

Cornwall September 2012

Having hammered Norfolk for the past couple of years we felt that Cornwall was worth another shot after our disappointing trip in October 2010. We'd had high expectations of the place back then but unfortunately at the time of our visit everything was against us so we left with the feeling of unfinished business. Not only did we have unfinished business but also an unfinished article which is still, to this day a work in progress! We knew that if we hit it at the right time it could be amazing but trying to choose a good week was always going to be a gamble. Wendy's calendar at work was already totally booked up apart from a couple of weeks in mid September so we crossed our fingers and started organizing our Cornwall (round 2) trip. We were feeling quite optimistic that we could be there for when Wrynecks would be on the move, as we both were hoping to get a better view, decent photo or even find our own.....hahaha dream on! As usual we'd kept our eyes on the BirdGuides reports but typically of our luck they'd already been streaming through for a month before we'd even left the I.O.M.....Urrghhhh! We'd become so used to this kind of thing happening that it came as no surprise, just as the bad weather system with strong winds forecast for our boat crossing was, shall we say, slightly predictable. The forecast for Cornwall however, was looking pretty warm and settled which of course was totally wrong and probably the main reason we'd had such a non-productive trip last time. Much to Wendy's disgust we needed some good old Manx style weather, with overnight rain to put some birds down (but preferably dry days) and at least a day of strong westerly winds to get some perfect Seawatching conditions. It seemed like a tall order mind you and as we counted down the days to the holiday the more doubtful we became so reinstated our very appropriate 'Team Jinx' status ;).

Thursday 13th September

We arrived at the Sea Terminal at 6.50pm and it was really busy. While we waited we saw **Herring Gull** and **Feral Pigeon** which was about as good as it was going to get because by the time we set off it would be dark. The car park was full but it wasn't long before we were going through the gate.....and ushered into the searching bay. Confident that there'd be no problems, Wendy nipped off to Costa whilst I dealt with Security. Within seconds of starting the search they produced a small clear plastic tube of dodgy looking white powder! The suspicious security man asked, "Do you mind telling me what this is?" I was completely taken aback as I wasn't expecting any hiccups and all I could say was, "Ooo, well that looks dodgy doesn't it." Brilliant! The problem was that I had no idea what it was but suddenly and luckily I had a brainwave and said, "I know what it is... it's bird squeaker lubricant." I think I would have been better saying it was cocaine as I now had two security guards quizzing me over what sounded like a very lame lie! It wasn't going to be an easy task to convince them, as I was pretty sure that they didn't even know such a thing existed. It would've been helpful if I hadn't lost both my bird squeakers so I could have showed them properly. In a bit of a panic I googled a picture of the squeakers whilst explaining how you use them to 'squeak' birds out of a bush but I could tell they were both thinking that I was literally mental! Wendy luckily reappeared and corroborated my story nearly word for word. Pheww! After taking all my details and confiscating the tube of powder we were allowed to go on our way. This sort of thing could only happen to us!

We got into our cabin at 7.30pm and were promptly told by the Captain that it was going to be a rough crossing.....Urrghhhh! Wendy had already popped her Stugeron but there was no chance that I could as a side-affect is drowsiness, not good for the massive drive I had ahead of me :(Even though our cabin had a good clear view for once there was no way either of us were even going to try to stand up and sea watch in the rough seas so instead we got our heads down to try to relax after all the security palaver!

We disembarked at Heysham at 11.25pm and Wendy went straight off to get her coffee fix. This was a good move as I'd reckoned it to be about a 2hr drive down to Gloucester for our overnight stay.

The journey down to Stonehouse in Gloucestershire took longer than I'd expected but we arrived, very tired, at 2.20am. The room smelled a bit funny and was pretty poor even by Travelodge standards (we won't be staying at that one again) but despite that we both went out like lights.

Friday 14th September

We didn't need to be up early as our first port of call didn't open until 9.30am but even so we were up and about by 7.30am. We hadn't packed any waterproof clothes for the holiday so we were slightly annoyed to see that it was chucking it down outside.... dohhh. While I was packing the cases back into the car I heard a **Grey Wagtail** and **House Martin** fly over and there were **Black-headed Gulls**, **Blackbird**, **Robin** and **Wren** in the surrounding bushes. After having a very hearty breakfast of a cereal bar and some water we left at 9am. On the way we picked up **Jackdaw**, **Rook**, **Wood Pigeon**, **Chaffinch**, **Collared Dove** and **Mallard**.

We arrived at WWT Slimbridge at 9.15am and while we waited for it open we saw a **Blue Tit** in the car park and **Moorhen**, **Goldfinch** and **House Sparrow** near the entrance. As they were so close we both stopped to get some pics and I ended up with my best Moorhen shot to date.



Moorhen

Wendy also got the classic shot of a Goldfinch on teasel.



Goldfinch

We had purposely overnighted in Gloucestershire near Slimbridge as there was a rare American Wader, which had been there for nearly a month. This was a bird I'd wanted to see for a long time, as it's one that could possibly appear in the Isle of Man. Before we went looking for it though we nearly became bankrupt paying to get in at £11 each! This would be the first and last time we visited Slimbridge with that sort of entrance price! Firstly Wendy needed a Coffee fix, to try and counteract the Stugeron downer that was making her well zonked, so we headed straight for the Cafe. Luckily it was very nice, which is one thing that the RSPB reserves should learn from, and as we hadn't had much for breakfast we also got some toast to keep us going. After refueling, a quick check of the logbook revealed that the bird had been seen from the Zeiss hide the day before so off we went. Stepping outside our first impressions weren't good. We were expecting Slimbridge to be the usual WWT affair like Martin Mere, one side zoo and the other side wild. Disappointingly, looking at the rubbish map it looked like the wild bits were mingled in with the zoo bits... errr? We battled our way through the numerous women with prams, screaming kids and the begging geese, seeing **Lesser black-backed Gull**, **Coot**, **Pintail**, which we assumed were wild and got to the Zeiss hide in one piece. Our first **Grey Squirrel** of the trip was scurrying around on the ground before it leapt up a tree and vanished round the back. Looking out from this hide was a bit of an anticlimax as the mud and water were about 1 billion miles away.



Where's the water?

We could just about see the tiny dots that were waders in the distance so set about attempting to go through them. There were **Swallows** feeding over the pool, **Lapwing**, **Black-tailed Godwit**, **Redshank**, **Ruff**, **Knot**, **Dunlin** and **Curlew** but no sign of our target bird :(While we were desperately looking for it a **Buzzard** flew by and flushed most of the birds. This put up **Starling**, **Shoveler**, **Teal** and a **Common Snipe** and we also found a few **Wheatear** but there was still no sign of what we were after. With the cold wind blasting through the hide windows and the clock ticking we eventually decided to give up. Before we left I thought I'd better check my BirdGuides and RBA apps to see if there'd been any reports of the bird but to my horror my phone had no 3g connection.... Argghhh! If my phone couldn't get a 3g connection then we would be practically blind for the whole holiday and we would miss out if anything decent was found. Noooooooo! This could spell disaster so I tried some different settings as a last ditch attempt but they also didn't work... Arrghhh! Depressed, we trudged off to check out the other hides.....if we could find them. After checking the Slimbridge leaflet map and getting totally confused we just went for the first path we found which lead us through some trees. We heard a **Treecreeper** and a flock of **Long-tailed tit** and on a nearby pool we saw some **Tufted Duck**. Slightly disheartened by what we'd seen (or not seen) by that point we decided to have a look at the Dragonfly pond by the Van de Bovenkamp Hide to try to rescue our visit. On the path leading up to it were loads of Butterflies so we stopped to see what was about. There were **Red Admiral**, **Small Tortoiseshell**, **Speckled Wood** and **Green-veined White** everywhere and we also found a couple of lovely **Commas** which Wendy managed to get a belting shot of.



Comma

The pool itself was pretty quiet on the Dragonfly front though with just a few **Common Darters** and a **Migrant Hawker** flying about. Sitting in the grass by our feet we found a small pale moth, which we'd never seen before. Wendy got a pic of it and later that evening it was ID'd on the iSpot website as a female **Small China Mark**.....finally a lifer for us even if was just a moth! I found out later on that these moths are semi-aquatic, I never knew moth larva could live underwater. Very interesting little things!



Small China Mark

Even so, it certainly wasn't looking as though we'd be leaving Slimbridge with a bird lifer. Having wasted sufficient time there we moved over to the Kingfisher Hide which we thought would be as good a place as any to see the bird it's named after.



Kingfisher hide

It seemed like a good move until we arrived and read the info board explaining how there were now no Kingfishers there as they'd not survived the past 2 harsh winters! How depressing :(On a lighter note it did say that they were confident that in time they would re-establish themselves there and that there'd already been a sighting of one bird earlier in the year. We knew that the population had suffered this year due to the heavy rainfall so fingers crossed it doesn't happen again next year to give them a chance of recovering. We had a quick look at the channel but only found **Gadwall** and **Little Grebe** to add to our list.

Heading back down the path we heard **Chiffchaff** and **Cetti's Warbler** singing somewhere deep within the bushes but nothing had caught our eyes or ears yet as being anything different. The 3g problem was still on my mind so I had a quick look at my phone and was very relieved to find that my adjusted settings had luckily worked and that we now had a 3g signal....Phew! Literally seconds later I received a phone alert reporting the bird we were after but it wasn't at the Zeiss Hide, as we'd been told earlier, it was on South Lake. No wonder we hadn't found it.....Grrrrrr! Feeling more positive we attempted to head to the hide but yet again looking at the map we couldn't work out which way to go, it really was the worst reserve map I've ever seen. Eventually I decided to use the sun's position (sort of) to work out which path to go on and luckily we finally found the hide. There was already a good few people in there who'd hijacked the very few spaces with their scopes and tripods. We looked longingly at the long comfy looking sofa (in a hide!), as we were beginning to flag at that point, but it was occupied with someone's rucksacks and coats etc. Luckily the guy sitting nearby moved them so we could finally sit down to try and find the bird through the dirty windows. The sun was out so with all the glass in the hide it was just like being in a greenhouse and we were absolutely boiling! Typically, the sun was right in our faces so on first glances all we could see on the pool were the silhouettes of many Black-tailed Godwits with a **Grey Heron** and a couple of **Cormorants** thrown in...woopy doo! I scanned for a few seconds and was sure I could see our bird but as it was just a black blob it was very hard to tell so I asked the bench hogger bloke, who had a scope, if that was it. He confirmed it and we both got a pretty bad view of our first lifer of the trip.....**Long-billed Dowitcher**! I got up and moved into a slightly better position to get a very poor, into the sun, record shot over some people's shoulders before we got our stuff together and left.



Long-billed Dowitcher

We'd really thought we'd going away empty handed but even though our view was bad it was still a good result from our first location of the day. Happy with that we returned to the giant WWT HQ.



Slimbridge HQ

Wendy was flagging again so we paid the Café a second visit for a caffeine top-up and a quick rest before we headed off to our 2nd stop of the day and another possible lifer.

We left at 12.50pm and were now 1hr behind schedule. It was going to take about 2hrs 15mins to reach our next location and when we got there we didn't really know how far we'd have to walk or if the bird was still there. Driving away from the reserve we saw **Great Tit, Magpie** and passed a dead Badger at the side of the road, which is usually the only way we see them. The only positive thing we could say about it was that at least it had escaped the (totally pointless and barbaric)

Badger cull they'd just put into action in Gloucestershire :(. Something, which struck us in the area, was a noticeable lack of cows compared to everywhere else, making the decision to take such drastic action even more mind bending.

Progress was very slow on the M5 anyway so an extra hold up due to a couple of young lads stuffing their car into a ditch, on a completely straight road, were not ideal. We really needed to make some good progress, as we didn't want to be arriving at our H.Q half dead at midnight. By the time we'd hit Somerset at 1.47pm we'd counted 16 x Buzzards which was pretty good. Somerset itself, with Devon and Plymouth combined, only clocked up a measly total of 4 and apart from a **Kestrel** at the side of the motorway in Somerset we saw nothing else. We crossed the Tamar Bridge into Cornwall at 3.09pm, which even with the delays was pretty much to my revised schedule.

We arrived at China Fleet Country Club at 3.15pm and our next challenge was to find the Nature Trail. Firstly though Wendy had to find a W.C and some coffee in a place that resembled The Mount Murray but bigger and better. This made us feel more than a bit awkward as you don't tend to get many Birders there either! She tried inside the Health Club but it was very posh and only seemed to have changing rooms with showers for the Swimming Pool. There was however some disabled toilets so out of desperation and when nobody was looking she dived into one. Feeling slightly out place she decided not to attempt the Bistro/Café just in case they mistook her for the local tramp and reappeared coffeeless. Luckily the Golf Shop nearby had a sign outside for Coffee so in she went for her, much needed, fix and quickly returned with a Cappuccino and also directions to the Nature Trail....wahey good skills! I'm assuming that as part of the planning permission for the metropolis of the Country Club & Golf Course they had to build a nature trail and hides. I just wish this type of ruling happened in the Isle of Man! After downing her coffee in record time, burning her throat in process, we set off down a small track outside the perimeter fence of the driving range.

There were a good few balls on the track so we were slightly paranoid of being hit on the head by one as that would be bound to hurt! It was such a nice, sunny day that the bushes were covered in Butterflies but Wendy spotted something else landing on a branch. We had a look and were very pleased to see that it was in fact a **Beautiful Demoiselle**, which was another lifer for us both! Before I had time to raise my camera it was off and disappeared way up the track never to be seen again :(The first hide wasn't far away at all but the second, where of course the bird was reported from, seemed like miles away. Eventually the hide was in sight and we bailed in and sat down...Phew! Why can't birds choose the nearest hides to plonk themselves or at least sometimes? From there we could see **Little Egrets** and a load of waders including **Greenshank** over on the far bank which as usual was miles off. There were also **Sand Martins** feeding over the pool but finding our bird at such a distance was looking hopeless.



Kingsmill Lake

We both had our eye on the smaller waders but it was impossible to get any details at that range and we could only be sure of the Redshanks. All of a sudden the birds lifted and flew to a different

spot landing again at the waters edge. I noticed a bird, which had been hidden until then, lift up from a spot a tiny bit closer to us. My first thoughts were that it wasn't a Redshank or Greenshank but its back pattern reminded me of Green Sandpiper although it was too big for that. Something in my head was ringing alarm bells, I was sure this pattern was exactly right for our target bird. We watched it for a bit with baited breath and our fingers crossed that our instincts were right. I decided to get an extreme distance record shot of it and zoomed in to confirm our suspicions.....**Lesser Yellowlegs!** Woo Hoo Lifer number 2 for us both :).



Lesser Yellowlegs (just about!)

Wendy then let out a shriek, "**Kingfisher!**" She'd spotted it whizzing along right at the back on the far side and was watching it sitting on a perch. By the time she'd explained where it was to me it was off again and I never got to see it but we didn't have time to hang around and decided to call it a day.

Back at the car at 4.28pm I realized that I'd have to fill the car up again as the distance we'd already covered had nearly drained the tank. Wendy then pointed out that even though we'd arranged a delivery from Tesco, between 8-10pm, we wouldn't have any milk for drinks or anything to eat for our tea when we arrived at our H.Q. Grrrr.....this meant that we'd have to stop off at Morrisons on the way. So, after another long drive and a couple of detours seeing **Pied Wagtail** in Morrison's car park we finally, after a ridiculously long day, arrived at 'Surfers Paradise' in Porthcurno at 7pm.



Surfers Paradise

As we unloaded the car we heard a couple of **Yellow Wagtails** fly over and we lugged our gear up the 3 flights of stairs to our apartment. Our first impressions weren't the best as it didn't look half as nice as on the website but we reckoned that after a bit a scrub etc it would do us for the week. After moving our stuff in and microwaving a very quick tea of soup for Wendy and curry for me Tesco arrived at 8pm on the dot...handy :). With all our chores done Wendy finally retired to the bath to chill out but, as she was so tired, couldn't be bothered to get her ipod. When she emerged she was more than happy to have listened not to music, but to the sound of **Crickets** and **Tawny Owls** calling from the trees in the garden. I went out for a listen and the Owls were really close but we never managed to see one in the darkness. The sky was totally clear so the amount of stars was just amazing and with the warmth and sound of Crickets we could easily have been on a foreign holiday. We managed to stay awake until 11pm but decided to pack it in and go to bed with our only plan for the next day being NOT to get up early!

Saturday 15th September

After a good nights sleep Wendy was up at 7.20am closely followed by me. It was a lovely sunny day and even at those early hours we could feel a substantial increase in temperature compared with back at home. At the back of the apartment were steps down to a yard but there was also a raised garden behind the wall with bird feeders hung out in the trees. It looked as though it would've been a really good place to put the moth trap but we hadn't brought it due to lack of space in the car.....Nooooooo! Not to worry though, we were sure that the tons of ace birds in Cornwall would keep us occupied so we wouldn't have time for moths. The only new bird for us was a **Dunnoek** but the garden was certainly busy with all the usual garden birds. After breakfast we got our stuff together and I went to load up the car.....only to find that I couldn't find the door key. I asked Wendy had she seen it but she had no idea. Uh oh! After searching high and low I finally checked my dressing gown pocket and there it was. Whoops, silly me! We left at 9.30am with the plan being to go and check Porthgwarra as it was nearby. It had started to cloud over but was still warm so we crossed our fingers that it wouldn't rain. Porthgwarra is a coastal valley on the extreme SW corner of Cornwall and is renowned as one of the best places in Britain for migrants so we were brimming with excitement at the possibilities.

We pulled up at Porthgwarra car park at 9.42am with the hope of finding something brilliant somewhere along the line. The sun had reappeared again and the first thing to get our attention was something 'chatting' from the dense undergrowth near the car. We stood listening for about 10mins but there was no way we were going to get to see the culprit so knowing that it was going to bug us for ages we reluctantly started our walk up the track. The track was bordered by bushes caked in flowers and about half way up we came across a particularly busy section. We can honestly say that we'd never seen so many bees in such a small area before and we had to dodge

them as we walked passed.....Eeeeeek! The end of the track opens up onto a coastal heathland and that chatting had made us think of Whinchat, Dartford Warblers and whatever else the brilliant habitat had in store.



Porthgwarra

The chatting of **Stonechats** was the overriding sound and they were everywhere but it was nothing like what we'd heard earlier. A bit further along we heard a familiar sound, which turned out to be a **Whitethroat** flitting through the brambles. We also found an equally as skulking female **Blackcap** but we couldn't pick up on anything different at all. This wasn't a good start to our trip, such a great place should have something of interest in amongst the cover but for all our efforts there was nothing else. We walked over towards the coast where Wendy spotted a **Red-Throated Diver** flying over the sea. We were very surprised to see that just like at the Ayres and Smeale the area had loads of **Grayling Butterflies** and we also found a nice **Silver Y moth**. Scanning out to sea we only found big groups of **Gannets** heading North, **Shag** and **Great Black-backed Gull**. Luckily a bit of action appeared in the form of a **Peregrine**, which landed out on the rocks to our left. It was typically alert but if we could get closer to it without being spotted it would be a belter of a shot! Wendy got down with the rocks between herself and the bird and slowly edged nearer. The bird was onto her so she realized she couldn't afford to get any closer and would have to be quick if she was going to get a pic. As she moved her camera into position I could see it getting twitchy so alerted Wendy to be quick. She held her breath and fired off some two shots just before it flew.....Grrrrrr! There was no way it was going to let her any nearer so the photo opportunity of a lifetime had been and gone with the results being disappointing for her. We watched it disappear behind the cliffs and Wendy was gutted that the shot she ended up with wasn't what she'd envisaged in her head after first seeing the bird sitting there.



Peregrine

It's extremely difficult to stalk Falcons as they have 'eyes like a hawk' funnily enough :). The presence of the Peregrine had flushed some **Meadow Pipits** and also loads of **Linnets** who already had another predator to deal with. One minute a Peregrine, the next a Kestrel which frantically chased the flock around. They certainly gave it a run for it's money though and it finally zoomed off out of site and peace was resumed once more. While we were watching all this we noticed 2x **Wheatear** hopping about at the top of the ridge and a good few **White Wagtails** flitting around in the cove below us. We were just about to move off and continue with our walk when Wendy let out a shriek, "Yellow Butterfly!" We got it in our bins and were very happy to see a lovely **Clouded Yellow Butterfly** which was yet another lifer for us both and one which we'd always wanted to find somewhere on our travels. It would have been impossible to get a photo of it though as it was on a mission and didn't land once but it was brilliant to see regardless. We carried on over to the infamous 60ft cover where, back in the day, the ringers used to set up massive 60ft nets in the dense cover. They probably needed nets that big as there were so many amazing birds to trap and ring in those days so a normal net wouldn't hold the huge amount. There'd been a Wryneck reported there the day before but needless to say that, just as on our 2010 trip, yet again there was nothing, not even a squeak. All we found was a male Blackcap so we quickly gave up and headed up to the heathland pool where it was supposed to be good for Dragonflies.

In front of us on the footpath was a retired couple with a Golden Retriever and we had an awful feeling that they were going our way. Sure enough as we approached the pool, not only was their dog making a beeline for it, but there was already another retriever standing wagging it's tail right in the middle! The 2 dogs acted like long lost friends and proceeded to chase each other through the water like total lunatics.....Urrghhhhh! So, we scrubbed seeing any Dragonflies until they'd gone and amused ourselves by watching the dogs having fun. The dog owners hadn't looked like they were in a hurry to leave but when they eventually did the dogs had other ideas and carried on playing together. Luckily despite all the commotion we finally spotted some Common Darters on the boardwalk and then something much bigger appeared, flying low over the heather. It came closer to the far bank of the pool and we were able to see that it was an **Emperor Dragonfly**.....very unexpected but very nice :). Finally with a lot of shouting the mad dogs and their owners left and we wandered over to the dry stonewall which is another Wryneck hot spot. Obviously there were no Wrynicks but it was worth a shot, you never know :/. By then it was all too apparent that we were wasting our time there so we turned around and headed back to car, dodging the psycho bee bush as we passed it again.

It was 12.05pm by the time we got back and we thought we'd utilize the nice little Café as Wendy needed a caffeine fix after our pretty uneventful walk. We sat outside and she topped up with a Cappuccino while I demolished an ice cream....om nom nom :). Knowing what we know now about moths Wendy couldn't leave without a trip to the toilet block. She went in and had a look around but only found a **Plume Moth** on the wall inside, bet there's all sorts in there in summer and by that I mean moths! We ate our lunch back at the car and drove away at 12.50pm to go to our next stop, which was also nearby and the last large body of fresh water in the South West, making it a migrant magnet.

When we arrived at Drift Reservoir it was 1.12pm, overcast and quite cold. It wasn't at all obvious where we were supposed to go and what appeared to be the entrance gate had a Private sign on it. I decided to tweet a Cornwall Birder about access and while we waited for a reply we had a look up the road to see if there was another way in. There were quite a few fishermen about who were bound to know the Birders who went there so we would stick out like sore thumbs. I spotted a bird on a wire, which turned out to be a **Spotted Flycatcher** so we hung round for a while and Wendy got a nice shot.



Spotted Flycatcher

Walking up the road it looked like we were heading away from the reservoir so it wasn't looking good. There were no birds about but Wendy spotted a **Lizard** sunbathing in the hedge....don't ask me how! We turned back after I had a reply to my Tweet telling us to go through the Private gate anyway. Apparently, although it's a CBWPS member's only site, nobody asks you any question's as they're not that bothered. On the reservoir we could see **Great-crested Grebe** and 2 x **Little Grebes** but looking at the edges it didn't look like a very good habitat for waders at all. This was disappointing, as I'd imagined it to be better than it was and furthermore the hide was miles away. The fishermen were all floating around in the water on dingy type things but with their legs in the water so Wendy grabbed a sneaky pic.



Fisher dude

We'd never seen anything like them before but they looked like a great idea. Another Birder had arrived and was catching up with us so we hoped he wasn't going to question our presence. Luckily he didn't but we overheard him joking with a guy in the water who had fish jumping out of the water right next to him but had caught nothing! On the way over to the hide we stopped to take pictures of the numerous types of insects and heard a **Whimbrel** calling from somewhere, saw a **Carrion Crow** and a **Raven** flew over but the bushes were all pretty dead. The other Birder had overtaken us ages ago and gone into the hide while we'd amused ourselves, killed some time and I'd even ended up with a pretty nice shot.



Small Tortoiseshell

At the hide there seemed little point in hanging around never mind going in. There was absolutely no exposed mud for waders and I can only think that it was due to the recent heavy rainfall so we

called it a day and were back at the car by 2.47pm. I was quite disappointed by this as you always see Drift Reservoir mentioned on BirdGuides throughout the year. Back at the car park the Spottfly was still there and sun had reappeared so it was boiling again but after our long day yesterday we were starting to feel the strain. This was going to be a short day as we were already struggling to find anywhere else to go that was nearby. I'd planned on doing some local stuff though just so I could have a break from the long journey down. We scratched our heads until I suggested Pendeen Lighthouse to try and save the day, as it's the best Seawatching spot in Cornwall.



Pendeen

The best time to be at Pendeen Lighthouse is first thing in the morning and when it's a South Westerly Gale but when we arrived at 3.15pm it was neither. We looked out over the birdless calm sea and knew that it wasn't going to be worth the time or effort. We gave it a chance first though but after 30mins we'd only managed to find 2 distant **Manx Shearwaters**, which we could've easily seen at home. It was clouding over again and the sky had turned a nasty shade of grey so at 3.50pm we left.

We were back at HQ by 4.30pm feeling tired and disillusioned already. We were rapidly realizing that there was going to be no migration going on during our week and that we were probably going to see nothing out of the ordinary. We'd had our chill out day so from now on we'd have to travel further afield and hammer the place to try and find something! Wendy went outside for a listen but found a moth on the ground outside the back door. I got a quick pic and she ID'd it as a **Square-spot Rustic** which was another moth new to us. I put it up on ispot and later her ID was confirmed.



Square-spot Rustic

At 10.30pm and with no sign of the Tawny Owls, the past couple of days had taken their toll so both decided to have an early night in preparation for whatever tomorrow would bring.

Sunday 16th September

Even though she was still knackered Wendy was up and about at 6.22am.....nutter! I couldn't prize myself away from bed until 7am, which is definitely more like it. It started off being grey and overcast but by the time we were ready to go out it had cleared up. Our first plan was to try for the Spotted Crake, which had been reported regularly for the past few weeks at Marazion and we left at 8.30am.

As we were nearing our destination we were alerted by loads of yellow signs saying that the main road through Marazion was closed for the weekend! There was a bike race on as part of some 'Festival of Sport' so that totally scuppered our plan....Grrrrrrr! We parked up so that Wendy could grab a quick Coffee fix from the Café overlooking the beach. Just days before there'd been a Buff-breasted and Baird's Sandpiper there, which were showing incredibly well right up until just before we got to Cornwall! Inside the Café the very friendly owner asked Wendy if she was there for the festival and told her that it was the first time it had ever been held. OMG trust us to go there on the only 2 days in the entire history of the universe when they were hosting that.....typical! That stopped us going to Marazion so we quickly drove off and onwards towards The Lizard, our 2nd planned stop of the day, albeit slightly earlier than we'd expected. The Spotted Crake was obviously not going anywhere in a hurry so hopefully we'd get another chance.

We arrived at Kynance Cove at 9.49am and after being told precisely where to park and (literally) how by the military Nature Trust worker we got our stuff together. Firstly, we walked back on ourselves to the place where a Wryneck had been reported the day before. We weren't optimistic about it still being there by any means but it could be somewhere in the vicinity.....well you live in hope.



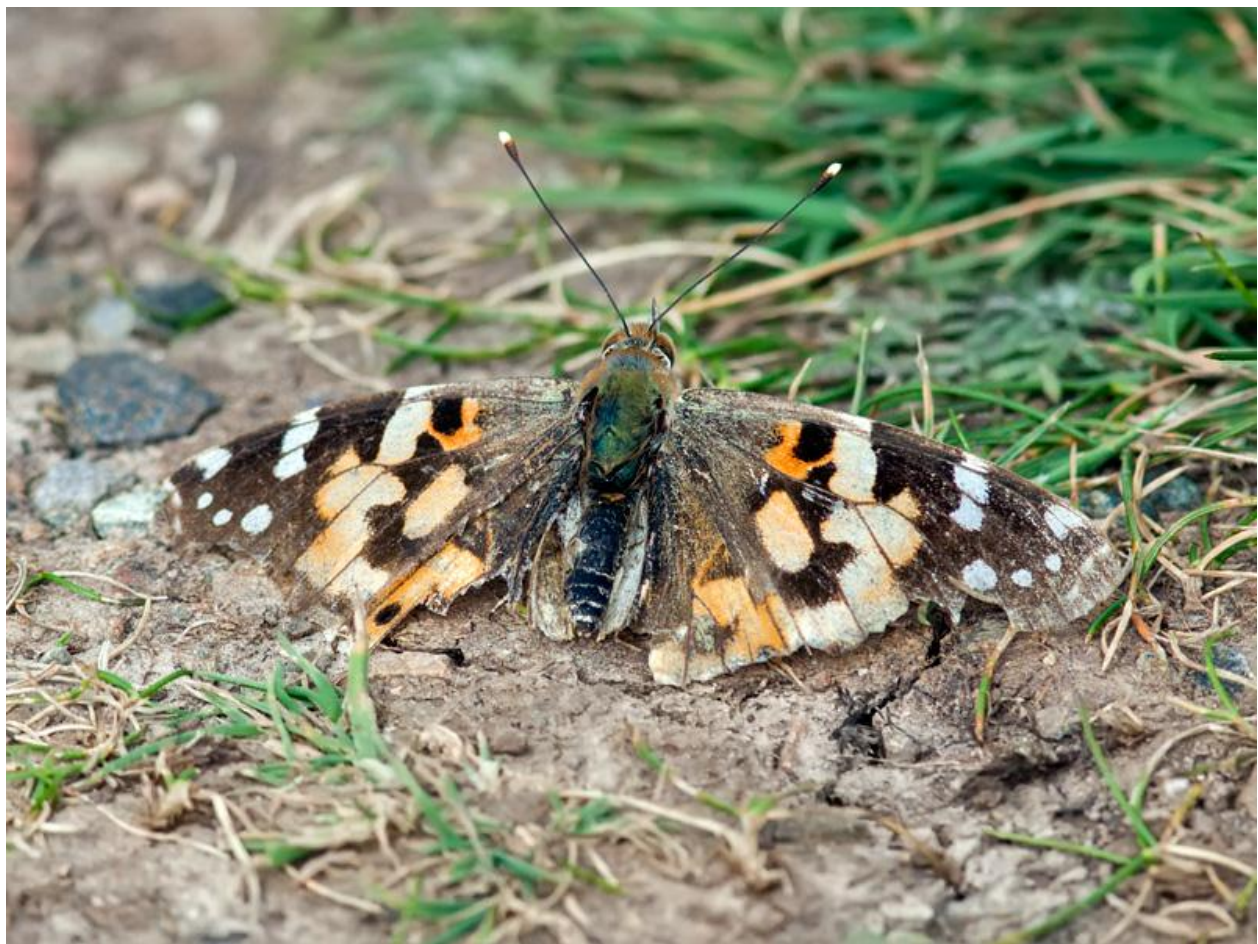
Wryneck area

We had a good look round the heath and bramble hedges but found nothing so we headed back and onto the track, which took us on a very scenic coastal walk. We were soon hearing the sound of **Choughs**, which appeared in a small group, flying along the cliff edge. Yet again the walk started with a steep climb up a footpath before it became flat at the top. About a mile into the walk we were on the way down again towards Kynance Cove.



Kynance Cove

There's a café down there but Wendy fought her cravings and we didn't stop but carried on up another steep climb. On the way up there were again a good few Butterflies out but one of them caught our eye with its strong flying style. When we got it in our bins we could see that it was a **Painted Lady** and as we'd only seen one on the I.O.M in the whole year (which was a lifer for me) we were pleased. As I have never taken a photo of a Painted Lady I set about trying to get one. I got in perfect position and could see in my mind a really good shot but as I looked through the viewfinder I was pretty disappointed to see this tatty looking specimen.....Dohhh!



Painted Lady

Wendy then found a small moth in the grass, which size and shape strongly resembled a type of moth she'd found at Smeale in the summer. It was a dull moth and looked like a *Pyrausta despicata* so I took a quick a record shot to ID.



Pyrausta Despicata

There was another Wheatear hopping about busily on the rocks below us but again there didn't seem to be much going on. I found a small hairy caterpillar wiggling across the path, which was

new to us so I got a record shot. A couple of weeks after the holiday I put it up on ispot and within 30mins we had our answer – final instar larva of a Knot Grass Moth. Shame it wasn't the actual moth as we've yet to see one but it's a start and pretty cool anyway.



Knot Grass Larva

It was a longer walk than we'd bargained on and when we reached the brilliant looking Soap Cove Valley, which was thick with cover for any skulking migrant, we had to stop and check it out. It really did look the business but unfortunately by that point we'd realized that there were no birds in the whole of Cornwall. We'd picked another duff week straight after a good week of movement.....Nooo! This place the previous week had, not one but two Wrynecks! Near the top of the valley was a rocky waterlogged path, which would eventually take us out and heading back in the direction of the car. Just before the path opened out we noticed some, would you believe it, BIRDS!!!!!! It was like all the birds in Kynance Cove had congregated in this one little spot. They were everywhere and included a couple of Wheatear, more Stonechats, Meadow Pipits, Tits and thankfully a single **Whinchat**.....Phew! We were beginning to think that we wouldn't see Whinchat at all on the trip so even though it wasn't anything amazing it was still good enough to lift our spirits.....slightly. Where was our Wryneck or Barred Warbler? By then anything would do! It was looking like another 'all pain no gain' type of holiday. At the top of the valley we turned a corner onto the flat where the path, which ran between fields became wider and easier under foot. There were hedges either side of us but no sign of any life in them. Depression had well and truly set in and we just wanted to get back to the car for a drink and some food. All of a sudden a bird flew off an exposed bit of mud by the hedge, across the path in front of us and into the hedge on the other side. It was brown, looked streaked, big for a small bird and seemed to have a longish tail! I nearly called it but bit my lip. I was sure that it was well worth persevering with so we backtracked and went through the gate into the field to see if had gone round the other side. We stood for ages, waiting but there was no movement. In a last ditch attempt to try and corner it I walked the field while Wendy went back to the track to stand on the other side of the hedge. It was a nail-biting few minutes but needless to say the bird didn't move a muscle and stayed well hidden. I was absolutely convinced it was a Wryneck but knowing that we couldn't stay there all day we had to prize ourselves away and head back. So near yet so far! :(

Back at the car at 1pm I thought that we should drive to Lizard Point to eat our lunch. We arrived at 1.20pm, refueled and then decided that while we were there we may as well take a wander. Lizard Point is the most Southern tip in the UK so as expected it was bustling with people including a lot of American Tourists. There were tons of people down at the point having their photos taken so we considered our position to be near enough and kept our distance.



Lizard point

As there was not much going on there we didn't hang around and were leaving at 1.54pm for our next stop Kennack Sands.

Before going to Cornwall I'd attempted to research where to see my dream Dragonfly the Golden Ringed Dragonfly. There was little information to be found but I did find someone's pictures of one at Kennack Sands so, as it was only 5mins away we headed off there. When we arrived at the car park at 2.10pm we were faced with a parking charge of £3 for the whole day. We knew we wouldn't be staying long so felt a bit reluctant to be getting stung again just to park up for a few minutes. Just as we were getting out of the car to go and pay, a very kind man whistled over to us and handed me his ticket.....nice one :). He told us that it made him angry, that he didn't agree with the charge for a whole day and said, "I bet you're not even going to be long are you?" He was bang on! We thanked him for his gesture and with an eye roll and a smile he drove away. We put our freebie ticket in the car window and scuttled past the ticket hut trying not to be noticed. Kennack Sands is a beach famed for its white sand and good swimming, diving and surfing conditions.



Kennack Sands

There's a stream running down to it, which is surrounded by a wooded area so we could see that it had potential. We made our way up a sandy path, over to the stream and stood on the wooden bridge across it. We were starting to think that not only were we too early for bird migration but that we were too late for Golden-ringed Dragonflies.....Urrghhhh! It was dead! We wanted to give it a chance though so stuck around for a while and eventually saw another Beautiful Demoiselle but nothing else. Looking at the bushes they appeared to be equally as dead until we heard a sound that we didn't recognize. Not long after a couple of Warblers came flying out of the bushes giving us a split second view and vanished deep inside the cover. They never showed again and the sounds became more distant so they were obviously moving their way through and away from us. This seemed like the best time to give up and go to the Café for a drink.

There were 2 Cafes to choose from, one was where you pay for parking so was out of the question and the other looked as good a place as any for a caffeine fix. Wendy ordered herself a Cappuccino and as usual the rather strange looking girl asked her did she want chocolate on top to which she replied, "Yes please." It's a standard question to ask as maybe some people don't like chocolate sprinkles on theirs but when Wendy looked over her eyes nearly popped out of her head. "Oh, No chocolate on mine thanks, I thought you meant chocolate sprinkles!" she yelled in horror. The girl was pouring liquid chocolate all over the top of her coffee from a plastic squeezezy bottle. The girl's even stranger looking mother (we presume) stepped in and said, "What do you mean no chocolate, this is the ONLY way to serve Cappuccino." I don't drink the stuff but even I know that it really isn't. Wendy's face fell as she looked at the gooey sickly looking beverage in front of her but drank it anyway wondering how they could think millions of Italians could be soooo wrong. After that we headed back to the car and left at 2.55pm and not wanting to give up on our Dragonfly hunt I realized we still had time to visit a place I had planned to visit.....Windmill Farm.

Windmill Farm is, as the name suggests, a farm but with a difference. The farmer has made it into a nature reserve and opened it up to the public for free, which we thought was just brilliant.



Windmill Farm

When we arrived at 3.05pm it was warm and sunny which is always a good start for Dragonflies. There were a few **Greenfinches** in the trees on the track near the car park and we weren't alone. A van had pulled up next to us and a guy in his 30's, with bins and Nikon gear, hopped out. We had to laugh as everything about him reminded us of a certain individual from back at home, he could easily have been his brother :P. We went into the small Visitors Centre and had a flick through the comments book. The last entry was by a man who'd for some reason brought his children there but had been disappointed and recommended a children's play area and sports activities etc! As a nature reserve shouldn't it be kept as nature intended and be nothing but a thriving habitat for wildlife to be enjoyed and learnt about by interested people? Why bring children to it if there's nothing for them to do? Honestly, some people! Wendy wrote a few suitable lines in protest, rightfully calling the previous commenter an idiot and we left to explore the reserve.

We picked up a map from the Centre but as the paths were seasonal it was hard to work out where to go. Thinking that Nikon man knew his way around we followed him down through a field of cows to a pond.



Drying up pond

The field was full of Yellow Wagtails, which were quickly flushed by Nikon man, but down at the pond we couldn't see much sign of life. Nikon man had got himself into position with his camera anyway. Eventually we could see loads of Common Darters sunning themselves on the path so we thought we may as well start looking through them....if they'd just stay still! As we scanned them I noticed one, which looked slightly different and crossed my fingers that it was a Ruddy Darter. On closer inspection I noticed it had red veins and blue under its eyes so this could only mean one thing.....**Red-veined Darter!** Another lifer for us both :). These are migrant Dragonflies that keep trying to colonise Southern England. Some hang on but we weren't sure if these were born in the UK or migrants from the Continent, either way it was fantastic to see them. This was a Dragonfly along with Golden ringed that I was hoping to see on this trip. After grabbing a quick record shot it flew off so we started looking for a path to the other pools.



Red-veined Darter

We soon realized that we'd gone the wrong way, as there was no sign of a path leading to the rest of the reserve. We ended up asking Nikon man and it turned out that he'd only gone there for a look because he'd not looked at that pool for a while. He told us we'd have to walk back on ourselves through the cow field and turn left at the top.....Urrghghh! I suppose it was a good job we'd gone wrong though as we wouldn't have seen a new Dragonfly if we hadn't.

Back on track we spotted the first of the two pools that are supposed to be the Dragonfly pools and went for a look.



Dragonfly pool

There was a **Sedge Warbler** singing from somewhere in the reeds and loads of **Common Blue Damselflies** with the odd **Emerald** and **Blue-tailed Damselfly** amongst them. We then ended up wondering if we'd gone wrong somewhere along the line again and were fighting our way through a spider ridden overgrown jungle presumably to the next pond. We heard a **Great-spotted Woodpecker** calling but only caught a fleeting glimpse of the bird as it flew between trees. We ended up on an old RAF airfield approach road so we had a quick look at the old airfield.



Old Airfield

On it were old rusting Harriers, Hawks, Sea Kings and all sorts....weird. On the way back we found 2 x juvenile Yellow Wagtails in another cow field and we were back at the car by 4.31pm. By now we were definitely feeling tired but knowing that we'd be passing on our way home we decided to go to Marazion again in the hope that the 'Festival of Sport' was over for the day and that the road had reopened.

By the time we'd parked up in the weather was changing again and it was now really windy and decidedly chilly. We made our way down the track and found the 'standing stone' from where the bird we were after was viewable from. All we could do was wait, and wait we did! Most of the reports of the bird were from early morning so we weren't holding any hopes. We knew that the bird would be deep in the reeds and it wouldn't budge and come out into the open unless it fancied it. On this occasion it wasn't playing so we had to give up as it was getting late and we still needed to go to a shop for some bits we needed. Down on the beach by the car park was a flock of very close **Turnstone**, Dunlin and **Ringed Plover** and we couldn't help but feel sick that we'd missed the Baird's and Buff-breasted Sandpipers from the previous week.

As we drove up to Morrison's the car park was unnaturally quiet and it turned out that it was closed....Uh oh! We went straight to Tesco down the road and it too was closed! There was only one other option, to drive into St Just and go to the Spa, which was a diversion but we had no option. By the time we'd done that, and come away with practically nothing, I couldn't be bothered connecting my SatNav back in for the short journey home. Bad move! I ended up going the wrong way so we got lost and went home the long way so we didn't arrive back at H.Q until 6.30pm, extremely tired and very hungry.

At the end of the day after tea and baths etc. there was again no sign of the Tawny Owls and it was threatening rain so we went to bed hoping that something would happen tomorrow :/.

Monday 17th September

After waking up at 7am and finding that it had indeed rained over night we felt pleasantly optimistic, even though it was overcast and felt pretty cold again. Well at least we did for a split second before I read my text alert that a Wryneck had been reported at 3pm south of the bridleway at Kynance yesterday! OMG that meant that what we'd seen hadn't been so crazy after all, if only we'd been able to clinch the ID.....Aarrghhhh! With that frustrating news we headed out at 8.47am finding a Chiffchaff in the bushes by the car so surely this was a sign of some movement? We thought we'd start the day with a very familiar haunt, Nanquidno. We'd stayed there on our 2010 trip and it had been hyped as being the best valley in Cornwall so we'd had high expectations. In reality, apart from loads of Firecrests (which can't be sniffed at), we'd not witnessed any such thing so we thought we'd give it another shot at least once during our 2nd trip. Although we knew that this time in September was too early for Firecrest it would be nice to revisit anyway. We'd actually thought about staying at 'Nanquidno Barn' (where we'd stayed last time) but by the time we'd made our minds up someone else had beaten us to it by a day!

Passing Land's End Aerodrome, which is noted for American Waders, we had a quick look finding only 2 x Wheatear. There had been no previous reports from there either so we weren't too surprised. We arrived in Nanquidno at 9.07am and it felt like we'd never been away. The 3 over friendly dogs from down the road, which sat outside on the wall of a house waiting for passers by to bark at and follow, were all still there. Nanquidno Barn was indeed inhabited and nothing had changed at all. We started off our walk by retracing our early morning route in 2010 where all the Firecrest trees are.



Nanquidno

It was lovely being back in old territory but after walking all the way down to coast we found nothing and all was quiet. We turned round and headed back and on the way we were greeted by 2 very jolly blokes who made us raise an eyebrow when they said, "There were 3 of those there Ospreys over the fields this morning." Ooo Arr, I think they meant Buzzards really but at least they were trying to be helpful. We thanked them and carried on, crossing the stream and walking up the farm track, which overlooks the wooded area. There were Chiffchaffs everywhere but a Great-spotted Woodpecker and Spotfly were all we saw in this section so we decided to admit defeat. Back at the car at 10.15am it was absolutely boiling and sunny and on route to our next stop we decided to go back through St Just to get Wendy a Coffee and grab a loaf of bread from the Bakery.

After our quick break, which included a very nice cookie from the Bakery, we arrived in Cot Valley at 10.46am.



Cot Valley

This had proved another Firecrest hotspot when we were there last time but we weren't sure what else, apart from a possible Wryneck or some kind of weird Warbler we could expect. We took a wander down the road and scanned the fir trees by the houses but could only find some of the

common species we'd already seen. The road continues down the hill and on the left side of the valley is a stream with dense bramble bushes and bracken as far as the eye could see. This looked like it was going to be a long slow process and our patience would be stretched to the limit. To say it was stretched would be an understatement as every bird we saw would give a nano second appearance before vanishing back inside the bushes....Grrrrrr! One of them though looked very different so we knew we had to persevere and stay put until it came back out into view.....if it did! It was right next to us in the bush by the road but it was so deep inside all we could see was a shape moving from time to time but could get no details. I went round to the other side of the bush as it seemed to moving away from us but Wendy had noticed it working its way up higher and didn't dare move. She eventually got it in her bins and for a brief moment saw it**Barred Warbler!** OMG! Try as she might she couldn't direct me to the bird so the only view I had of it was a large warbler shape at the back of a dense bush. Maybe this was an indication that stuff was happening at last so we'd just have to put the effort in to find something! I put the news out straight away, as there'd been no reports of any other sightings of these birds up until now. We tried to relocate the bird to where we thought it had flown to but there was no further sign and buoyed by this we headed off with renewed enthusiasm.

We carried on down the road towards a rocky cove on the coast but by then we'd seen enough to know that we were wasting our time going any further and that the Barred had been a one off so we turned round. We stopped off at the Barred Warbler bush just in case it was still about but all we found was a load of Blackcaps on the other side of the stream and a million Chiffchaffs. Back up the road at the fir trees it had become Goldcrest central but even though we could hear them loud and clear, it was impossible to see any so there was no chance of finding a Firecrest in amongst them. We were back at the car 12.07pm and heading off to our next stop.

It didn't take long to get to Kenidjack and we arrived at 12.19pm feeling slightly disheartened by the lack of reports of decent birds about. The high of finding the Barred Warbler had lasted all of 2mins and the come down was in full swing. We dragged ourselves down the road past the empty trees and bushes that surrounded us with as much spring in our step as in a Tempur mattress! Wendy found a moth we didn't recognize feeding on some flowers so I grabbed a record shot to ID it later. Looking back at it later we were uncertain, as it was so washed out, and could only come up with **Rosy Rustic** so again I turned to the brilliant ispot and our ID was right.



Rosy Rustic

We had to do a double take in disbelief when we saw 3 Birders coming towards us, we could count on one hand how many we'd seen so far out in the field. 3 together was a record but we were

stumped as to why there were so few Birders out and about. We're so used to being in Norfolk where the majority of people we see have bins, scopes or camera gear and sometimes the lot! We'd expected Cornwall to be crawling with them too especially in September but everywhere we went we seemed to be the only ones. Maybe they all knew something we didn't? Maybe they'd all thrown themselves off cliffs because they couldn't cope with the depression of seeing nothing? Whatever the reason it really wasn't very helpful to us.

Kenidjack has a brilliant old Mine, so we wandered down to have a look at it again and got some pics.



Kenidjack Mine

The only living thing down there though, were some Donkeys in a field and decided that we could see no point in going any further so headed back to the car. Back at the car at 1.25pm we were pretty hungry and we knew it was time for lunch. Rather than have it there though we thought we'd wait and drive to Pendeen Lighthouse where there might be something to look at while we ate it.

Ten minutes later we pulled up in the lower car park and opened up our lunch bag. As we ate our lunch a car pulled up and a couple got out and started looking out to sea. "Ooooo Sea Lions, can you see the Sea Lions?" the woman, who looked slightly nuts, screamed. Wow that would be a first for the UK! :P. Apart from big groups of Gannets we finally picked out a Manx Shearwater blasting through, then another 13, then 12 then 8 but still nothing like we'd hoped for. A Skua would've been nice to add a slight bit of interest but it just wasn't happening so we left at 2.15pm empty handed.....again.

As it was now raining and the thought of walking about looking for birds was less than appealing we decided to do the touristy bit and go into St Ives to get some pressies to take home. On the way we passed an open top bus, heading to Lands End, full of cold and wet looking tourists. So, it could be worse, we could have been them!

We arrived at an incredibly busy St Ives at 3.01pm and what a nightmare! The roads to the car park are very narrow but are also pedestrianized as they're in the main shopping streets. I kept panicking that I was driving down a pedestrian only zone but eventually I got behind another car so was able to relax a touch. I don't know what it is with the people but they seem to be ignoring the traffic and walking down the middle of the road as if the cars weren't there. There were people walking dogs, pushing massive prams or just generally milling about everywhere and none of them looked like they wanted to move for us.....Grrrrrr! When we got up to the car park it appeared to be full but after driving round I eventually found the only space left and parked up. St Ives has been the worst and most stressful place I've ever had the misfortune to drive through. It makes the Peel roads look like they could take a supertanker no problem! Wendy spotted a Wheatear hopping about, which wasn't stopping as it flew off over the rooftops and was gone. We left all our stuff in

the car and headed off into town in the rain. It was ridiculously busy and after grabbing a few Cornwall inspired bits and bobs, we'd seen enough and ended up ducking for cover in a posh Italian Restaurant/Café so Wendy could have a small and overpriced Coffee while watching the rain.



St Ives

We were back at the car at 4.10pm and with nothing being reported and the weather being so grim (but not windy) we thought we'd head home via Marazion for our 2nd look of the day.

At 4.10pm we were back where we'd started the day and on the way to 'Spot Crake Pool' we heard the blast of a Cetti's Warbler and saw a few Little Egrets roosting in the trees. It was cold but there was another couple of Birders there this time so we asked them if there'd been any sign but of course there hadn't....Urrghhhh!



Marazion

The younger of them had only been into Birding and photography for 18 months and was having a great time away from his wife who hates it. He lived in the Midlands and had seen 7 lifers since he'd arrived on Saturday but had already tried 5 times and put 20hrs into this bird :O. This shocked us but not half as much as the older guys story. He'd just arrived, also from the Midlands, on the

back of the Aquatic Warbler, which as usual had used Marazion as a stop off point before heading south about a month earlier. Apparently he'd read that it was a long stayer and must have got his wires crossed thinking long stayer meant months not weeks so had high hopes of seeing it. He was so desperate that he was practically suicidal when we broke the news to him that it was long gone. We felt really bad telling him but someone had to.....and quickly! The sympathy didn't last long as it wasn't long before he stood up on the bank to try and find the Spotted Crake. I couldn't believe anyone would be that stupid! We were all standing still and quietly, in the hope that this notoriously secretive bird would feel confident enough to come out into the open and that muppet goes and does that. I couldn't be bothered to tick him off so we left at 5.35pm.

By then we were tired and hungry and just wanted to get back but typically we got stuck behind a Seat Leon which was going at the pace of a tranquilized snail.....Urrghhhh! Finally we were back at HQ by 6pm and although we'd planned to go back to Pendeen Lighthouse before it got dark, by the time we'd had tea the light was fading fast. We had to ditch the idea off but it was probably for the best as no reports of any interest came in later on and we were knackered. Yet again there was no sign of the Owls so we considered them being there on our first night to have been a one off bonus.

Tuesday 18th September

We were up at 6am and before we'd even looked outside we could hear that it was the windiest it had been since our arrival. That was our morning sorted then....Pendeen Lighthouse, as early as we could get there! As the Spot Crake had only been reported early am or late pm it was difficult to know where to go first so in the end we settled for Marazion and left at 7.24am.

It felt like we'd been there too many times before when we parked up at 7.46am but that was possibly because we actually had! This was the earliest we had got to Marazion so I was feeling a bit more enthusiastic than the previous times. It started to rain as we traipsed back along the track but by the time we got to the pool, a rainbow was forming so the shower was passing over. The rainbow turned out to be a double one, which was quite cool to see.



Rainbows!

Even being there early we still didn't see anything and not wanting to waste too much time, we left at 8.09am and headed straight off for a bit of seawatching.

It was 8.32am when we arrived at Pendeen Lighthouse and it was certainly the windiest we'd seen it, although looking at the forecast it still wasn't strong enough for proper seawatching conditions :(There was yet another Wheatear hopping about and a **Sparrowhawk** out hunting for breakfast. We battled our way down the steps and round the back of the lighthouse, nearly being blown off the cliff as we went.



Pendeen

Round the back there was already quite a gathering of about 20 other people huddled around their scopes, looking out to sea and mumbling amongst themselves. So this was where all the Cornwall birders were! It looks like the difficult traipsing around bushes early morning has been dropped in favour of sitting down and letting birds come to them! We found a spot against a wall and sat down in the grass to get some kind of stability from the wind. Endless streams of Manxies were zooming past with some only about 100 yards out, I just knew that there had to be something else in with them.....if we could just pick them out! Finally I called out, "**Balearic Shearwater!**" I just didn't have the time to explain to Wendy whereabouts before I'd lost it amongst the gazillion speedy Manxies :(I was gutted as it would've been a lifer for her but this kind of fast pace and hectic birding was always going to prove a challenge. I then spotted a **Sooty Shearwater**, which I also couldn't get Wendy onto but fortunately she found her own, which was lifer number 3 of the trip for her. I ended up seeing 2 x Balearic and in total we counted 3 x Sooty but the number of **Puffins** flying past was a surprise to us as we hadn't expected to see any. When the seawatch report came in later that night I was relieved to see that we hadn't missed anything. There'd been no big Shearwaters or Long-tailed Skuas, which I was desperate to see for a lifer, but we'd managed to see nearly all of the Sootys and Balearics reported that day.....Phew!

By 9.30am our fingers and toes were numb and it was obvious that the huge numbers of birds moving through had dropped right off so we raced back to the car to warm up. I drove over to the lower car park so we could still have a good view but this time in comfort. While we scanned and complained about how rubbish it had been Wendy shouted, "Skua!" Sure enough there was a **Great Skua** out there....Yes! It carried on and soon vanished out of sight but a Skua's a Skua and we couldn't grumble at that. Apart from **Razorbill** and **Kittiwake** we saw nothing else so we decided to pack it in and left at 10.16am.

We were on our way to Lands End but detoured via St Just for a coffee fix for Wendy and of course a cookie.....om nom nom :). It was already 11.20am when we arrived at Lands End and this time I would be staying well clear of the hideously busy Visitor Center and it's tourist/family days out. Wendy went off to the WC first and returned about half an hour later after standing, dwarfed, in a queue of about 20 6ft German girls who were obviously on a school trip. It was nice and sunny when we started our walk but very windy which made it feel colder than it should've been. We used the Best Birdwatching sites in Cornwall book to pick a walk and decided on the north path as that was supposed to be good for migrants. The habitat was again brilliant and there were so many places where we could just picture a Wryneck.



Lands End

Unfortunately though the footpaths are well walked and it was quite late in the day so we neither saw or found anything apart from another Wheatear and some Stonechats.....Urrghhhhh! With all the walking we'd done you'd think we'd be feeling fit but it seemed to be having the opposite effect. The walk itself was very pleasant but we were back at the car by 12.49pm and starving so we ate our lunch quickly before heading off at 1.10pm. As we'd be driving straight past our HQ we stopped off for 1/2hr to sit down and chill out before setting off for our next stop.

Nanjizal valley is known as the best place for mega rare migrants in Britain and the walk starts on a stretch of road leading to a farm, which is lined with trees either side.



Nanjizal walk

We'd done that section on our 2010 trip and found a few Firecrests but we were planning to do the whole walk down to the beach this time. With no reports at such a late stage in the day we weren't optimistic but with seemingly nobody else out looking it was worth a shot. We arrived at 1.53pm and started the walk down the farm track but as we'd expected there was nothing about. At the end of the track by the farmhouse is supposed to be a separate footpath, which takes you down a field to

some pools. The pools were mentioned in our book as being brilliant for migrants like Night Heron and American waders so off we plodded down the dry stubbly field. There were loads of Common Darters about which we were looking through until we heard a voice shouting over to us. We looked up and saw the farmer standing there, looking slightly annoyed and shouting, "Gerroff moi laaand!" Well, not exactly in those words but near enough. We were slightly confused when he told us that we were on private property so I explained that we'd read about the pools in our book and that we thought we were on a public footpath. His reaction was to say, "That book was written without permission, there's been a lot of trouble over that!" Hmmmmmmm we strongly suspect he may have been full off **** and just didn't want people on his farm. He told us that we could stay where we were and look for birds if we wanted but seeing as there wasn't any we saw absolutely no point in taking him up on his 'very generous' offer.....Bah! On the way back up I called up a map on my iphone and the footpath through the field was clearly marked on it.....and don't even get me started on the stile that lead into the field in the first place...Grrrrr!

After that bit of drama we felt a bit demotivated, especially Wendy, but we carried on and took the footpath down to supposedly the nicest cove in Cornwall. We walked past the Alder Flycatcher field and scanned desperately but couldn't even find a common bird!



Nanjizal Valley

When we finally got to the cove it did look nice so we could see why it was popular with walkers. I wanted to go and have a look at the caves but was slightly put off by the two women sunbathing topless in front of them. The cove was dotted with people all over the place but it was totally void of any wildlife so we quickly climbed back out and what a climb it was! To make the walk a loop instead of going back on ourselves we went on the northerly path, which was practically a sheer cliff that we had to scale like mountain goats! As soon as we'd reached the top we had to go back down again and cross a valley back up towards the farm. Urrghhhh this walk was a killer! Yet again we were walking through superb habitat for migrants and as usual there were no birds. This was becoming an all too familiar pattern. As we walked down the farm track we spotted a pristine Painted Lady Butterfly so I raised my camera but before I could get a shot it flew and I'd missed it.....Nooooooo! On the last leg back to the car we saw a **Jay** but then finally after being dead all day my bird alert went off. Great Shearwater on sea at St Ives – showing very well.....Aarrghhhh! Why couldn't that have been yesterday while we were there at the exact right time? We discussed our options, which were either forget it go home especially as driving in St Ives is horrific and it was getting late after all or go straight to St Ives. For me, even taking into account the driving, there was only one answer and we had to go..... quickly! A Great Shearwater would be a lifer for us both and a bird I've always wanted to see. Wendy on the other hand was going for the negative approach saying it would probably be long gone by the time we got there as she didn't think a bird like that would sit around for long. We jumped in the car at 4pm with a 23mile drive on slow, narrow, single-track roads, which I was going to have to do quickly, ahead of me. I'd also noticed my petrol tank getting low on fuel so I'd have to fill up somewhere soon. After Wendy had finished protesting

I put my foot down and we were off, the thought of driving through St Ives town again filling me with anything but joy...Uh oh :/.

After driving for what seemed like forever and negotiating the vehicular hell hole that is St Ives we arrived at the Island car park later than we'd anticipated at 4.50pm. Luckily with it being later in the day it was much quieter so finding a parking space was easier than it had been the day before. Wendy saw this as a bad sign, surely if the bird was still there the car park would be full and looking around at the distinct lack of Birders we started to fear that she was right. We took a walk over to the railings where it had been viewable from but there was no sign and we still couldn't see anyone else looking. It was growing gradually colder as the sun had already started its descent and still very windy so not what I'd describe as a pleasant visit. It was nice to see St Ives with blue skies again though, which was a good contrast to the dark, wet, grey scene of yesterday. Wendy had seen enough and went all Karl Pilkington on me and stormed off to shelter round the back of a hut while I stayed put. Two lesbians approached me and said, "Wow that's big!" I oh so nearly came out with the classic line, "Thanks and the lens is pretty big too." but managed to bite my tongue and play it safe with the boring line, "Yes it's very heavy too." With that conversation killer the lesbians were off and I was left alone to desperately scan everywhere I could think of for the bird. I tried round the back of the island but there was nothing there.



St Ives island

Depressed I trudged back to the railings and sat down in a huff. Within minutes though I started realizing birds were coming out of the bay and past the island. 2 x **Common Scoter** and a **Mediterranean Gull** flew past which I got some record shots of.



Common Scoter

There were also a few **Sandwich Terns** in the bay and an **Eider** too so being the nice person I am and despite her strop I texted Wendy to let her know what I'd seen. Luckily she'd seen everything from the hut apart from the Common Scoters so she hadn't missed out on too much after all. Things started to die down from then on so it was definitely time to leave. Back at the car at 5.36pm I wacked on the heating and we warmed up and left for not home but Morrison's for petrol and also anything edible, which wouldn't require any time or effort before eating. We found out more details of the Great Shearwater sighting later that evening. The bird had circled the island, landed BRIEFLY on the sea then flew off. Why on gods earth the 'briefly' part wasn't put out on the report I will never know. Very frustrating!

By the time I'd filled the car up and we'd done some shopping we were pretty much past it so when I got a text alert that the Spot Crake had just been seen again at Marazion our hearts sank. Wendy had given up on the bird and was pretty sure that if it'd just been seen then even in our wildest dreams it wasn't going to reappear again. What can you do though? We had to take the chance and try again, we'd put so much into that bird that we deserved to see it once....didn't we?

We were growing sick of the sight of Marazion and when we parked up at 6.31pm it felt all too familiar. Over at the standing the same old Birders where all there still looking depressed, which we weren't expecting as it had just been reported! We asked them about the report thinking they'd all be beaming having finally seen the thing but they all looked vacant and just as confused as us. We had a quick scan in the reeds hearing a **Water Rail** and being frustrated by the pesky Coots, which caught your eye and made you look in hope. When we read them the text they all scratched their heads and worked out that a couple of them had been there before the report was put out. What the? Who was putting these reports out? How many of the reports in the past had been false as well? It was all getting a bit weird. Totally aggrieved (to put it nicely) we left straight away and as we stomped back to the car we concluded that the report was a blatant lie. We'd previously wondered if people had been reporting Water Rail in cases of mistaken identity but this couldn't even be that. To say it had been a long and fruitless day would be an understatement and by then we just needed to get home for tea.

We arrived back at HQ at 7.10pm tired and cold but when I got to the front door I found it unlocked. This had happened yesterday but I'd dismissed it as being my mistake (even though I always double check) but I knew for a fact that I'd locked it that morning, as I was paranoid. How odd, we thought maybe the cleaners had been in to check but that wouldn't make sense, as they hadn't impressed us with their skills when we first arrived. How odd! Wendy was too tired and cold to bother with tea

so went straight off for a bath to thaw out. I heated up some beans and sausages to have with toast then went for a bath myself.

I was finally relaxing....until I heard Wendy shriek from the living room. There wasn't much I could do, being in the bath, so I waited to see if she'd come banging on the door screaming or something. After a while I heard her shout to me, "You've GOT to see this Pete, you'll never guess what it is!" She sounded quite calm and was laughing so I wasn't worried and carried on. When I emerged from the bathroom I went straight to see what all the fuss was about. Wendy was grinning from ear to ear and pointing to the table next to me. She was right though, I'd never have guessed what it was, especially being in an apartment 3 flights upstairs. I peered into the pint glass, which was sitting there only to find a tiny, fat **Common Shrew** quite happily cleaning itself at the bottom. Apparently she had been in the kitchen to get a drink but when she went to sit back down on the sofa she saw something running out from under the coffee table. Luckily she's not scared of mice and stuff but it was the sudden and unexpected movement that had made her jump. A pint glass from the kitchen was the nearest thing to hand for catching it in but by then it had gone into the bedroom and behind the wardrobe. Fortunately she'd been watching its movements and positioned the glass at the opening between the wardrobe and skirting on the other side. Unbelievably, after it had sniffed the place out and had a climb, it calmly walked straight into the glass and was finally caught. After we'd admired it we took it downstairs to release back into the great outdoors where it belonged. After it had a sniff and got its bearings it slowly walked out of the glass and vanished into the grass. Cool :). Maybe whoever was going into our apartment while we were out was planting things intending to scare us away? Wendy had caught a big spider the night before so what were going to find the next night....a huge, scabby long tail? That was enough excitement for one day and we were knackered so it was definitely time for bed.

Wednesday 19th September

There didn't seem much point in slavishly making ourselves get up at stupid o'clock so we just woke up when we woke up. Wendy was up at 7am while I had an extra 30mins sleep...clever me :). It was another nice day and our main plan was to go to Hayle estuary as there'd been a Pectoral Sandpiper there the week before and it would be close enough to high tide. Firstly, as it was on the way, out of sheer defiance we decided to go back to Marazion to check out the early and late theory. Feeling lethargic and deflated we weren't in a hurry so didn't leave HQ until 8.53am which meant that our early visit to find the elusive Spot Crake had already failed.

At 9.28am we pulled up at Marazion and swore that it was the last time we would go there. A quick scan of the beach produced the usual waders with a few **Sanderling** amongst them for a bit of a change of scenery.



Marazion beach

Over the road on the way to the marsh there were Sedge and Cetti's warbler singing, making it feel like a nice place to be. We're sure that it would've been if we'd had some luck on our side in seeing the bird we'd been trying so hard to see. When we were back in position the Birder who was there already told us that it had been seen very early that morning. Now it was beginning to sound really dodgy for so many reasons...so it wasn't just our cynical mood the night before. No report had been put out yet of the sighting earlier, nobody (including him) had seen the bird, nobody we'd spoken to about it had seen it either AND more importantly was that in a whole week there was not one picture on BirdGuides of it, not even a crap record shot! That was enough for us to see our cue to leave for the last time and forget the whole thing. There was another Spotted Crake at a place we intended to visit on our way back to Heysham anyway and this one had pics to back it up! As we'd wasted enough time already Wendy had to leave the Café coffeess as the machine hadn't heated up yet and was going to take another 10mins....Disaster! The best she could come up with was 2 cans of sparkling mineral water flavoured with elderflower and fruit which sort of did the job but it felt appropriate to burp ourselves away from Marazion and on to our next stop :).

We arrived at the rather scenic car park for Hayle Estuary at 10.02am and couldn't resist taking a photo. We always seem to end up in some dive or another when we're away and it was only a matter of time.



Hayle

This wasn't our main plan though but we thought it was worth a quick look although a Med Gull was the only thing 5 pairs of eyes had found last time we'd been there. Looking out over the Estuary the water was miles away so consequently also the birds. We could see **Canada Geese** and **Bar-Tailed Godwit** but amongst the Redshank were 3 x small waders which were so far away it was impossible to ID them. We thought we'd better keep our eye on them but all of a sudden they lifted and flew off over the road and were gone. Luckily they'd flown in the direction that we'd be going so hopefully we'd be able to catch up with them later. We crossed over the very busy dual carriageway and stood on the pavement, which borders the reserve to view it properly.



Hayle Estuary

The only new birds we added were **Wigeon** and **Teal** but there were no white winged gulls amongst the numerous Black-headed Gulls and the waders were absolutely miles away. With so little about we were back at the car at 10.33am and heading down the road to our main stop, Copperhouse Creek.

5mins later we parked up in the Co-Op car park, behind which is a footpath leading to a causeway where you can view the creek. Wendy needed to find a W.C before our walk so asked inside the shop but the directions she was given lead to nowhere so she would have to hang on. It was absolutely boiling so we left our coats behind and rolled up our sleeves. There was no sign of the Pec Sand from the causeway but at the end was a sign for a Café so thinking that it would have toilets we set off along the opposite side of the creek. There were semi tropical gardens with fishponds and benches for people to sit at and the whole area looked well maintained so we quite liked it in Hayle.



Hayle

We were in no rush so when Wendy saw another sign for 'Café Riviere' she couldn't resist the thought of sitting outside drinking coffee in the sun at a nice Café with the added bonus of a W.C!

We followed the arrow on the sign but the Café itself was nowhere to be seen. Half way down she asked a lady walking her dog where it was and we were told that it was right down at the end! Not only that but there was construction work going on at the old harbour so what should have been a scenic spot was now a building site...Urrghhh! We'd gone that far so carried on to the end expecting to find a bit of a posh modern Café with an unfortunate but necessary view.

In reality the Café was a small run down looking hut right on the corner of a busy main road. We crossed over and went through a gate into an outdoor swimming pool area which looked like it hadn't been done up or cleaned since it was built in 1972! It really did have that kind of prefabricated Benidorm kind of vibe :D. The authenticity had been perfectly recreated by the building site, with real sound effects and of course the heavy traffic for the sake of completeness :P.



Cafe

We went up to the hatch and Wendy ordered drinks, some toast for herself and a sausage bap for me. We were told it would take about 10mins which we were OK with and sat down at a wobbly table with a parasol over it.....had we actually gone abroad on holiday by mistake? The guy who presumably owned the charming establishment was in no hurry and so chilled out he was nearly horizontal, possibly why our order was going to take 10mins. Wendy, who was by then desperate, asked him where the toilets were so he took her through the gate into pool zone and unlocked them for her as he hadn't got round to it yet. I sat under the shade of the parasol, "Ahhhh" and Wendy managed to position herself in a bit of sun to soak up the 'atmosphere'. We waited, and waited, and waited for about 20mins. When our order arrived we were starving and would've eaten a scabby dog but Wendy's vision of frothy cappuccino and doorstep toast with real Cornish butter in the sun were soon shattered. Instant coffee, white sliced cheap bread (which had barely even been shown a toaster) with tasteless margarine didn't really hit the spot. My sausage bap was very nice I have to admit but I did find it slightly odd that there were 2 ½ sausages in the bap. Hmmmm I wonder what happened to the other ½? All in all it had been an experience but not one we'd care to repeat in a hurry AND we had to walk miles back to the car, all for the use of a W.C too hahahaha! Having wasted bags of time we were back at the car at 12.50pm hoping that our next planned stop was going to more successful.

We arrived at Zennor at 12.50pm and had our lunch in the car. There was a lovely looking Café/Hostel opposite the car park and up the road a nice old Pub, which was serving food. Why did we stay in Hayle and end up at Café Riviere? Urrghhhh! Zennor was bustling with people and the sun was still shining so after eating our lunch we set off on our walk.



Zennor Village

That is until Wendy announced that she'd forgotten her bins and we had to turn back. While she'd nipped to the W.C's I'd accidentally packed them away in the boot of the car with the rest of our gear...Oooops! So after she found them we tried again for the second time on our walk and again the habitat was perfect for any number of great birds. First off we tried for a walk inland which I had seen somewhere as being a spot for Golden Ringed Dragonfly. I could see a stream on the map so thought it might be good... it wasn't. The path was nowhere near the stream and there was literally nothing about. Eventually eagle eyed Wendy spotted some Caterpillars on the vegetation, so for something to do I took a record shot which was later ID'd on Ispot as the Larva of a Buff Tip moth.



Buff Tip moth Larva

We quickly left the inland track and set off on the coastal track which was supposed to be the better one of the two anyway. This track seemed very popular and there were loads of walkers about but we could see why as when we reached the coast there was a lovely looking cove.



Zennor

Walking southwards from there we walked through tons of perfect migrant habitat again but we were seeing no birds at all, not even common ones. It had already sunk in that we had chosen a really useless week to be in Cornwall. Fair enough the conditions weren't helping us but with even the local common birds nowhere to be seen it just felt like Cornwall is birdless in September! A few miles into the walk we got a bit lost and had to look at the map. According to the map we needed to take a turning but we couldn't see one.... Uh Oh! Eventually I found a tiny gap in a hedge which was all overgrown so we'd have to bend right down to get through it. We chanced our arm and went in and after 20 yards of Jungle like trekking (a machete would have been handy) it opened out and into dry overgrown bracken.



Zennor walk

This looked absolutely perfect for Adder which instantly struck me as a problem as every step we took was on stuff that had the same pattern as an Adder.....Eeek! Very carefully we edged our way

through it with Wendy constantly telling me that I'd got us lost. After about 15mins we suddenly popped back onto the main path...Hurray! Pure navigational skills it was, I could be a Sherpa no problems :P. On the main track back we joined up with a very friendly older lady and her dog. Whilst chatting to her we found out that she was doing 35 miles of the coastal path in 5 days and as she looked about 75 we were pretty impressed. Just when we thought we were nearly back at the start we came across a field chocka full of cows. Recently there had been warnings in the news to be wary of cows as 2 women had been trampled to death so I was a little hesitant.



Cows

It was like being in some kind of mad puzzle type game of finding your way round tons of cows and keeping out of their kicking zone! I gave myself 95% for the Cow level as we got through without a problem :).

When we got back to the car Wendy said she really fancied a ½ shandy in the beer garden at the pub. This was something she'd wanted to do a couple of times but it hadn't happened yet and as I was so knackered I agreed. The pub was a very nice old place with friendly young bar staff and after ordering our drinks we sat outside. Wendy is very much a sun worshipper and is never too hot while I'm the total opposite so I picked a table, which was shaded on one side and sunny on the other. This was a good compromise and our shandies went down very well indeed. So well in fact that Wendy wanted another as she was enjoying the 'time out' relaxing in the sun so much.



Zennor pub

There was no point in rushing back so I ordered a pint of Coke, well the entertainment was good there anyway. We'd found ourselves sitting amongst a collection of big mouthed, posh, arrogant, self-important idiots.....and wasps :O! One guy was reciting as many pedantic ways to say the same sentence as he could to his friends who sat listening him intently....yawn! It turned out that he and his group hadn't even ordered a drink and were just using the pub for somewhere to sit. He pulled over the unsuspecting Barman and quizzed him over the history of the place and told him that next he was there he'd possibly order some food....cheeky! Becoming slightly irritated by the wasps we saw it as a good time to go over to the Café/Hostel for some cake. We were back at the car for 3.50pm and with all the walking we'd done and zero reports coming in we headed for home.

By the time we got back to HQ we were totally knackered and had started to wonder why we were bothering. There were no birds, no migrant activity, nothing....apart from the lovely scenery and long sunny walks that is. Wendy was turning all Karl Pilkinton again saying, "I feel like an old person on a rambling hikers holiday!" and "I may as well give up now and book a coach tour next time!" Urrghhhh there's no pleasing some people :P. After tea and baths she went outside and heard the Tawny Owls again. One was really close and in the trees to the left of the back door but it was too dark to see anything.

The next day was going to be our last day in Cornwall but we had no idea where to go so I decided to keep it local. I thought that the walk from HQ to Porthgwarra and back would be a good one and hopefully something would turn up somewhere along the line.

Thursday 20th September

With motivation at an all time low the night before you'd think that Wendy may have stayed in bed and had a lie in but no, she was up at 7am! I surfaced at 7.45am to find another nice sunny day, which was a bonus as we had quite a long walk ahead of us, and no car to run back to if it rained. After breakfast we left HQ at 9.15am and as we wandered off down the road we noticed that it was beginning to cloud over and they were heading straight for us.....great! The walk itself covered every kind of habitat you could think of from farmland and hedgerows, to wooded coastal valleys and was probably the best area we'd covered all week. We found our first big flock of Meadow Pipits since arriving, which was enough to realize how it had great potential. Unfortunately though that was all we found and as we scrambled our way down a steep path into Porthgwarra and saw the café sitting there we just couldn't resist.



Porthgwarra

Last time we were there Wendy had spotted cheese and herb scones on the board so this time she was having one! The owner very kindly put it in the pasty oven to heat through for her so we went outside and sat down at a bench. After our 2010 trip I'd sworn never to eat Cornish pasty again, after finding out they contained turnip and ending up feeding mine to a dog, but they did smell nice. I had some Monster Munch and a massive piece of millionaire's shortbread to keep me happy this time and Wendy's scone with proper butter went down well. There was a Robin and Dunnock in the Café garden, which were entertaining us by chasing each other relentlessly between picking up crumbs to eat from under the tables. With nothing else to do we tried for some pics, some of which turned out OK.



Robin

Before we left Wendy went to the W.Cs and came back all excited due to finding 3 x moths inside. I reluctantly got up with the camera and followed her over to get some pics. Here we were again, just like in the I.O.M, having more luck finding things by hanging round Public Toilets!



Feathered Ranunculus



Frosted Orange

She'd also found the feathery remains of something small, which I could only think was a combination of Blue Tit and Wheatear.

We left at 11.10am and continued our walk back to Porthcurno by doing a loop over the heathland and to Arden-Sawah farm, which had had more Wrynecks in the past month than the Isle of Man has ever had. Yet again the habitat was perfect and it felt like at any second you could come across an Ortolan Bunting or Olive-backed Pipit but rather predictably we saw nothing at all. It had turned very chilly by then but fortunately it hadn't rained on us so we'd been pretty lucky. We dropped down into Porthcurno valley at 12.40pm.



Porthcurno

We realized there were some public toilets there too so we headed straight for them! Sure enough we found and got pics of 5 moths and a funny looking green Cricket hahahaha.



We stopped and had a look round the shop in the Café and Wendy had another caffeine fix while I had an Ice-cream...yum yum :). After that we walked up the road and back to HQ to have a look at our moth pics to ID while we had our lunch. We were quite impressed with our findings as at Porthgwarra we'd had **Feathered Ranunculous**, **Frosted Orange** and **Snout** and at Porthcurno **Rosy Footman**, **Dingy Footman**, **Snout**, **Plume Moth type**, **Carpet type**, **Rustic type** and a **Speckled Bush Cricket**. Not bad for a couple of toilet blocks :).

As it was our last day we thought we'd better go and visit a place nearby that we never got to see two years ago so we jumped in the car at 2.13pm and I drove to Sennen Cove. We arrived at 2.26pm and parked up in the car park for a few minutes. Sennen Cove is one of the top surfer beaches in the UK and you could see why. I would hate to see the place in the summer as it was still chocka at this time of year and both car parks were rammed!



Sennen Cove

We took a few pics and left at 2.40pm and with no idea what to do next we headed for Cape Cornwall, which had a Wryneck reported about a week earlier.

It was getting quite late in the day when arrived at 3.08pm and we were feeling the effects of the walk earlier and probably the whole week. Even so we bailed out of the car and hauled ourselves up to the top of the tower.



Cape Cornwall

We had a look out to sea and it was dead as usual but we were tired so we just enjoyed being up there with such a fantastic view around us. Suddenly I saw a fin rising out of the water and then disappear and shouted, "Dolphin!" "Or was it a Porpoise?" I couldn't be sure so it was all eyes on the sea waiting to see it again. Trying to explain which area it was in proved more difficult than I'd expected and there were so many waves that I was starting to think I was seeing things. Then, I saw one of them jump clear of the water, which Wendy saw too and we both shouted, "**Dolphin!**" Cool :). The views we had were pretty rubbish as they were nearly out on the horizon but good enough to know that it wasn't a Porpoise. We couldn't tell what kind of Dolphin it was which was a shame as it could've been a lifer. After our quick break we went back to the car at 4pm and scraping the barrel decided to give Pendeen Lighthouse a last look.

We parked up in the lower car park for the last time and wondered if being later in the day would make a difference. We should've known the answer to that question really as it made no odds at all and there was still nothing out there. We gave it about 15mins and finally decided that we'd just about exhausted Cornwall and it was time to pack it in. We were tired, hungry, needed to pack our stuff up before the morning and worst of all we were NOT looking forward to the long day ahead of us! I couldn't be bothered cooking when I got in so I nipped into the Chinese in St Just for my tea.

Back at HQ at 5.15pm there was a **Song Thrush** out the back and we had a quick tea, baths and started our packing. Later on Wendy found that for the first time there were **Bats** outside (we hadn't brought the bat detector again dohhhh) and the Tawny Owls were calling very faintly in the distance. After writing some good things and some bad things on the feedback form we watched a bit of TV, with one eye on the floor to check for rodents, before finally going to bed and crashing out.

Friday 21st September

We were both up at 7am frantically getting everything packed up and ready to leave Cornwall as early as possible as we had a massive drive ahead of us. I still hadn't anything set in stone for the day, which I was worried would backfire on us. I like to research places before coming away to see if it's worth doing the detours but it was too late now and I would have to wing it and decide on the fly. It was a nice day again and Wendy was certainly going to miss the nice weather and Tawny Owls. As we had breakfast a report from earlier of the Spot Crake at RSPB Greylake, Somerset came in! Good job I had a visit there in the back of my mind for a second chance of a lifer for us both, although the bird at Marazion had taught us a lesson in Crakes – don't hold your hopes! As we packed up the car we were greeted by a lovely and very friendly Greyhound who's owner told us that she was a Rescue Dog. The dog would quite happily have come with us apparently but didn't like being left alone....awwwww :). One thing that was set in stone was a stop at Leighton Moss and I'd predicted to be arriving there at around 4.55pm, which would give us a couple of hours before it

got dark. There'd been recent reports of Otter there and having failed so far to see one, even in Scotland, we thought it would be an amazing way to end the holiday. We left at 9.18am knowing that it was going to be a VERY long day! Before we left Porthcurno we took a spin down the road the toilet block for a quick moth check. There was nothing new there apart from the appearance of some chrysalis things, which we got some pics of for ispot later. After that it was time to get my driving head on and we drove away wishing we were home already.

Not finding anywhere else to go to brake up the first portion of the journey we decided to try 'The Camel Trail' at Wadebridge, which had a Pectoral Sandpiper reported every day for two weeks. On the way we turned a corner to find a Grey Squirrel in the middle of the road and an oncoming car, heading straight for it. It ran up and down as if in blind panic and our hearts were in our mouths as the gap between it and the car rapidly shrunk. Right at the last minute the car swerved, it jumped up the hedge and ran for its life...Phew! We'd hoped to see at least one Fox on our trip but hadn't until we came across one dead in the road.....not quite what we had in mind but all too often the only way you see them :(We then came to a really narrow road with a tractor doing hedge cutting and unable to pass it we had to take a diversion, which was sure to hold us up. On this stretch we saw another Grey Squirrel and a few **Red-Legged Partridge** running around in the road, which seemed to be where all the creatures of the Wadebridge area liked to hang out. At 10.54am we arrived and headed straight for the newly built hide. The Pec sand was being seen in with the Godwits, which weren't hard to find, but there was nothing else amongst them....Grrrrrr! We couldn't believe it, this bird had been seen EVERY day. We desperately scanned the flooded field but it wasn't there.



Wadebridge

Not wanting to waste time we gave up quickly and went back to the car to find a W.C in the town. This proved more difficult than we'd anticipated, as they were right on a corner at the junction of a busy main street with nowhere to park. In the end after driving past them a couple of times I had to let Wendy jump out and run for it but as I couldn't park up anywhere I'd just have to wait :/.

Luckily our next stop wasn't far away and we found ourselves driving through an old Airfield bordered by a Plantation, which was being grazed by sheep and horses. This place looked so weird we stopped to take a picture. It's not every day you drive through the middle of an Airfield that looks like it was from World War 2!



Airfield

We arrived at our location of Bodmin Moor at 11.53pm and this was a place that a member of the CBWPS had told me about as the best for Golden Ringed Dragonfly. A small stream ran through the valley and it looked perfect but it was quite windy and felt too cold.



Bodmin

We took a wander but saw nothing again so that was our last chance to see them and it was a big fat fail. Had we been there earlier in the season though I'm sure we'd have stood a much better chance at any of the sites we'd tried, it was just too late. On the way back to the car I spotted another Spottfly flitting about in the gorse bushes. We were then approached by a retired couple walking their dogs, who stopped to ask if we were looking for anything in particular. We told them about the Dragonflies and their response was interesting. They said that it had been a very poor year for them and that they'd hardly seen any compared to previous years.....so all the odds had been against us! Back at the car at 12.22pm I got a text reporting the Pec Sand showing well at 11.30am at Wadebridge. If only we'd been able to stick around for a few more minutes.....So annoying! It really was time to knuckle down and get going as our next stop of Greylake was 100miles away and it was touch and go that we'd reach Leighton Moss before sunset so there'd be no Otters for us :(.

By 12.50pm we'd finally left Cornwall behind and entered Devon only to hear on the radio that there were delays and estimated speeds of 25mph on the M5.....Urrghhhhh! By 1.39pm we'd hit Somerset and eventually pulled up at RSPB Greylake at 2.09pm.

There was already a couple of Birders with scopes in position at the Spotted Crake pool so with them having the best vantage point we had to hang back.



RSPB Greylake

After a while of watching the reeds and seeing nothing but Coots skulking about, which felt all too familiar, our attention was diverted to the Dragonflies. There were loads but one in particular caught our eye as it was flying totally different to any we'd seen before. It never landed so we couldn't get any kind of decent view or even a record shot but going by what we saw and know there was only one conclusion to be drawn, that it was a **Southern Hawker** which was another lifer for us both. We heard a Water Rail again but there was no sign of the Spot Crake and nobody else had seen it either. Having put far too much time and effort into the Marazion bird we decided that enough was enough and left at 3.18pm.

When we saw the sign for Sedgemoor Services I saw it as a good opportunity to stop and fill the car up so at 3.47pm we did just that. It was absolutely chucking it down by then and the petrol there was more expensive than in the I.O.M! My Sat Nav was now telling me that we'd get to Leighton Moss at 7.25pm, which would definitely be far too late! Depressingly we had to bin the idea totally and decided to just get the drive out of the way and head straight to Arnside. This was going to take longer than we thought as the traffic had practically ground to a halt as we approached Gloucestershire. To add insult to injury there'd been a crash at Birmingham so we hit more delays and didn't arrive at the Services until 7.05pm. Even though it had been a 3hr stint I didn't feel tired at all. It must have been due to spending about 1hr of it at a complete standstill that helped! We were pretty hungry by the time we got to the services so Wendy went in and got me some food from Burger King and a coffee for herself. Fortunately she had ½ a cheese sarnie left over from earlier and after nicking some of my fries to put in it that was tea done and dusted....healthy :P. We left at 7.41pm very tired, bored and wishing that we could just teleport ourselves to the pub!

At 9.40pm after 2 more traffic jams on the M6 and 12½hrs on the road we finally sat down in our favourite end of holiday pub 'The Albion'. As usual we were totally brain dead but it was still nice to chill out after a very long day. While we were there and it was totally dark outside and un-birdable I got a text alert of a Rose-coloured Starling at Cape Cornwall!! We'd checked all the Starlings there the day before and there was nothing in with them. Grrrrrrrr how infuriating! After successfully killing some time with a couple of drinks we noticed that yet again we were the last 2 people in the pub, apart from a couple of die hard locals, so at 11.25pm we thought it would be a good time to leave.

Driving out of Arnside we'd normally hear Tawny Owls or see a Barn Owl but not this time, it was very quiet. My car warned me that the temperature was just 4C and the driving conditions on the

dark, winding roads were made worse by the thick mist which had settled. Although we had no luck on the Owl front we did finally have a **Fox** run across the road and over the hedge and also a **Hedgehog** slowly ambling its way across. We used to see Deer in the roads at night as well but haven't seen any in the area for a couple of years now.

We eventually arrived at Heysham at 12.12am and as predicted my car was searched again. I wasn't surprised though after the bird squeaker lubricant incident at Douglas Sea Terminal.....Hahahaha! Amazingly the wind was very light for a change so it looked like it was going to a nice crossing. Wendy was nodding off, after having a massive hyper when we left Arnside, and finding it very hard to stay awake so we were hoping to board early and crash out in the cabin. When it was getting near to boarding time we noticed cars coming off the boat, which was odd. Turns out that they'd had problems with the Linkspan AGAIN so were late unloading the boat! After we'd realized we were probably in for a long wait Wendy hopped over into the back seat and went to sleep. At 1.55am came the announcement I'd been waiting for, we could finally board. Trying to wake Wendy up was like trying to raise the dead but after staggering to the cabin we were both fast asleep.

As we disembarked at 5.55am the first thing we noticed was that, compared to the temperatures we'd been used to in Cornwall, it was absolutely freeeeeeezeing. We were home by 6.11am and after we'd unpacked etc we decided that instead of going out birding, as we normally do, we'd give ourselves the day off. Well, there's only so much disappointment you can handle in a week ;).

Unfortunately for the 2nd time Cornwall wasn't as amazing as we'd hoped for and the only rarities we saw were some of the people! We're sure that if we'd hit a good week we'd have been itching to go back but it's a long way to travel for a bit of a gamble. The weather and scenery were gorgeous, although the nice weather did put a spanner in the works as far as birds were concerned....there was literally no chance of us seeing anything during that week. The walks were enjoyable if not a bit hard going with all the valleys we relentlessly went up and down. We dipped on not 1 but 2 Spotted Crakes, a Pectoral Sandpiper, a Great Shearwater and Golden-ringed Dragonfly. I was pretty gutted about all of the dips, bar the Pec Sand, as who knows when I'm going to be in an area where they are likely to be seen again? I came away with 2 lifers and Wendy 3 but that's only counting the birds. We both saw a good few new moths, a couple of new Dragonflies and a new Butterfly, which we certainly didn't expect in late September. I struggled to pick a bird of the trip and nearly didn't but in the end I decided on the Long-billed Dowitcher. I'd been wanting to see one for a long time and we so nearly didn't. Wendy stuck with not having a bird of the trip and I can't blame her really!

The day after the holiday a Buff-breasted Sandpiper was reported from Davidstow Airfield on the day we left Cornwall. I'd heard of Davidstow many times as it attracts a lot of American Waders while Wendy knew of it for its nice Mature Cheddar! I'd always had it in my mind that it was like Lands End Airfield i.e. it was active and you needed to view from a fence line. Imagine my shock AND horror then when I found out that it's actually a redundant old WW2 Airfield which was very close to where we stopped for the Golden Ringed Dragonfly, in fact so close it was the one we drove STRAIGHT THROUGH! NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO! I couldn't believe it, that was the final nail in the coffin for the trip. I'd wanted to see Davidstow for a long time but knew it was nowhere near the SW tip of Cornwall so paid no attention to it. Not only did we have the sadness of not seeing somewhere we wanted to, when we had time, but we'd also driven past somewhere where there was a Buff-breasted Sandpiper showing superbly well.....so it turned out. Unbelievable! We must be the most, unlucky and jinxed Birders on the planet!

I think it'll be a long time before we try Cornwall again, maybe next time we head down that way we'll have to go to the birding Mecca that is the Scilly Isles instead, surely we couldn't fail there.....could we?

Mute Swan	Moorhen	Sandwich Tern	Song Thrush
Greylag Goose	Coot	Guillemot	Cetti's Warbler
Canada Goose	Oystercatcher	Razorbill	Sedge Warbler
Wigeon	Ringed Plover	Puffin	Reed Warbler
Gadwall	Lapwing	Rock Dove / Feral Pigeon	Blackcap
Teal	Knot	Woodpigeon	Barred Warbler
Mallard	Sanderling	Collared Dove	Whitethroat
Pintail	Dunlin	Tawny Owl	Chiffchaff
Shoveler	Ruff	Kingfisher	Goldcrest
Pochard	Snipe	Wryneck	Spotted Flycatcher
Tufted Duck	Long-billed Dowitcher	Great Spotted Woodpecker	Long-tailed Tit
Eider	Black-tailed Godwit	Skylark	Blue Tit
Common Scoter	Bar-tailed Godwit	Sand Martin	Great Tit
Red-legged Partridge	Whimbrel	Swallow	Treecreeper
Red-throated Diver	Curlew	House Martin	Jay
Little Grebe	Greenshank	Meadow Pipit	Magpie
Great Crested Grebe	Lesser Yellowlegs	Rock Pipit	Chough
Fulmar	Redshank	Yellow Wagtail	Jackdaw
Sooty Shearwater	Turnstone	Grey Wagtail	Rook
Manx Shearwater	Great Skua	Pied Wagtail	Carrion Crow
Balearic Shearwater	Kittiwake	Wren	Raven
Little Egret	Black-headed Gull	Duncock	Starling
Grey Heron	Mediterranean Gull	Robin	House Sparrow
Sparrowhawk	Common Gull	Whinchat	Chaffinch
Buzzard	Lesser Black-backed Gull	Stonechat	Greenfinch
Kestrel	Herring Gull	Wheatear	Goldfinch
Peregrine	Great Black-backed Gull	Blackbird	Siskin
Water Rail			Linnet

110 species in total.