

# Cornwall Oct 2010

Ok.....so this article has taken longer to write than usual (make that over 2 years) and there's been a good few eventful trips since, which have taken priority, but hopefully you'll understand why after reading this one :P.

After taking all our 'foreign' birding holidays in Norfolk for over a year we were itching to broaden our horizons. When an offer for me, and also Wendy, to tag along with friends on a Cornwall birding holiday came up about a year earlier we'd jumped at the chance. Cornwall is rated as highly as Norfolk for attracting migrants and interesting things (some people would argue higher until they were blue in the face) and with the scenery and habitats being totally different we had high expectations. Luckily our travel companions had been several times before so were familiar with the area and knew a) the best area to stay b) the best places to go birding and c) the best local pubs for food etc.....sorted :). The trip was arranged for mid October, which would be prime migrant time and Keren had very kindly sorted all the bookings out for us. All we needed now were a few cloudy or rainy days, just before we were due to arrive, to put the migrants down and we'd be laughing.

## Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> October

After being picked up by Chris and Keren we left Douglas on the new Super Duper Sea Cat at 3.20pm. Despite the dodgy and very tight parking there was tons of places to sit, which was much better than the older Sea Cats. After about an hour we went for a short seawatch from the back but the view was a bit restricted and we only saw **Black-headed Gull** and **Cormorant** fly past. It was a bit strange to smell cigarette smoke as there were signs everywhere saying 'NO SMOKING'. It was all made clear when a scummy looking woman with a fag in her mouth walked out from behind the bulkhead. She got her comeuppance though when a Steam Packet geezer came flying through the door and collared her. The crossing was very calm and we arrived in Liverpool at 6.30pm. Chris had of course brought his Land Rover and I didn't envy him having to negotiate Liverpool and drive about 250 miles to Devon through rush hour in it!! On the long journey down to our overnight stop we had a **Barn Owl** flash through the headlights, as it was dark for most of the way. Although Wendy had fallen asleep she was rudely awoken and struggling for breath after 'someone' had accidentally dropped their guts. I was doubled and up killing myself laughing as the other three scrambled desperately to open their windows to let some fresh air in... :D. We arrived at the Travel Lodge in Tiverton at 10.45pm, went straight to our rooms and collapsed into bed instantly.

## Friday 15<sup>th</sup> October

Although we were all still knackered from the previous day, we were up by 6.20am and after Wendy and Keren had made a quick visit to the very conveniently placed 'Costa' next door (cheers Keren) we were on the road by 7.50am. Our first planned stop was about 30 miles away and heading slightly away from Cornwall. We were hoping it would be worth it though as there was a very rare American wader at a marsh down there. On the way we saw all the usual common birds but Wendy was far more interested in IDing the vegetables in the fields we were zooming past, randomly piping up with...."Ooooo sprouts!" and "Aha beetroots!" from time to time.

At 8.45am we finally arrived at Seaton Marshes where we met up with Chris and Kerens good mate Jon who would be joining us as the 5<sup>th</sup> member of our team. We could instantly tell he was OK as he had Leica bins which, is DEFINITELY the mark of a well cool person :P. Introductions aside Jon guided us down the short track and out onto the reserve proper. What a smart little reserve, considering it's just a couple of shallow scrapes which border a

river. I was especially impressed, as I'd found out that Seaton Marsh Reserve had only been created in 2002 and before that it was just a bunch of fields.



Seaton marsh

Straight away we could all see a potential wader but it was very close and seemingly quite tame. Chris, Keren and Jon quickly dismissed the bird and marched off towards the hide but Wendy wouldn't budge and stayed put so we carried on looking at it. My main worry was that even though I also thought it looked different, especially the long-winged look, it surely wasn't the vagrant as there hadn't been any decent photos of it on BirdGuides yet. Surely there'd have been at least one with the bird happy to walk around so close? We both knew the vagrant was difficult to separate from its European counterpart the Green Sandpiper but Wendy suggested I took a record shot as she was convinced it was the bird we'd all gone to see. I duly obliged and then set off after Chris and Jon to show them the pic but both of them dismissed it again! When we got to the hide it was quite busy, which was surely a good sign? I asked one chap if he'd seen the bird to which he instantly replied, "Oh yes, it's here in my scope have a look." Wendy and I had a look and said, "Cheers." Wendy still looked awkward but I thought it was because the bird was so far away that we couldn't see any features so neither of us could claim it as a lifer. While we were there we had a look at the pools and saw **Ringed Plover, Dunlin, Green Sandpiper, Curlew Sandpiper, Little Stint & Little Egret.** Wendy, who was still looking twitchy, was mumbling about something so we went outside where she told me that the bird in the scope was the same one that we'd been looking at earlier. We scurried back to the entrance to the marsh where, by now, there were about 4 birders with scopes all aiming at our bird!!! Wendy had been right all along and there it was, clear as day.....the **Solitary Sandpiper**. The others quickly realized they'd made a massive mistake and sprinted (well walked quickly) back by which point it had turned into a right old twitch with Photographers everywhere!



Solitary Sandpiper twitch

We all watched it for about 20 minutes and it very kindly came quite close to us. The light was poor due to it being so overcast so it was just a matter of trying every tactic to get a good enough shot. I was quite happy with this one in the end.



Solitary Sandpiper

We were very pleased with getting our 1st lifer so early in the holiday and getting the great views too. We then realized we'd have enough time to go and have a look at nearby Seaton Reserve, where there'd been a Pectoral Sandpiper reported the day before.

This reserve was basically a little hide that overlooked a river and it's muddy edge. From there we saw a funny little tram going at about 2mph, which must be the most boring form of



transport in the world, but more interestingly a **Kingfisher**, which landed on a fence just in front of the hide. We also saw **Black-tailed Godwit**, **Peregrine**, **Buzzard**, **Kestrel**, **Common Sandpiper** & **Little Grebe** but try as we might none of us could locate a Pectoral Sandpiper.....Boo :( Time was ticking on so we had to give up and left Seaton at 11.35am.

There was one more stop planned before heading to our HQ at Nanquidno, which is practically the most South Westerly point you can be at in Britain! We arrived at our destination 'The Lost Gardens of Heligan', which is just inside the Cornish border, at 1.45pm. There'd been an American vagrant, even more rare than the Solitary Sandpiper, there for the past 2 weeks so even though the entrance fee was a hefty £10 each we all paid it happily for a chance to see this particular bird. We asked for directions at the ticket booth and headed straight for the 'Lost Valley' section. As we approached the pond we could see loads of people on the boardwalk so it was going to be a bit of a squeeze.



After the crush at Heligan

After what felt like ages, eventually the stunning little **Green Heron** appeared deep in the undergrowth. Another lifer for us! Photos were impossible as it was so dark but after a while the bird flew up and into a tree. Cool! Everyone had great views of it until it flew again but this time much further away and out of sight. I quickly ran off thinking that if I had any chance of getting a decent photo I had to get away from the crowds. I raced down to the other pool, where I couldn't see the Heron for dust, but seconds later it reappeared. It was typically skulking behind tons of leaves but finally, by lying down and craning my neck, I managed to sneak a nearly clear shot of it.





Green Heron

Quite pleased with this I chilled out and watched the bird hunt for food around the pool until the others eventually joined me to watch it as well. Very smart :). Happy with seeing a 4<sup>th</sup> for Britain we headed back out through the woods picking up **Nuthatch** and **Great-spotted Woodpecker**. We left at 3.45pm but only after Wendy had visited the Heligan Deli and bought a pile of weird hippy food.

Chris then drove all the way to Nanquidno in one go but after ignoring my Sat Nav he got lost and went too far haha :P. At 6pm we eventually parked up outside our HQ 'Nanquidno Barn', which had been booked skillfully by Keren.



Nanquidno HQ



After we'd all unpacked and settled in nobody had the energy or the will to cook so we headed out (including me who at this point didn't do eating out) to St Just and the nearest pub for tea. On the way back we saw a **Snipe** and about 200 yards from HQ we caught a **Tawny Owl** in the headlights. Ace! We were all very tired after another long day so went straight to bed when we got in. We were going to need all the sleep we could get before our early start in the morning.

Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> October

We hauled ourselves out of bed at 6.30am like a couple of zombies after the worst sleep ever! Throughout the night we'd been listening to the worrying sound of dripping water combined with someone snoring very loudly upstairs. We'd been lying there in the dark imagining fires starting, from water in the electrics and all sorts so hadn't had much sleep at all. I'd already been up at stupid o'clock to investigate and found that the front porch was 3 inches deep with water, which was pouring through the ceiling and running down the walls over the light fitting! I'd gathered up some pots and pans to catch the drips but knew there was nothing permanent I could do at that time of the morning so went back to bed to try and get some sleep. As soon as we could hear signs of life upstairs we went to warn the others who'd discovered that the toilet in the en-suite was flooding. Once we'd assessed the situation Keren made a phone call to the company responsible for the house. We needed a plumber and fast so we weren't very happy to be told that nothing could be done over the weekend and that we'd have to live with it till Monday....Grrrrrr. We cleared up the mess as best we could and declared Chris and Keren's en-suite officially closed. This now meant that there was only one toilet (without a lock) and one bathroom for all 5 of us, which was going to be very interesting :/. To this day we still don't know who the mystery snorer was though.

There was nothing more we could do about the flood so after breakfast we headed out at 8.07am to explore Nanquidno valley, which was right on our doorstep, for the first time. It was a cold but bright morning and the tree-lined track looked perfect for migrants so our optimism levels were sky high. Chris had always said it's the best valley in Cornwall and we were already in agreement. The place looked amazing but after our flying start the day before would Cornwall deliver and meet with our expectations?





We could see and hear **Goldcrests** everywhere and hoped to find something a bit more interesting in amongst them. It wasn't long before the first **Firecrest** was found.....very nice :). We carried on down the track picking up 2 x **Woodcock**, **Song Thrush**, **Blackcap**, **Whitethroat**, **Linnet**, **Meadow Pipit** & a few **Fieldfare** flying over. Wendy and I had gone off to explore the path down towards the coast but when we heard a shout from back up in the valley we quickly sprinted back and found an agitated Chris pointing to the field on the hillside. He was sure he had seen a big Pipit in with the Meadow Pipits and was thinking Richard's. Try as we might though and with the power of 10 eyes we couldn't spot anything unusual so that one went down as a miss. After that slight bit of excitement we all wandered back to HQ and saw a nice **Grey Wagtail** on the stream outside the cottage.



Stream opposite the cottage

Jon had offered to be the driver for the day so at 10am we all squeezed into his car and left for our first destination of the many we had planned.

At 10.30am we arrived at Porthgwarra which, as it's the most southerly point of the SW tip to mainland Britain, is a famous spot for migrants and a Red-breasted Flycatcher had been reported there the day before. You park up in a small cove and then walk up a short path to get up onto the high headland area of semi moorland.





On top at Porthgwarra

Just a few hundreds yards inland are some low dense bushes which has a section known as 'sixty foot cover'. It gets its name from when they used to use 60ft mist nests there in the 60's and 70's when we used to get loads of amazing rarities in the UK, unlike nowadays. I quickly gave it a new and censored name due to the fact that we saw absolutely nothing and it was totally overgrown to waist height with brambles making walking through it virtually impossible.....well for me anyway. Grrrrr!



Me stuck in brambles.....again!!



Walking back down towards the cove we did see **Stonechat**, **Sparrowhawk**, Whitethroat, **Chiffchaff** and about 40 billion **Buzzards**. Eventually we worked out that the RBfly had been seen in the large area of small trees right by the car park. Chris went straight in to look while Wendy went for a coffee from the kiosk and as the temperature was now soaring I couldn't resist an ice-lolly :). Sure enough Chris found nothing and it was pretty obvious it had gone, as we saw no one else looking for the bird either. Shame, we would've loved to have seen a RBfly.

It was absolutely boiling by the time we left at 12.35pm! Apart from preventing me from roasting to death, in my winter gear, we really needed some bad weather to come in to put some birds down. If it carried on being so warm and clear we had very little chance of anything needing to stop off in Cornwall before making their jump over the Atlantic.

We arrived in Newlyn, Penzance at 1.15pm after receiving a pager message about a Snow Bunting. Penzance itself looked lovely and we wouldn't have minded stopping for a look



Penzance bay

but we had no time for any of that, drove straight through and ended up in this grot hole!



It's behind you John!

Oh the joys of birding! Unbelievably, although we'd been too hot a few minutes ago we were now too cold! Where we were standing was completely in the shade so it was like being in a freezer! Within seconds we'd found the **Snow Bunting**, which was typically very tame, and set about trying to get some decent shots. It was totally unfazed by us and scurried about feeding literally yards away from everyone. The red arrow in the photo below shows exactly where the bird was and if you look carefully you can just about make out a white blob.



Very tame

As usual everyone else seemed to be getting the luck as the bird trotted past, inches away from them, but eventually it went past me. Luckily I found a place where the sun was popping through which enabled me to better any other Snow Bunting photo I'd taken up till then.





Snow Bunting

At 1.50pm we'd all filled our boots with the bird so we called it a day and left. Jon's car was now running low on juice so we headed to the nearest petrol station in Penzance. One thing about being in someone else's car is that you have to tolerate their choice of music but Jon's choice was a pleasant surprise. His car soon became Boogie car as 70's Disco pumped out from the speakers, making a more lighthearted change from the usual Led Zeppelin and Kings of Leon ;). While Jon was filling up Wendy and I legged it into the supermarket next door to grab a few bits. We were in such a hurry we'd forgotten to take our bins off which wouldn't have bothered us in Norfolk. Here, it was more like home and everyone was looking at us like the freaks of the week!

After filling up we headed to Sennen as there'd been a report of a Rose-coloured Starling and arrived at 2.20pm. We quickly found a Starling flock but there was no pink or pale one amongst them. We looked around the area more thoroughly but none of the Starlings we found were anything other than Starlings so we gave up at 3.15pm and headed off to our next stop.

It was 3.40pm when we arrived at Kenidjack, which is another well-known migrant hotspot





Kenidjack valley

in Cornwall, although not as deeply covered or steep sided as the others. I liked the look of this place with its overgrown hedges and little stream, the only problem was that if any small bird got into the cover by the stream we would probably never see it again :-\ . We were there for two reasons, firstly there 'd been a Yellow-browed Warbler reported the day before and secondly, Chris had said it was one of the best places in the UK to find Wryneck. After we traipsed up and down the valley the best Chris and Jon could do was point out exactly where they'd seen one 10 years ago.....Grrrrr!



Wryneck was here.....10 years ago!



We wrote it off as a bad job in the end and the entire valley was seemingly lacking in any kind of wildlife. On the way back up the road something caught Wendy's eye up in one of the fields and sitting against the hedge was a rather scruffy looking **Fox**. At least we'd seen something and a Fox is always a good find for us Manxies :). I grabbed a quick record shot as I only had one shot of a Fox, which Wendy had spotted very early in the morning on our Haweswater trip, but this one really wasn't what I had in mind either!



Fox

Further up the valley we came to the trees where the YBW had been reported. Everyone stood watching and listening while Wendy and I ended up giggling to ourselves at the extremely Cornish looking bloke, complete with mutton chops, who was working on a Steam engine! "Ooarr geroff moy laaaand." Much more entertaining! There was absolutely no sign of the YBW, even after an Uber Cornwall Birder and his 'crew' had appeared and failed to dig it out as well. Chris at one point thought he heard it call but everyone mumbled Chiffchaff apart from Wendy, who was obviously becoming delirious due to lack of coffee and said to me out loud, "Chiff Chiff!" A few minutes later there was a Chaffinch flying into the tree and I heard Wendy say, "Sealfinch!" Hahaha :D. She then ended up with tears streaming down her face, doubled up and unable to move, in hysterics. We needed to get her a Coffee pronto!!!



Nout there!

We left disappointed and tired at 5.15pm and were back at HQ by 5.30pm. Wendy had miraculously survived the whole day without a coffee..... I sent off an email to the Guinness Book of World Records but we're still awaiting her certificate. I think we were all hoping that the next day would be more exciting but I reckon it had finally sunk in and we'd all realized that this was as good as it was going to get :-/.

With a bit of peer pressure involved all 5 of us headed for the pub for tea again, which for me was something very out of the ordinary! I've never been a fan of pubs or drinking but on this occasion I had my arm twisted and found myself resorting to slurping on a bottle of blue wk'd. This made me the brunt of many jokes about how we were only 2 days into the trip and the depression was so bad already it had turned me into an alcoholic!

Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> October

Despite the uninspiringly slow start to our first day in Cornwall we were all up and about early again and as usual we went out to see what was about in the valley at around 7.45am. Instead of covering the same old ground again Wendy and I decided to split off and explore the other side, as we'd found a track that nobody had been up yet. It was a lovely morning with a bright orange sunrise but it was very cold and our feet got totally soaked as we waded through the grass. We really should've re-proofed our boots before going away!





Errr is this a path?

Somewhere along the line we'd somehow managed to misplace the footpath and found ourselves slightly lost...Oops! Luckily my Iphone and map app came to the rescue and we got ourselves back on the track and outside a farmhouse making friends with a very approachable old dog, who was on guard at the gate.



Nice doggie

Eventually we managed to find our way back down into the valley where we could see the others still ambling their way slowly along the track. It was a nice scenic walk to blow away the cobwebs and a great way to start the day. Nobody looked particularly flustered and no



cameras were raised so we knew we hadn't missed anything. Although we'd enjoyed our little adventure our fingers and toes were so numb that it was time to go back to HQ to warm up and for Wendy to have a quick coffee top up before we went out for another coffee-less day!

Everyone piled into Chris' Land Rover at 9am destined for Sennen to see if we could find the Rose-coloured Starling that had been reported again.



Landy

After a thorough scan we could still only find normal Starling flocks on the house roofs and telegraph wires so gave up pretty quickly. There were some extremely rare looking people about though and our scrawly notes read 'snot eating parsnip head' which after over 2 years I'd forgotten what it meant! Wendy vaguely recalls having spotted such a rarity walking down the road who's head resembled a parsnip and was picking his nose and eating it.....Nice.

We were at our second stop of the day, Porthcurno, by 9.32am where there'd been a report the day before of a Barred Warbler, which we were all pretty keen to see. There'd been a slight argument about where to park to get to the bird because Jon's pager was telling us to park at Treen and walk from there but I on the other hand had put the grid ref in the map app on my phone and was able to work out that Porthcurno was a lot closer. I eventually won the argument by showing the others the map and even telling them the exact distance from each place! You can't beat technology :). Saying that though the walk to the spot wasn't what we'd expected and was extremely hard work and treacherous in places. I was pleased to find out later though that the people who'd walked from Treen really wished they'd come from Porthcurno! Once we'd hauled ourselves up and over a steep hillside we found the decline to be even worse. An extremely narrow winding footpath down the side of a cliff isn't the best place for me to be as I'm not exactly what you'd call the steadiest human on foot!





Look at the height of that!

There were already a few other birders dotted about looking up at the cliff face so we spread ourselves out and joined in the search. This proved to be incredibly boring and the sun was starting to heat up by then too so our choice of clothing from our frosty morning walk was becoming a bit much. Quite a crowd was beginning to gather and as we admired the view of the bay below us and out to sea we saw a single **Kittiwake**.



Porthcurno beach

Eventually the heat got to us and we had to start stripping off the layers, which we'd never expected to be doing in late October.





Barred Warbler twitch

We'd just about given up on this typically elusive bird, as it hadn't shown at all, but at 11.50am Mr Cornish Uber-Birder spotted it. We all had a fleeting glimpse as it flew out of hiding and disappeared, miles off over the other side of the ridge, never to be seen again....Nooooooo! However disappointing, it was still a **Barred Warbler** though. We hung around for a bit longer in case it came back but of course, it didn't so we made our way back up the cliff path and down to the car. Thankfully our view of the Barred Warbler in Norfolk had been much better, if it hadn't been we'd have been leaving pretty depressed after all the effort we'd just put in. We drove off at 12.45pm to go to our next stop, which was St Levens.

When we pulled up into the Church car park we were greeted by a woman as we all bailed out of the car. She wanted our £1 for parking which we happily gave her. She then turned into one of those 'Little Hitler Traffic Warden' types ranting on about how people don't use the honesty box to pay when she wasn't there and that some people will even refuse to pay £1 and leave instead! She gave us the impression that she didn't trust us either so we couldn't get away quick enough! Apart from it being a good spot, the reason for our being there was for a Firecrest, which had been reported in trees near the Church. After giving it our best shot, none of us found it or even so much as heard it. It was boiling hot again and although this wasn't an issue for the others I'm not a hot weather person so was suffering. We had a wander round and found an old derelict building but found nothing in the way of birds. It was a lovely part of the world to be in though.





View over the trees at St Levan

After wandering round for a while in the heat we were all knackered but some of us had to stop for a rest ;). In the end we gave it up as a bad job and moved on to our next stop, which was hopefully going to give us something to look at least.

After about 30 minutes we arrived at Hayle Estuary, which is a sheltered shallow tidal estuary and luckily (or skillfully) we arrived bang on high tide. Perfect conditions :).



Looks ace...but was rubbish!

Scanning around we picked up **Canada** and **Greylag Geese**, **Greenshank**, **Bar-tailed Godwit** and Chris managed to pick out a **Mediterranean Gull**. There was nothing else apart from these though, which was disappointing for somewhere that had initially looked so promising.



We tried the flooded field from the hide too but there was literally nothing in that section at all.... Urgghhhhh! Deciding not to waste any more time we left at 2.25pm and on this occasion it was Jon who ended up nodding off in the car.....he wasn't driving by the way! :P.

Our next stop was Cot Valley where there'd been another Yellow-browed Warbler reported and as we'd failed to see any so far we were slightly desperate to find it. We arrived at 3pm walked along the path and looked into the trees. There were certainly a lot of small birds flitting about in them but as usual they were all difficult to pin down. Chris was certain he'd heard the call of a YBW so we all locked onto where he thought he could hear it. We'd all become aware of a woman, who was hovering nearby. She was very small and thin and obviously quite well off but she appeared to be very timid. She had no bins and certainly wasn't dressed for the occasion but she hung around in the background. All of a sudden we'd pinned a bird down, which looked a likely suspect, so the tension started to mount. We all watched the bird intently as it worked its way through the treetops, never seeing much more than its arse or back. We were hoping that we weren't putting so much time and effort into just a Chiffchaff but finally it was nailed by a delighted Wendy, who was the first to see it's face. "**Yellow-browed Warbler!**" she squealed. Wahey lifer number 3! Luckily we'd all seen it and the woman even came over and asked us where it was. She then disappeared and brought back a man who we presumed was her husband. He was a right grumpy looking git who'd obviously been sitting in the car all that time while his poor wife stood around in her heels doing the dirty work for him.....Nice! He didn't look like the nicest bloke you'd ever meet and his birding methods were, shall we say, questionable but...whatever! While we were there we took a walk down to Cot Valley Cove for a look around and although it was a lovely looking place it was also desolate.



Cot Valley

On the way back up the road to the car we could all hear a Firecrest right above Chris' head but typically not one of us could see the little \*\*\*\*!





The Firecrest is up there somewhere

While Jon and Chris were looking for the bird I heard a call, which I thought was another Firecrest further down the road, so I went off to look for it. Sure enough, within minutes a Firecrest showed itself right out in the open. I shouted to the others and started taking pics, positive that this was my best chance for a decent and clear shot. Within about 10 seconds the bird was gone but I optimistically checked through my shots and was gutted to see that every single one was out of focus. Arrgghhhh! I prayed this wouldn't be my last chance and after that little bit of excitement we left at 4.20pm.

We were back at HQ for 4.35pm and as we'd been out last night we decided to stay in for tea. The others all fought for the shower (actually it was all working out to be very civilized really) to get ready to out to the pub again while we made tea. Wendy had been very excited about the Range oven in the kitchen after using an Aga in a couple of cottages we'd stayed at in Norfolk. I was having pasta so we had the opportunity to use it for the first time. I think it took over 30 minutes in total to cook.....or should that be soak! You could've comfortably had a bath in that pan and nothing we did seemed to make the Range get any hotter. All Wendy's dreams of proper baked potatoes were shattered...if she'd put them in then they'd be ready by the time we were leaving at the end of the week...Urrghhh.

After tea we had a look in the amazing looking garden and then took an evening walk in Nanquidno Valley.





The Garden

We took the coastal path down to the sea and the sunset was amazing.



Nanquidno Sunset

There was another bloke down there sitting on the rocks admiring the view who started chatting to us. He seemed like a bit of an expert of the area so we asked him what the ruins we'd found were. He explained that it was a 4000 year old mine, which was pretty cool, but he then lost our interest rapidly by going into far too much detail.





Ancient mine

After we'd managed to escape the over enthusiastic man we headed back to HQ and the others soon joined us after they got back from having their tea.

Chris knew of a pub, where they fed Badgers after closing, and had planned to take us there that evening. It was late and we were totally knackered but it would be worth it, as I'd never seen a Badger before. Chris, Wendy and I headed out but when we pulled up in the car park at the back of the pub there was no sign of life. There were no lights on inside, no cars, nothing! It looked as though the pub had shut down (well it was in the middle of nowhere) so there'd be no reason for the Badgers to go there anymore. While we waited we did see 2x **Foxes** emerge from the trees behind us for a sniff about. We were all disappointed and headed back to HQ but on the way we saw something walking into the hedge at the side of the road. A **Badger**, well it's fat arse anyway. Woo Hoo a mammal lifer for me! :). In the car headlights we were also lucky enough to see a Tawny Owl sitting up in the branches of a roadside tree and a Barn Owl flying over the road on the way home. By the time we arrived back to HQ it was definitely time for bed.

Monday 18<sup>th</sup> October

As usual we started the day in the valley at 8am going through all the Crests and I was chuffed to find another Firecrest. There honestly seemed to be more Firecrests than Goldcrests in Cornwall, which was pretty impressive! Down by the coast there were streams of **Gannets** flying out over the sea but nothing unusual.

It was Jon's turn to drive us around again, as he and Chris had agreed to take it in turns, and we left at 9am for our first planned stop of the day. There'd been a report of a Buff-breasted Sandpiper in a field with some Golden Plover and we all thought it'd be worth a shot as it was only a few minutes away. We pulled up in the layby in Sennen at 9.10am and wandered over the road and down the track towards a gate, which overlooked a field. There was a group of Birders there already, looking at the massive **Golden Plover** flock foraging in the grass. It would be virtually impossible to pick a single bird out of such a tightly grouped flock at such



a distance. Eventually they all lifted up and flew around exposing a much smaller bird in with them. A **Buff-breasted Sandpiper**.....Cool!



Buff-breasted Sandpiper

We ended up watching them for ages and luckily at one point the flock flew straight over us before landing back in the field. This was another lifer for both of us and yet again we had great views and I'd even managed to grab a record shot. Brilliant! Eventually we left at 10am to move on to another coastal valley.

When we arrived at Penberth it was 10.25am and we all set to work hammering the trees and dense cover. We quickly heard at least 2x Yellow-browed Warblers high up in the treetops but there was no chance of getting a decent view. Walking through the trees behind some houses we also had 2x **Jay** fly over, which was nice. We found ourselves coming out the other side at a lovely fishing cove but the place was dead.





Penberth Cove

We then worked our way back on the other side of the valley seeing nothing else so left at 11.35am.

Our next stop was back along the coast to another valley but this one was not as deeply covered so maybe had something different in it. All the way there, Jon who seemed rather jolly, annoyed Chris by singing loudly along to his 70's Discos music. Hahaha or maybe it was the fact that Jon could impressively actually sing that ruffled his feathers?

We parked up at Porthcurno in the large museum car park. The museum was all about telecommunications or something and I was well interested! There were some WW2 tunnels going into the cliff face, which I wanted to go down (such a child). I found out that the first transatlantic communications cable came to British shores in Porthcurno cove and we even found a little hut, which still has all the old kit inside. While I was like a kid in a sweet shop nobody else seemed particularly interested :/. Well we did have NO birds to find!





Porthcurno Cable room

Eventually we put some effort into checking the coastal bushes but there wasn't a single bird and all we spotted was a bunch of posers trying to sunbathe on the pebbles. As we walked back towards the car something leapt out at us, an in touch with nature, hippy dude completely starkers! He was rubbing himself down with a towel after obviously checking out the surf and didn't seem at all bothered about all the people around him! I struggled to hold back the laughter (and Wendy's eyeballs) as we scuttled away.

Chris and Keren had been banging on about the amazing Cornish Pasties, which they baked at Porthcurno café so that was the next thing on their agenda. Wendy went in with them for a coffee and bought me a pasty too, having persuaded me with her 'when in Rome' tactic. It looked the business and I was starving so I tucked in.....and spat it out faster than it'd gone in. Bleurghhhh!!!! Naively, I'd just assumed that a Cornish Pasty was like a normal pasty but nicer. Dohhhh! I'd stupidly believed Wendy when she said, "If you like pasties you'll love these." She'd known all along what goes into a 'proper' Cornish pasty but if I'd had the slightest inkling that one of the ingredients was TURNIP I'd have told her to, "\*\*\*\* off!" The pasty didn't go to waste though as a stocky little Staffie dog, which looked as though he'd eaten a pasty or 2 in his time, swaggered his way over to us and within about 2 nanoseconds of it touching the ground he'd scoffed the lot down in one! :).

We eventually left at 12.45pm and decided to try a nearby track that went through some farm fields towards Nanjizal valley. As we arrived at Polgigga at 12.55am Chris and Keren announced that they were going to stay in the Landy while we went for a wander! We couldn't help but wonder why they wanted to stay behind though.....Ooerrr! ;). It was raining and dark so as the 3 of us set off down the track we really couldn't blame them. On the other hand though, what if it was a brilliant place and.....we found something amazing? Further more, to our amazement this place wasn't a coastal valley! :O. The track, which was lined with trees and bushes, lead down a driveway to a farm and very quickly we'd picked up 2x Firecrests on call.....Skillz :). Jon told us that the area is one of the best places in Britain for rare migrants, which picked our spirits up as we were slowly realizing we couldn't seem to find anything other than Firecrests. Walking past the hedgerows we broke out into what looked like arable fields and my mind started to get totally carried away with its self. Could we find an Ortolan Bunting or Richards Pipit or something? We found 4 **Stock Dove** but were then distracted by the sound of someone blowing a horn. We looked into a field to find that we'd only gone and stumbled across a hunt... great! There were Toffs in all the gear on

horses and dogs too, which confused me as I thought that it'd been made illegal in Britain not so long ago? Fingers crossed that whatever they were after, presumably Fox, would not only have escaped unscathed but had also bred twenty times and had tons of babies! Grrrrrrrrrr take that, moronic hunters! We were only supposed to go for a 5 minute walk but ended up spending nearly two hours there.....Whoops! Shame we'd only come up with Stock Dove and more Firecrests but at the right time of year the place obviously had bucket loads of potential.

For some reason we ended up back at Porthgwarra at 2.25pm but since we'd already been and had no luck I can only presume that something else had been reported from there and we'd gone back to give it a shot. There were hardly any notes to go by and we must've failed to see whatever it was but we did add **Chough** and **Raven** to our list. Although we found little else we did come across something new, which looked like an old Badger Set. There didn't appear to be any sign of recent activity as the holes were full of leaves but who knows, maybe they were still around but using a new entrance?



Badger Set

We also ended up back at sixty foot cover but we have absolutely no idea why! Maybe we'd resorted to torturing ourselves by then and wanted to rub salt in the wounds? Just look at the picture, it looks brilliant and like it could have any number of brilliant birds hiding in there! Yet again though, it was totally dead :(.





Sh!tty foot cover

After killing time we left at 4.20pm and were back at HQ, shortly after, at 4.45pm.

At 6.20pm, as it was a nice evening, before going out to the pub we went out for another walk in Nanquidno. Call us gluttons for punishment but you never know. We had a pretty good idea what to expect though and we were right.....absolutely nothing.



Nanquidno valley

It had been another long day so we all piled into the Landy and headed out at 7.30pm. We'd already had our tea at HQ so while the others refueled we had a couple of drinks and we were all back at home by 9.30pm. The others swiftly retired to their beds totally knackered again.....hardcore or what!



Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> October

After another early start we all set off for our usual morning stroll in Nanquidno ever hopeful of finding something different. Obviously we didn't but if a report had come in later of something good in our local patch and we hadn't even looked we'd have been kicking ourselves! There'd been a report of Ring Ouzel and Wryneck the day before from a place on the Lizard Peninsula called Poltesco. Obviously it was a gamble as the Lizard was about an hours drive away but we decided this would be our plan for the day. Wryneck would be a much sought after lifer for both Wendy and I.

When we arrived at 9.45am it was very windy and we couldn't tell if the sun was going to come out or not. There was an information board telling you about the place, which looked quite interesting, so we went over to read it. The cove was once a Pilchard factory but in later years had been turned into a serpentine rock mine. The old mine was still standing and we were guessing that the birds from the previous day would've favoured it's derelict stone walls as a resting place and we could vividly picture them sitting there.



Poltesco

We had a walk up the stream which ran out onto the beach and Wendy found yet another Firecrest. It had certainly been a good week for these birds but we just wanted something different.....anything! After a good scan of the area, including the jutting rocks on the cliffs it became very obvious that the Wryneck and Ring Ouzel had moved straight through.....Urrghhhh! While everyone was wandering about back on the beach Wendy spotted a blue flash whizzing down stream and called, "Kingfisher!" Poltesco was a lovely place and it's history had been well preserved but for all our efforts we'd just dipped on our 2 target birds and as we'd found everywhere else, birds in general were very few and far between.

We admitted defeat and gave up at 11.25am and were taken into Lizard Town for a proper Cornish ice cream, probably to cheer us up from the depression of seeing no birds. Not



content with the high cream content already in their ice cream a couple of the others had a huge dollop of clotted cream on top of theirs! Not being a fan Wendy passed on that particular indulgence but treated her self to a 2 coffee top up instead. With everyone's cravings suppressed we left for our next stop of the day, which we hoped wouldn't be our 3<sup>rd</sup> dip of the morning.

Parking up at Church Cove at 11.47am we'd already lost our enthusiasm but there'd been a report of a Common Rosefinch, which although not the worlds most eye catching bird would be another lifer for Wendy. At least there were reports coming in and it's always worth a shot to follow them up. Myself, Wendy and Jon hopped out of the car but Chris and Keren decided to stay put but told us to give them a shout when we'd found it! The 3 of us ambled our way down a track, which took us to the field where the bird had been seen. We sat on the hedge with the other Birders who were already there and waited.



Church Cove

There was a caravan in the field with a guy milling around outside, so we hung back not wanting to trespass or intrude on somebody's land. After about 30 minutes we'd still not seen the bird and it was getting very boring and looking like another waste of time. There were plenty of Finches knocking around and loads of House Sparrows to catch our eyes but no sign of our bird. If only we could walk into the field and have a proper look but no formal permission had been given....Grrrrrr! Unfortunately, as with any birds on private land you have to respect the owner's rights even if it means not seeing what you went for. It was definitely looking hopeless as this bird was not playing ball and was keeping its head down probably somewhere frustratingly nearby. We all agreed that we should give up very soon but then Chris appeared saying, "Have you found it yet?" When we told him we hadn't he shook his head, said, "Useless!" and proceeded to walk straight into the field. About 30 seconds later he came back and said, "It's over there, you idiots just next to that mound!" Well, "if you can't beat em join em" that's what I say so we threw our good intentions in the bin. Sure enough there was the **Common Rosefinch** feeding on the ground just out of our previous range over by the mound of earth. All the other Birders followed us and it turned into a right old twitch.





Rosefinch twitch

There were cameras going mental everywhere and Wendy was pleased to have another lifer for the trip. After we'd all filled our boots and had taken some shots we were happy enough with we packed up and left at 2.10pm.



Common Rosefinch



On the way back to Nanquidno we'd planned to visit Marazion Marsh as there'd been a Bittern reported from there. We arrived at the car park at 3pm and set off to check out the reserve. There were reeds everywhere and it wasn't long before we heard the erratic blast of a **Cetti's Warbler** but we weren't prepared to stick around and try to see it, as we knew we'd have more chance of spotting a flying pig. We followed the path round a pool and towards some trees where surprise-surprise was another Firecrest. From what I can remember it was beginning to get quite cold by that point and although we'd hoped to at least hear the boom of a Bittern while we explored the area we heard no such thing. Somewhere along the line we noticed we'd managed to acquire an extra member in our group. This guy, who looked like the lost and mental 5<sup>th</sup> member of The Beate's, had started following us around. Hmmmmmm? Maybe he was as desperate to find something as us and thought that we'd have more luck than him.....he'd been wrong there! Yet again we'd gone somewhere that should've been good but due to the complete lack of birds in the whole of Cornwall it was another damp squib. The clear skies through the week were really killing any chance we had of decent migrants dropping in :( With nothing else on our agenda and keen to lose our new buddy we left at 3.14pm and headed for home.

We were back at HQ by 4.45pm after another frustrating day.....apart from the Common Rosefinch that is! Looking out of the kitchen window Chris had spotted about 10 Birders standing looking up into the trees opposite the house. This was very unusual so he ran outside, faster than we thought possible, to see what was going on. They told him that a friend had seen a Pallas' Warbler earlier in the day so Chris came back to get us. Strangely there'd been no news of this on any of our pagers or text services, which made us all wonder whether it was a string or just blatant suppression. We were starting to get the distinct impression that Cornwall was pretty bad for suppression and everything was kept between the 'in-crowd.'



Cottage

We all went over and one bloke even said that he'd headed straight there after receiving the call and hadn't seen it either. We all looked everywhere humanly possible and there was still nothing. We reckoned it must've been a string, which was backed up later that evening when we couldn't find a single report of it on any of the existing bird news websites.

Wendy woke up and leapt out of bed in panic, her alarm hadn't gone off and she'd slept in till 6.45am! Knowing that nobody would wait around it was all systems go to be ready in time for our morning stroll. Luckily she pulled herself together and was ready in time so we all headed out at 8.15am. Our first place to check was of course over the river as that's where the supposed Pallas' had been reported the evening before.



Nanquidno

Not surprisingly we found nothing remotely like one so we carried on down the valley. A flock of **Redwing** flew over but that was literally it so we all went back to HQ, bailed into the Landy and left at 10am.

Our first plan was to go to Cot Valley where a Little Bunting and Yellow-browed Warbler had been reported. Not wanting to look a gift horse in the mouth we all agreed to give it a shot. We duly arrived at 10.20am and found a park in a layby at the top of road. As we walked down the hill we were surrounded by the calls of Goldcrests so we slowed down to check them out. In amongst them were 3x Firecrests but no sign of a YBW. We took a footpath into some trees in the hope we'd have more luck there but there was nothing. Further on this then opened out to a path lined with bracken, which led down to the coast. This was where the Little Bunting was supposed to have been but there wasn't even a bird there. Down at the coast we found a very old looking mine entrance which grabbed my interest.....for a minute.





Cot Valley

We were starting to become 'one trick ponies' according to Chris who was sick of finding nothing but Firecrests. We took it as joke though considering he was in exactly the same boat. We'd covered just about everywhere and found nothing else so it was back to the Landy through Firecrest central and we left at 12pm.

At 12.40pm we arrived at Cape Cornwall so we could have our lunch followed by a walk around. It was a beautiful place and we fancied walking up to the top of the hill but nobody else seemed to share our enthusiasm. After we'd all eaten we got out for a wander and ended up persuading the others to join us on the steep walk up the hill to the tower. It was painful watching them creek, crunch and wheeze their way up while we were already standing at the top laughing at them and admiring the view.....albeit out of breath ourselves!



Steep!



On the way down I brilliantly tripped over a rock and went over on my ankle. It felt like I'd really gone and done some damage so I instantly thought my holiday was over and envisaged myself sitting in the HQ garden or stuck in the car for the rest of the week. Nooooo! Luckily after a few minutes the pain subsided and I was able to gingerly get back on my feet. Phew! Maybe we're not 100% jinxed after all but I suppose that'll teach me for mocking the afflicted!



Cape Cornwall

After our short sharp walk we left 1.30pm taking a quick detour to Sennen where we found the Buff-breasted Sandpiper to be still hanging around.

Our next plan was to go to Lands End and when we arrived at 2.20pm we couldn't believe how busy it was. I know it's Lands End and all that but for god's sake....all that fuss over a café and gift shop! Well that's where most people were and it looked like they were there for the day!





We, on the other hand, after a quick trip to the WC'S, dodged the crowds and walked southwards along the footpath across the heath. There'd been another report of a Rose-coloured Starling from there but there was nothing amongst the obvious Starlings remotely different....typical! The scenery from the paths was stunning but the whole place was too busy for my liking. I suppose that's what happens when someone builds a tourist attraction at a beauty spot though, which totally spoils the place. On Chris and Kerens last trip to Cornwall they'd seen a Penduline Tit on the southern path but we saw a big fat nothing :( On the return walk, for want of something better to do, me and Wendy stopped off at the little farm for kids and found some very nice and friendly pigs :P.



Greeb Farm at Land's End

Back at the Lands End metropolis I realized this would be a good place to buy my Mum and Dad a present so I braved the hoards of Yanks and went in. It was worse than Strand Street at Christmas so I quickly grabbed the nearest Honey/Fudge pack and got out of there vowing to never set foot in the place ever again!





Lands End metropolis from the heath

We happily left Lands End behind at 3.10pm by which point we had no enthusiasm or energy left to try anywhere else so made the unanimous decision to head for home.

After driving past it so many times on our way home every day we realized that we'd never checked out Nanquidno plantation. Since it was still early we decided to give it a go and managed to squeeze out our last drops of enthusiasm to go in. It had looked quite promising but in reality it was totally dead and we neither found nor heard anything, which put the final nail in the coffin of the whole day for me.



Nanquidno Plantation

After that it was time to head home but Wendy decided that she'd walk the rest of the way back to HQ and returned slightly happier having found 2 more Firecrests on the way.



I presume everyone went out to the Pub for tea again but my guess is that Wendy and I had already eaten and just went along for the ride....and a drink :).

Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> October

Everyone was up typically early at 6.45am and setting out for our morning scan of the valley by 8.10am. The usual suspects were about including more Firecrests and I finally managed to get a shot I was pleased with. After so many failed attempts during the week I'd started to think I'd missed my chance and would be going home empty handed. Luckily enough this one turned out ok.



Firecrest

Another surprise came for us when a small skein of **Pink-footed Geese** flew over, which we totally weren't expecting. This was to be Jons' last day with us, as he had to be back home that evening, so he packed his stuff into his car and Chris took his Landy too in preparation to go our separate ways later.

We left at 9.30am and headed back to Cot Valley where there'd been a reported Radde's Warbler the day before. At 10.05am we arrived feeling less than optimistic or enthused. We finally gave up after having dipped on the Radde's and seeing absolutely nothing else so it was then that we all said our goodbyes to Jon. From then on there was something missing, he was definitely good company and fun to have around. As we were getting ready to leave we saw, but wished we hadn't, a man actually wiping his dogs bum with some grass, which was pretty gross and didn't help the mood.....Bleurghhhh! Our spirits were soon lifted again when a woman came hurtling down the hill walking an over excited Labradoodle. It would probably be fair to say that the dog was walking her and after it had dragged her around for a bit and got its lead totally tangled around her legs it finally knocked her over into the hedge....Ooops! We knew we shouldn't have but we just couldn't help ourselves laughing....well it was really funny! With one man down we drove off at 11.20am and on to our next stop nearby.



Three minutes later we were at Kelynack and walking down the road past some allotments with vegetables growing in them. One of the fields even had a very impressive Scarecrow family in it, which would've taken the creator a fair bit of time and effort to make.



Kelynack road

We didn't hang around though as there was absolutely nothing there so we left at 11.54am. By then it was lunchtime so we detoured into St Just for a break and to get some food from the bakery before heading over to St Ives briefly to do the touristy bit. We couldn't resist stopping to have a look at this picturesque mine which was right at the side of the road. I bet there's not many days go by where someone doesn't stop to do the same.



Mine

As we drove into St Ives it looked very picturesque with the sun shining down onto the perfectly blue sea. There were people everywhere, in the sea, on the beach, sitting looking



cool outside the numerous trendy cafes and bars on the front or just enjoying milling about.....very chilled :). Chris stayed at the car to seawatch while myself, Wendy and Keren were able to go and explore the town. Keren wanted to find some pressies to take home with her, as did we, but we also just wanted to have a look round so we split up.



St Ives

The town itself was very pretty with plenty of interesting 'alternative' shops as well as the more mainstream ones. It was so clean and very modern in parts with an obviously thriving gay community. It was also extremely busy so we could now see why Chris had chosen to stay at the car! I found myself an interesting bookshop to browse through while Wendy drooled her way round another poncy Deli and got herself a much needed coffee fix. As we only had an hour we couldn't really do it justice but it was still nice to be able to take a break from the relentless, non-productive birding!

After our hour was nearly up and we were heading to the car we started to notice some weird situations going on around us. The first of which was a man dragging a very small and reluctant looking child by the hand towards one of the side streets. That in itself wasn't weird at all, as we all know what young kids can be like, but it was what we heard that made us look twice. The man, who bore no resemblance to the child, was saying things like, "Yes, I know but this is your new home now" and, "Mummy's gone away." Hmmmmmm creepy! The next thing was a woman, who was knocking on a bit, with a guy on her arm who was definitely young enough to be her son! He may have been for all we know but they must be verrrrrrrry close if that's the case. Having seen enough for our liking we hurried back to the car. We were half expecting to go out the next day only to see the local billboards reading, 'Cougar Town Child Snatcher strikes again. We'd be on our way home by then and wouldn't be able to help out with enquiries. Hmmmmmm maybe our imaginations were running away with us? Keren was already back, having bought her pressies and Chris had spent the hour on his own having a very uneventful seawatch. We ended our time in St Ives having seen nothing else other than yet another Labradoodle, which seemed to be the 'in' breed for Cornwall at the time and some dodgy looking scenarios. On the up side though, Wendy had managed to top up her caffeine levels before she started announcing any more Seal Finches or Chiff Chiffs out loud.

It was early when we got back to HQ at 4pm so we all started to pack up our stuff so we could make a quick get away the next morning. While we were looking through the visitors book and info booklets we discovered that the brilliant looking trees opposite the house was



actually a private reserve which we had access to....Doh! If we'd known that earlier we'd have been in there every day so we thought we'd make the effort to go and check it out. Needless to say we found nothing but we could see that it could have had anything lurking in there, if we'd been there at the right time.



Nanquidno private reserve

As it was our last night and we had loads to do we all ate in but Chris and Keren nipped into St Just and treated themselves to a massive Indian take out. After that we all chilled out upstairs in the lounge, watched 'An Idiot Abroad' and had a look through some of our photos while one of us sampled some traditional Cornish Mead she'd bought earlier in St Ives....bleurghhhh!





It must've been bad as the bottle, which was only a miniature, was left virtually untouched on the table when we left (evidence is in the above picture). Remembering my Cornish Pasty incident, off the back of Wendy's 'when in Rome' theory, I can only say it served her right.....Hahahahahahah :P.

Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> October

We were up early again, getting the rest of our stuff packed up, but we still made time for our last walk in Nanquidno at 8.20am. After a week of doing this and finding nothing but Firecrests we were finally rewarded with something different :O. We heard a Yellow-browed Warbler! Nobody could manage to pin it down though.....shocker! :/. We couldn't sniff at the amount of Firecrests we'd found on the trip and we'd certainly all filled our boots with them! They're definitely a bird, which you could never get bored of. After loading up the Landy and Chris had written some cleverly chosen comments in the visitor's book we left at 9.30am.



Kitchen

The first plan of the day was to check the trees for the YBW at Kenijack again and we arrived there at 10.20am. We were hoping to go home with at least a record shot of one these birds but yet again there was no sign. There was literally nothing there, apart from a Buzzard so we already on our way again at 11am.

Our next stop was Land's End for a last look for the Rose-coloured Starling. We arrived at 11.45am and had another good scan through the Starling flocks hoping again to find something different. As had been the case all week there were nothing but common or garden Starlings so we'd dipped again. It would've been a great end to the week to get another lifer for Wendy but it wasn't to be. It wasn't the only RCS reported that week either but somehow we just hadn't been able to catch up with even one of them amongst the numerous Starling flocks we'd seen.....Boooooo!

Next up was Porthgwarra and at 12.30pm we set off back up the road and out onto the heath, which yet again seemed pretty dead. We felt that the chances of finding anything were very



slim but it was still worth a shot. After walking around for ages and finding nothing somebody chirped up with, “**Dartford Warbler?**” Wendy had spotted it flitting around in the gorse down in a dip...WTF? That was a bird, which we really hadn’t expected to see in Cornwall at all so it came as a welcome surprise. With that bit of good luck we could now head back to the car and on to our next stop, which if we were lucky could get us another lifer. We left at 1.35pm and had a fairly long drive ahead of us to Falmouth and a farm where they’re trying to reintroduce a bird, which is in real trouble.

At 3.10pm we parked up at Lanhay Farm and as Chris knew where to go we followed him down the road checking the hedgerows and telegraph wires. After a while we were starting to get worried, as there was no sign of anything at all so we were just about to give up. Not to be defeated too early we decided we’d walk down to a gateway to check a field and if there was still nothing about we’d turn around and go back. As we approached the gateway we could see some small birds sitting on the overhead wires but couldn’t make out any details. We cautiously walked into the field and around the edge to check the birds just in case.



Lanhay farm

It was lucky we did, as we ended up finding exactly what we’d gone for and there were 2x **Cirl Bunting** sitting there! Another lifer for me and Wendy :).





Cirl Bunting

Happy with that I got a record shot before we went back to the car and left at 3.25pm.

Somewhere on the journey out of the Southwest Chris suddenly slammed on the brakes, bailed out of the Landy and ran back up the road in a panic! What the? We sat there bemused, having not seen anything unusual, so when he got back in we asked him what he was doing. We had to laugh when he replied panting, "Thought it was a dead Tawny Owl, but it's a bit of carpet underlay." Bahahaha :P.

We finally arrived at our overnight accommodation in Bristol at 6.50pm and to be honest it did bear an uncanny resemblance to some kind of prison block.





Prison?

The entire set up wasn't exactly what we'd describe as aesthetically pleasing but it would do the job. We couldn't complain though as after being on the go all day we were all totally knackered and just needed somewhere to get our heads down for the night. After taking a shower with a grotty looking head that looked as though it could be the cause of legionnaire's disease we all met up in the pub next door for some food.



Legionnaire's shower

The pub and its punters looked exceptionally rough and the beer garden wasn't a good advert at all and would've been more appropriately called a Beer Jungle! There was broken glass and empty bottles amongst the overgrown grass too.



Beer Jungle

Inside it was actually a lot nicer than it looked from the outside and even the food turned out to be surprisingly nice. It did look like it might've featured in the 'Britain's most dangerous pubs' program though and definitely looked like a better contender than The Heron in Anagh Coar. After we'd eaten and had a drink or two we headed back over to our rooms and were asleep as soon as our heads hit the pillows.

Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> October

Reluctantly we were all up by 7am, still really tired but we needed to get going and on the road to our only stop of the day and last of the trip. After packing all our stuff back into the Landy and tearing ourselves away from our luxury accommodation we left at 8.50am.

Before too long we arrived at Chew Valley Lake in Somerset at 9.40am and the weather was doing anything but enticing us outside. It was absolutely throwing it down with rain so we hoped it wasn't far to walk to the hide. Despite my well-researched directions of 'turn right and go through the nearest gate' I was ignored so we ended up going the wrong way and consequently were walking for ages.





Wrong way!

By the time everyone had accepted that I'd been right all along we were absolutely soaked! We then had to backtrack to the other gate only to find that the hide was literally only 10yards away....Grrrrrr! We were all so wet by that point that we were freezing cold and our glasses and bins were steaming up too. We could just about make out some of the more likely birds such as **Gadwall**, **Shoveler**, **Teal** and **Great-crested Grebe**. A bit of a bonus came in the form of a **Water Rail** out in the open, which is always a pretty rare sight. Visibility over the huge lake was like looking through pea soup so the additional problems didn't help in the slightest and the only new birds for the trip we could find were **Little Gull** and **Pochard**.



Pea souper

We'd kind of hoped that the rain would ease off if we stayed put for a bit but it just wasn't shifting so we packed up and left at 12pm. Apart from getting soaked and cold we'd also managed to dip on Red-necked Grebe, Black-necked Grebe and Ring-necked Duck that had all been resident at the lake for weeks! They would all have been lifers for Wendy too, which

made the whole event extra depressing. Not the best ending to our trip and all we had to look forward to was the long drive up to Liverpool.

The journey felt like it took forever and as we entered Liverpool all we could hear was the sound of various sirens. Good to see the Emergency Services are being kept busy in the area though :P. When we arrived at the Dock (early) we were horrified to be told that our sailing had been cancelled. Nice of the Steam Packet to inform us in advance! Our only option was the 2.15am from Heysham with £5 worth of café vouchers each to spend for the inconvenience, how generous.....NOT! To top it all off there were no cabins available so sleep wasn't on the agenda either.....Urrghhh!

With nothing else to do we drove straight to Heysham, taking a quick diversion to McDonalds for Chris and Keren, and arrived at around 4pm with hours still left to kill. The terminal was closed until 11.30pm and there were people kicking off everywhere. No toilet facilities, no food or drinks, no nothing! When it finally opened at something like 11pm everyone abandoned their cars and like a massive stampede, piled in. Mr Red Eyes (who Wendy had found asleep behind the café counter on a past trip) was still working there but he was actually half awake this time.

After the longest wait ever we eventually boarded at 1.30am and were duly given our £5 vouchers so we headed off and found a seat in the Niarbyl Lounge. Having not indulged in a McDonalds earlier we were now starving but Chris and Keren obviously didn't want anything at the time. Wendy went off to the café for a coffee and picked up a sarnie and some crisps for our rumbling stomachs. When she handed the woman the voucher she was told that because it was for 4 of us she'd get no change or vouchers back if she used it for just us two. Slightly tired and annoyed by this Wendy quickly disputed the ridiculous rule and eventually the woman very reluctantly gave her 2x £5 vouchers back for Chris and Keren to use when they were ready. The sarnie turned out to be totally inedible, the bread was completely stale and the cheese was so dried up and hard it had turned a lurid orange colour but the crisps went down a treat. Shocking! :-/.

It had been a very long day, especially for Chris who'd done all the driving, ending up with a load of stress so he got down on the floor in front of his seat and went to sleep.



Zzzzzzzz.



I'd started to feel a bit ropery so took some Stugeron before I too resigned myself to the floor to try and sleep through it. Unlike Chris, who had loads of room in front of him, I was wedged between 2 rows of seats.



Comfy!

Wendy and Keren stayed awake and read their books but out of the corner of her eye Wendy had noticed a very large bloke reading 'Train' Magazine who was also providing some light entertainment. He had a bag, which she was convinced was a magician's bag! Apparently he just kept pulling more and more stuff out of it when it didn't seem possible that it could hold even quarter of the contents. She was just waiting for him to pull out a white Rabbit by its ears, a standard lamp, some white Doves to fly out or something equally as bizarre :D.

You'd think that getting seats in the Niarbyl Lounge, or quiet lounge, would've been a good move but it turned out to be anything but! For the whole journey we put up with its rickety vibrations and the constant coughing, sneezing and rustling coming from the passengers around us. Not forgetting the constant sound of flushing toilets behind the paper-thin walls. I managed to get a bit of sleep, although not much, and endured the sailing without the aid of a sick bag....Phew!

We've never been so happy to finally arrive back in Douglas and Chris had us back at home by 6am. We were totally knackered and freezing so we didn't envy him for having to drive home to Ramsey before they could both relax.

Both myself, and Wendy, chose the Green Heron as our bird of the trip. Not only was it a 4<sup>th</sup> for Britain but also neither of us had ever imagined being lucky enough to see one in the UK never mind at such close range. To witness it flying and sitting on a tree perch was pretty cool too and really gave a sense of how small these lovely birds actually are. The whole visual experience was made better still with the backdrop of the exotic plants at The Lost Gardens of Heligan. I'd gone home with 4 lifers and Wendy 6, which was much less than expected especially as we were there at prime migration time. I suppose it's better than none at all and anyway it's quality that counts and not quantity. Then again, according to our notes we'd ended our trip having seen a grand total of just 94 birds! Maybe some had been missed off the list and been forgotten about and we can only hope that's the case as this

would be our lowest count during any weeks holiday! On the plus side I had a mammal lifer by finally seeing a Badger at long last though so I can't sniff at that :).

After a whole year of really looking forward to visiting Cornwall and having heard stories of how good it was we left bitterly disappointed. We'd had such high expectations but the weather had been far too warm and calm so there were no migrants to be found. We could've done with at least a couple of days of unfavourable conditions to put some birds down to give us something to find. We'd expected amazing scenery too but found it to be unfeasibly similar to that of the Isle of Man, which was another let down. Cornwall was undoubtedly a beautiful place though, which we would ideally have been able to explore further. Who knows, maybe one day I'll get the balls to attempt the monster drive down there. Surely we couldn't pick another week as uneventful as this one.....or could we?

If you haven't already read it then please read the Cornwall 2012 article to find out ;).

#### Bird List

Mute Swan	Curlew	Fieldfare
Pink-footed Goose	Common Sandpiper	Song Thrush
Greylag Goose	Green Sandpiper	Redwing
Canada Goose	<b>Solitary Sandpiper</b>	Cetti's Warbler
Gadwall	Greenshank	Blackcap
Teal	Redshank	Barred Warbler
Mallard	Kittiwake	Whitethroat
Shoveler	Black-headed Gull	Dartford Warbler
Pochard	Little Gull	<b>Yellow-browed Warbler</b>
Pheasant	Mediterranean Gull	Chiffchaff
Little Grebe	Lesser Black-backed Gull	Goldcrest
Great Crested Grebe	Herring Gull	Firecrest
Gannet	Guillemot	Long-tailed Tit
Cormorant	Stock Dove	Blue Tit
<b>Green Heron</b>	Woodpigeon	Nuthatch
Grey Heron	Collared Dove	Jay
Sparrowhawk	Barn Owl	Magpie
Buzzard	Tawny Owl	Chough
Kestrel	Kingfisher	Jackdaw
Merlin	Great Spotted Woodpecker	Rook
Peregrine	Skylark	Carrion Crow
Water Rail	Swallow	Raven
Moorhen	Meadow Pipit	Starling
Ringed Plover	Grey Wagtail	House Sparrow
Golden Plover	Pied Wagtail	Chaffinch
Little Stint	Wren	Greenfinch
Curlew Sandpiper	Duncock	Goldfinch
Dunlin	Robin	Linnet
<b>Buff-breasted Sandpiper</b>	Stonechat	<b>Common Rosefinch</b>
Snipe	Wheatear	Snow Bunting
Black-tailed Godwit	Blackbird	<b>Girl Bunting</b>
Bar-tailed Godwit		