



TOUR REPORT
SCILLY PELAGICS
10TH-13TH AUGUST 2026

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MONDAY 10TH AUGUST – sunny and warm, NW'ly breeze at 7.5 knots.

We all assembled at the quay in Penzance before boarding the *Scillonian III* for our journey over to Scilly. The seas were very calm and made for excellent conditions for spotting cetaceans. We soon began seeing **Common Dolphins**, and we saw several different pods during the first half of the journey, with some surfacing really close to the boat. We also spotted a large pod of **Harbour Porpoises**, and a **Minke Whale** surfaced a couple of times as we passed the tip of Cornwall.

Several large rafts of **Manx Shearwaters** were loafing on the sea, and roughly halfway into the crossing, we began spotting **Wilson's Storm Petrels**. Most were distant but we were able to confirm their ID by zooming in on our photos. One or two **European Storm Petrels** were seen too, although **Wilson's** were the most numerous. That would have been hard to imagine a few years ago! A final highlight came in the form of a **Risso's Dolphin** spotted just before we reached the islands.

Once ashore, we had just enough time to check out our hotels before heading for lunch in Hugh Town. Later in the afternoon, we assembled at the quay on St Mary's for our first pelagic aboard the *MV Sapphire*. We joined Bob Flood, captain Joe Pender and their crew, before setting out in a north-easterly direction. We were soon seeing **Manx Shearwaters**, and a couple of **Sooty Shearwaters** were picked out too. We enjoyed our first close passes from **Great Shearwaters** and saw at least ten during the evening. We were pleased to see four **Cory's Shearwaters**, as they had been proving elusive recently and, once we started 'chumming', **Wilson's** and **European Storm Petrels** were soon foraging in the slick. We had great views of both and estimated at least five **Wilson's** and ten **Europeans** during our pelagic. We also noted our first **Ocean Sunfish** of the trip.



Great Shearwater

TUESDAY 11TH AUGUST – *sunny and warm, SE'ly breeze at 7.5 knots*

We assembled on the quay again at 08:30 ready to board our second and longest pelagic of the trip. This time we headed SW reaching fourteen miles offshore at the furthest. Excellent numbers of **Manx Shearwaters** were seen throughout the day, and both **Great** and **Cory's Shearwaters** made regular appearances, some giving some stunning close-range flypasts. In addition, one of the **Great Shearwaters** joined a flock of gulls on the water right by the boat and stayed for over twenty minutes.



Cory's Shearwater

A more unexpected highlight proved to be a steady passage of migrating butterflies and moths, even when we were at our furthest from the islands. We counted a single **Clouded Yellow**, 20+ **Painted Lady**, several **Peacocks** and **Red Admiral** butterflies plus a few **Silver-y** and **Turnip** moths.

We began chumming again and **Wilson's Storm Petrels** were soon feeding in the slick, and with patience they would often work their way towards the boat and fly past quite close. A few **European Storm Petrels** were around too, although they tended to stay further back in the slick. After enjoying our views of the petrels and shearwaters, we began sailing back towards the islands, via the lighthouse on Bishop Rock. We also called in at the rocks of Rosevean where an early **Purple Sandpiper** was roosting and allowed a close approach, before arriving back on St Mary's mid-afternoon. Counts from today's pelagic included:

- 10 **Wilson's Storm Petrels**
- 10 **European Storm Petrels**
- 14 **Cory's Shearwaters**
- 12 **Great Shearwaters**
- 4 **Sooty Shearwaters**

200+ **Manx Shearwaters**

We also saw no less than 8 **Ocean Sunfish** including a group of five together, plus a couple of groups of **Common Dolphins**. It was a great day!

WEDNESDAY 12TH AUGUST – *sunny and warm, E'ly breeze at 7 knots*

We were back on the quay again at 08:30, ready for our third and final pelagic on board the *Sapphire*. It was a very warm and sunny morning, and we made sure that we had plenty of suncream and water on board! Despite the wind not being stronger than previous days, the direction must have changed slightly as a swell had picked up. It was slightly quieter on the bird front today, although the **Wilson's** and **European Storm Petrels** were very obliging once again.



Wilson's Storm Petrel

There were plenty of Manx Shearwaters again (especially when the local lifeboat rushed past us and flushed several large rafts), although numbers of **Great** and **Cory's** were down, with only a couple of the latter seen at distance. One of the stand-out highlights from today's pelagic was an **Ocean Sunfish** which was lingering around a group of gulls just metres from the boat. It was presumably hoping the gulls would pick any parasites off of it although they didn't seem particularly interested! As we headed back towards the islands, a small group of **Risso's Dolphins** was spotted with one giving particularly good views and we had our best views yet of **Common Dolphins** during today's trip.

7 **Wilson's Storm Petrel**

7 European Storm Petrel
3 Great Shearwater
2 Cory's Shearwater
200+ Manx Shearwater



Ocean Sunfish



Risso's Dolphin

Once back on the islands, some of took a walk around Lower Moors and Old Town Bay. There were few birds to be seen in the heat of the afternoon, but it was nice to have a look around some different parts of St Mary's. We ate our dinner in Hugh Town, and the partial solar eclipse made for a memorable end to the day.

THURSDAY 13TH AUGUST – *overcast start to the day, clearing to warm and sunny later*

For our final morning of the tour, several of us made the short boat trip over to Tresco. We walked around the SW corner of the island, noting a couple of **Greenshanks** feeding on the beach. There was an even better selection of waders feeding on the muddy edges of the Great Pool including lots of **Wood Sandpipers** (we counted a minimum of 13 although there may have been as many as 21 between both ends of the pool), 8 **Green** and 7 **Common Sandpipers**, 2 **Black-tailed Godwits**, 2 **Dunlin** and 5 more **Greenshanks**. It was great to see so many passage waders feeding on one pool, especially given how many freshwater pools have dried out in the recent heat.

It was soon time to head back to St Mary's and join the queue for our return crossing on the *Scillonian*. Once we boarded, the seas were very calm again and we were soon spotting cetaceans surfacing around us. We saw **Risso's Dolphins** on at least three occasions, and a **Minke Whale** was again seen briefly as we passed Cornwall. Given the lack of wind, there were few birds visible although a few **Manx Shearwaters** were put up by the boat and a **Sand Martin** attempted to land on the ferry. In what felt like no time, we were back on land in Penzance and said our goodbyes after a superb few days of pelagic birding.



Wood Sandpiper