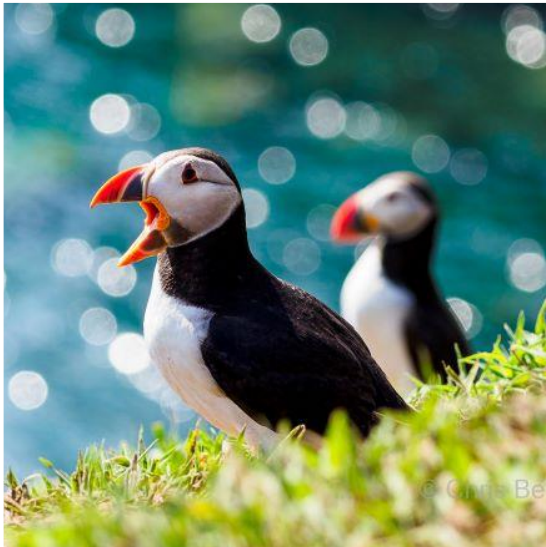


## Tour Report UK – Wild Pembrokeshire 12 – 16 July 2021

Puffin



Grassholm Island



Emperor dragonfly



Sedge warbler



Compiled by Barry Embling  
Images by Chris Bennett & Barry Embling

### **Day 1: Monday 12 July 2021**

*Weather: cloudy with sun; 17 °C*

After meeting at our hotel we made our way to Dowrog Common for a cup of tea before we started looking for wildlife. The common has a rich flora and we soon encountered southern marsh and common spotted orchids - and some of their confusing hybrids - and saw the glorious bog asphodel. Raptors showed well, with red kite, buzzard and sparrowhawk seen. As usual, many little brown jobs were in evidence, with meadow pipits displaying, passing linnets, great views of an impressive male reed bunting and a lesser redpoll that dropped in which was a new bird for some of our group. Our first evening meal was followed by a trip to Strumble Head, where we witnessed the movement of hundreds of Manx shearwaters moving west towards their colonies on the nearby islands and provided an opportunity to see this species alive and appreciate the sheer number of birds involved, with over 300,000 birds nesting on Skomer alone.

### **Day 2: Tuesday 13 July 2021**

*Weather: sunny; 19 °C*

A fine sunny start to the day with a light breeze boded well for our crossing Jack Sound from Martin's Haven to North Haven on Skomer. After a briefing from the assistant warden we were free for the next four hours to discover the island's wildlife. Puffins predominated in North Haven as they always do at this time of the year, though we'd be seeing many later. Walking inland, sedge warblers and whitethroats were singing, and a first highlight of the day was a juvenile cuckoo being mobbed by meadow pipits, that even showed its red gape as it food-begged; a lucky sighting. At the Garland Stone we saw maybe 4-6 harbour porpoises, including mother and calf, alerted to them by feeding gannets. Moving around the rest of the island we saw chough, a brief view of short-eared owl and spent some time with more puffins. A hard walk back across the island to meet our departure ended with the news that our boat had broken down so we had to wait a while until we could board a new vessel, though being stuck on a beautiful island in perfect weather (with some toast provision), was not a hardship. After a cuppa, we proceeded to The Gann estuary and lagoons, that were now at low tide. A scan revealed many curlew, oystercatchers and redshank. Realising at this point that we were all tired we retired back to St David's Cross to recharge before we had a fine evening meal and an early night.

### **Day 3: Wednesday 14 July 2021**

*Weather: 18°C*

A gentle start today at the hotel saw us moth trapping as our boat to Ramsey didn't leave until noon. Given all of the high-quality habitat around St David's, it was not surprising that we had a good haul of species, despite being in the city centre. Small elephant hawkmoth was a highlight, with true-lover's knot, small angles-hades, heart and dart, small quaker and willow kitten being few of the many species trapped. A spotted flycatcher made an appearance in the rookery tree, and a local breeding pair of blackbirds had already been taking moths from around the trap to feed their young and moths had to be released into the deeper herbage to avoid being taken. A smooth trip followed as we crossed to Ramsey on a rising tide and we were met by an Atlantic grey seal in the harbour. A juvenile stonechat and linnets were soon seen around the old farm buildings. Walking on the northern loop, we encountered chough, wheatear feeding young and all of us got to see young peregrines, one particularly well camouflaged against the cliffs – cliffs that we knew every bit of by the time all of us had eventually located the young peregrine. Proceeding around the trail we managed to connect with most of the population of the 14 red deer, various colour morphs of rabbits, then a resident little owl. An interesting crossing to Grassholm followed on a beautiful and still evening. When nearing the island, a group of distant circling gannets caught our attention and once we had arrived we realised the birds were circling around the gruesome sight of two immature gannets caught up in plastic twine, one of which was sadly dead. Morgan, our guide utilised the boat hook to haul them aboard so they could remove the plastic and the feisty live bird was released unharmed, much to the relief of all. This unfortunate experience behind us, we proceeded to have a wonderful circumnavigation of Grassholm in

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incredible evening light with all the noises of a busy bird colony of 39,000 gannets in addition to guillemots, razorbills, shags and kittiwakes. On our return to St Justinian's, we saw a few Manx shearwaters and continually spotted puffins commuting between breeding and feeding grounds. Thus ended two days of experiencing three very different islands.

#### **Day 4: Thursday 15 July 2021**

Weather: sunny; 20°C

We drove down to the National Trust's Stackpole Estate today to walk to St Govan's Chapel. This is very much a day's walk through many habitats, with woodland, reedbed, lakes, sand dunes and coastal heath. As expected with so much variety on a beautiful summers day we saw some wonderful wildlife. Initial birds seen and heard were a family of spotted flycatchers and later superb views of goldcrests feeding young. A burst of reed warbler song nearby gave everyone the chance to get familiar with it as it emanated from the reedbeds. Some good views of heron, moorhen, three-spined stickle-back and various dragonflies and damselflies along the length of Bosherton Lakes was enjoyed by all, and silver-washed fritillary and a holly blue butterfly were seen as we neared the sand dunes. We were met with a grand floral display on the dunes where we had our morning cuppa before pressing on and emerging above to follow the coastal path. We entered the Castlemartin range and saw large orange dark-green fritillaries winging around frenetically in the heat of the day – not making them very easy to photograph. Reaching St Govan's chapel itself was the halfway point marked by an ice cream from a welcome seller in the car park. A few cliff-nesting swifts screaming past was perhaps the ornithological highlight of the day. On our return walk we renewed and improved previous encounters, and added some more, including a male kestrel, all viewed now with the sun behind us. On our return to St David's some visited the cathedral for Evening Prayer, thus ending a full day.

#### **Day 5: Friday 16 July 2021**

Weather: 17°C

A short and final trip to Llangoffan Fen, a SSSI and National Nature Reserve brought views of whitethroats with young a male reed bunting and good close-up views of various dragonflies and damselflies. After a tea and coffee refreshment we returned to the hotel to go our separate ways, concluding a trip that had a continual supply of exceptional sunny weather, and was a superb tonic post-Covid for us all.

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# Checklist



	Common Name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
	<b>BIRDS</b>					
1	Little grebe				✓	
2	Northern fulmar		✓	✓	✓	
3	Manx shearwater	✓		✓		
4	Gannet		✓	✓	✓	
5	Cormorant		✓	✓		
6	Shag		✓	✓		
7	Little egret		✓			
8	Grey heron				✓	
9	Mute swan			✓		
10	Canada goose		✓			
11	Shelduck		✓			
12	Mallard	✓			✓	
13	Red kite	✓	✓			
14	Buzzard	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
15	Sparrowhawk	✓	✓			
16	Kestrel				✓	
17	Peregrine			✓		
18	Moorhen				✓	
19	Oystercatcher		✓	✓	✓	
20	Curlew		✓			
21	Herring gull	✓	✓	✓	✓	
22	Lesser black-backed gull		✓	✓	✓	

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23	Great black-backed gull		✓	✓		
24	Kittiwake		✓	✓		
25	Puffin		✓	✓		
26	Guillemot		✓	✓		
27	Razorbill		✓	✓		
28	Woodpigeon	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
29	Stock dove (heard)				✓	
30	Cuckoo		✓			
31	Short-eared owl		✓			
32	Little owl			✓		
33	Swift		✓	✓	✓	
34	Skylark		✓			
35	Swallow	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
36	House martin		✓	✓	✓	
37	Meadow pipit	✓	✓	✓	✓	
38	Rock pipit		✓	✓		
39	Pied wagtail	✓	✓	✓	✓	
40	Wren	✓	✓	✓	✓	
41	Dunnock				✓	
42	Robin	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
43	Wheatear		✓	✓		
44	Stonechat	✓		✓		
45	Song thrush				✓	
46	Blackbird	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
47	Garden warbler					
48	Blackcap	✓			✓	
49	Whitethroat	✓	✓			
50	Sedge warbler		✓			
51	Reed warbler				✓	

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52	Chiffchaff	✓		✓	✓	
53	Goldcrest				✓	
54	Blue tit				✓	
55	Long-tailed tit (heard)				✓	
56	Treecreeper (heard)				✓	
57	Magpie	✓	✓			
58	Carrion crow	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
59	Rook	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
60	Jackdaw	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
61	Raven	✓	✓	✓		
62	Chough		✓	✓		
63	Starling	✓	✓			
64	Linnet	✓	✓	✓	✓	
65	Lesser redpoll	✓				
66	Goldfinch	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
67	Bullfinch (heard)	✓				
68	Reed bunting	✓				
	<b>MAMMALS</b>					
1	Rabbit		✓	✓		
2	Harbour porpoise		✓			
3	Grey seal		✓	✓		
4	Red deer			✓		
	<b>AMPHIBIANS</b>					
1	Common frog	✓				
	<b>SOME OBSERVED PLANTS</b>					
1	Red campion		✓	✓	✓	✓
2	Sea campion		✓			
3	Ragged robin				✓	
4	Scentsless mayweed		✓			

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5	Tussock sedge					✓
6	Rest harrow				✓	
7	Birds foot trefoil					
8	Rosebay willowherb	✓	✓	✓	✓	
9	Hemlock water dropwort				✓	
10	Wild carrot		✓			
11	Hemlock	✓				
12	Hogweed	✓				
13	Alexanders					
14	Rock samphire	✓				
15	Water forget me not			✓		
16	Viper's bugloss				✓	
17	Ivy broomrape				✓	
18	Ox-eye daisy				✓	
19	Greater knapweed				✓	
20	White water lily				✓	
21	Yellow iris	✓	✓	✓		✓

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