Woodpecker heard calling as they stood looking.

Thursday 19th October 2023

On waking today, it was clear that the weather had improved to a degree, though as to how much remained to be seen! We needn't have worried though with the day producing a minimal amount of rain with the wind dropping considerably and the sun making an appearance too! Our first destination today was Porthgwarra, and after negotiating the narrow road down to the valley with no issues, we parked and headed out to look out over the sea. Bird movement was minimal unfortunately from a seabird perspective, with only a small number of Gannets and Shags noted and a handful of, at times distant, Kittiwakes, Guillemots, and Razorbills. Several showy Rock Pipits on the slip way proved an appreciated distraction though. After fifteen minutes or so we took the path up on to the top of the cliffs, again looked out to sea, which resulted in similar birds to what we'd had, had lower down. Whilst we sat looking, the distinct call of Choughs were heard and flock of around ten birds flew in and proceeded to feed nearby on a grass covered slope. We watched them for a while, then took a route along the cliffs, then back inland to complete a loop to get back to the bus. A rather smart Wheatear, several Stonechat and a flushed Snipe were seen at the higher level, and the walk back along the valley itself produced a showy Grey Wagtail and at least four Chiffchaffs.



A rather smart and much-admired Northern Wheatear

Arrival at the bus was followed by an impromptu 'coffee break' before we set off again, to check the bushes around the car park and lower end of the valley. Our walk produced at least six Chiffchaffs, a similar number of Long-tailed Tits, several Goldcrests, and a Sparrowhawk. With picnic tables (and a café) on site we decided to have lunch after which we headed off to our next stop, at nearby Polgigga. At this point planning went out the window, as quick check on bird news as we arrived, as we now we had a phone signal, revealed a selection of birds having been found earlier in the day from where we had just come from! One of these was a Wryneck, a bird we were particularly keen to see, so we turned the bus round and headed back. A search around the area the bird had been reported from proved fruitless and we reluctantly admitted defeat and headed out once again. At this point our luck changed, with a bird flying across in front of the bus as we reached the top of the valley. A brief glimpse was all it took to identify the bird to be a Wryneck! The bird landed in a bare tree right by the road and did the decent thing in sitting there for several minutes, allowing us all good views. A car behind us forced us to move and we pulled the bus over a short way further along and climbed out to try and get some more views. The bird had flown into a field, and we saw it briefly on the ground and again in flight before it disappeared finally from view.



Wryneck, a real bonus following a piece of good luck.

Another piece of news we had gleaned earlier was of a Snow Bunting at nearby Land's End Airport, so that was our next destination. We parked and walked onto the long stay car park, where the bird had been last seen feeding around the parked cars. With us all heading out along the different rows it didn't take long to locate the bird, which showed amazingly well, at times no more than 15 feet away!



Snow bunting, a male due to the amount of white in the wing.

We eventually returned to Polgigga where we parked to then walked out along the tree and bush lined road towards Nanjizal valley. A pleasant walk followed which initially produced no more than several Chiffchaffs and Goldcrests and a solitary Jay. We realised we were now running out of time, so we retraced our steps back to the bus. As we passed a small copse of woodland though, a series of strident crest-like call notes were heard. Firecrest was suspected and sure enough after a short wait one appeared, with a second appearing briefly too as we watched. With it having been such a pleasant day we felt one last visit to Chapel Carn Brae enroute to the guesthouse might be worthwhile to again look for Short-eared Owls. Today was clearly our lucky day, and after a ten-minute wait an Owl was spotted quartering one of the fields across the road. As we watched the bird moved closer, eventually landing on a large rock which enabled everyone to get some very nice scope views.

Friday 20th October 2023

Today was a day of two halves with us waking to a fine morning with virtually no wind, and after breakfast which gave us the opportunity to walk across the fields to nearby Cot Valley. We took a route along one side of the valley and then back along the other, meticulously checking the trees and bushes as we walked along.

Things generally seemed on the quiet side, a male Blackcap the most notable bird we achieved for our efforts. A small passage of birds overhead though was evident, with Siskins, Redwings, and Chaffinches visible throughout our visit, and a pair of Choughs and a Raven were also noted. As our walk drew to a close, we picked out a calling Firecrest, with most of us successfully gaining a view of it. We turned to take the path back across the field, pausing first to check out birds that were moving around in a nearby clump of trees. Chiffchaff,

Goldcrest and Long-tailed Tits were immediately obvious, then another Firecrest appeared, this allowing everyone to see it well. It then transpired there were three birds present, with them all appearing in the same binocular view at one point!

Returning to base we picked up the minibus and then headed off for lunch and another look around the valley at Porthgwarra. Lunch (and coffee) was the first job, then we set off for a walk to see what we could find. It seemed unfortunately quieter than the previous day, with our highlights restricted to two Choughs, two Jays and single Chiffchaff and Goldcrest! Then our luck changed. We'd been concentrating on searching the bushes and trees, but Vince had been looking the other way and had seen what he initially thought was a Blackbird fly on to the top of a bush at the top of the hillside. A look through his binoculars though revealed that the bird was in fact a male Ring Ouzel! We all then enjoyed nice views of it and whilst watching, we realised that two more, much more poorly marked individuals were sat in a bush slightly lower down.



Distant but much appreciated! Ring Ouzel, Tour Participant Vince Smith

Pleased with our success we continued our walk, returning to the bus then onto our next stop the Hayle Estuary. Once again, we parked at Ryan's Field and went into the hide. The tide in the estuary was low, so birds in front of the hide were minimal, but the Kingfisher was again active, and four Cattle Egrets and two Greenshanks were found. We crossed over the main road to again look at the estuary, which in contrast clearly held a good variety and number of birds. The bulk of these were Wigeon, Teal and a mix of the commoner waders and large and small gull species. Looking through them also revealed a small flock of twenty-two Golden Plovers, two Grey Plovers and a solitary Black-tailed Godwit. The weather had now deteriorated with mist and light persistent drizzle falling, but we had one more place we wanted to visit again, Marazion Marsh. This would be our third visit to the site with an

elusive Purple Heron in residence being the cause for our behaviour, and with the rain fittingly falling again too we hoped today was to be our lucky day. We'd allowed ourselves half hour and we stood watching and waiting, trying to be positive, noting that there seemed to be an increase in Grey Heron activity. With five minutes remaining another Heron went up, this time with a brown back and a long dagger like bill, success, a young Purple Heron!



Purple Heron, perched up on a distant bush, on occasions nice views but the waves of mist and drizzle didn't help! Tour Participant Vince Smith.

Our efforts had paid off and not only that, the bird flew over the reeds and landed in the top of a line of bushes, where it sat allowing us to train the scopes on it for some nice prolonged views.

Saturday 21th October 2023

Our last morning and with the winds having turned and strengthened and blowing from the Northwest, we decided to head to Pendeen for some sea watching. With a depleted group (several had peeled off after breakfast), we parked and walked down to sit behind the lighthouse wall, joining twenty or so other birders there. A steady stream of Gannets and auks, Guillemots and Razorbills, were immediately obvious and after setting up our scopes we could see good numbers of Kittiwakes were passing too. Twenty or so Manx shearwaters were picked out, their distinct flight style and profile easily noted, and five Common Scoters were also seen. As is often the case with sea watching the first couple of hours are generally the busiest. This was to be the case today, as after 45 mins or so the number of birds passing had reduced considerably. With time limited and a rain squall clearly heading towards us over the sea, we decided to move on and finish the day with a revisit to Kendijack Valley. It was a nice morning, and we enjoyed a pleasant walk, birds seen were much as expected and included Chough, Raven, Chiffchaff, Goldcrest and Redwing. One last addition for the trip though was a Reed Bunting, not the commonest bird it seems at this time of the year.

We then returned to the Guesthouse, where we said our goodbyes and then went our separate ways to start our journey's back home.

#	Common Name	Scientific name		15	16	17	18	19	20	21	
	Anatidae (Ducks, Geese, and Waterfowl)										
1	Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>		x	x		x		x		
2	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>			x		x		x		
3	Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>					x		x		
4	Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>			x						
5	Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Mareca penelope</i>					x		x		
6	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>		x	x	x	x		x		
7	Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>					x				
8	Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>			x	x	x		x		
9	Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>		x	x		x				
10	Common Scoter	<i>Melanitta nigra</i>								x	
11	Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>		x		x		x	x		
12	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>		x	x	x	x		x		
13	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>		x	x						
14	Northern Fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>								x	
15	Manx Shearwater	<i>Puffinus puffinus</i>								x	
16	Northern Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>			x	x		x	x	x	
17	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>		x	x	x	x		x		
18	European Shag	<i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i>			x	x		x	x	x	
19	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>		x	x	x	x	x	x		
20	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>		x	x	x	x		x		
21	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>		x		x		x	x		
22	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
23	Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>					x				
24	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>		x	x	x	x	x	x		
25	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>		x	x	x	x		x		
26	Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>			x	x	x		x		
27	Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>					x		x		
28	European Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>		x	x			x	x		
29	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>			x		x		x		
30	Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>			x	x	x		x		
31	Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>			x	x	x		x		
32	Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>					x		x		
33	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>							x		
34	Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>				x	x				
35	Ruff	<i>Calidris pugnax</i>					x				
36	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>				x					
37	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>			x	x	x		x		
38	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>			x	x	x	x	x		

[illegible]