



Sea Bird Watching in Cornwall – A Great Holiday



Manx Shearwater by Martin Elliott

Cornwall is a haven for watching and enjoying sea birds.

Cornwall is a fantastic county to visit during the summer or out of season, especially if you love the countryside. There are many varied and colourful birds residing or travelling through this fantastic county.

Sea birds can be especially entertaining as not only do you get to see wonderful, sometimes rare and less common birds, but while you are possibly perched high on a cliff top, surrounded by lots of beautiful scenery, you may even see a basing shark, Seal or pod of dolphins. Please do come and visit soon.

The Cornish Holiday Team – Alec and Helen

Often as the first of the summer storms start to batter the Cornish coastline many keen bird watchers around the country start to turn their attention to the iconic headlands of the South West, and Cornwall in particular, with the allure of the 'big two' shearwaters and the hope of something rarer proving an irresistible draw.



Cory's Shearwater – Brian Field



Great Shearwater – P Semmens



Storm Petrel

Where best to watch.....

It can depend upon many factors, but the weather, wind direction and speed can play a huge part. For the chance of large shears and the hope of a rarer seabird, a good option is to firstly aim for the far west of Cornwall. If the wind is westerly, then the likes of Pendeen or St Ives. If it's a southerly, then perhaps Porthgwarra.

Pendeen perhaps becomes one of the better sites when winds are due west as birds come down and out of the Irish Sea.

Strong westerlies veering overnight to northerlies or north westerlies can trap birds in St Ives Bay (leading to good or exceptional views as they exit by St Ives Island), and Porthgwarra can sometimes perform well in a light southerly or south-easterly.

Brief guide to the main seawatching sites

Pendeen has a convenient wall around the lighthouse providing shelter and some level ground, with a small (free) car park by the road above. A line of reefs offshore provides a good reference point with most birds passing just beyond in normal conditions, although the larger shearwaters and petrels are normally further out, and in certain conditions some birds will pass through closer.

St Ives – viewing can be good from the furthest north west tip of the island, or when birds are being strongly blown into the bay and being swept close in, from the railings on the north side. The (pay & display) car parking situation later in the day can be very awkward, and even first thing it can be a problem as it is used by B&B guests for overnight parking.

Porthgwarra – There are a couple of options, from some of the nearest cliffs beyond the (pay & display) car park where most seawatchers tend to gather loosely in the shelter of the rocks near the top (Hella Point) or a quarter mile or so beyond (Gwennap Head), as used by the Seawatch South West team a few years back. The third option is the cove – viewing from the benches at the top of the beach between the car park and the foot of the cliffs, and better for certain species in certain conditions. The Runnel Stone, circa.1 mile offshore and marked by a distinctive floating warning buoy is a useful marker.



The Puffin.

The Isles of Scilly are a great place to see the Puffin. A day trip on the Scillonian, by Plane or Helicopter is a fantastic day out to these sub-tropical islands. If this could be topped with seeing some of these wonderful birds, what could be a better holiday experience.

Cudden Point

A lovely place, especially for an evening walk in the summer, Cudden Point is owned by the National Trust. It is a place where you can regularly see one of Britain's rarest birds – the Cornish Chough.



Rame Head

This unspoilt, idyllic corner of Cornwall with its 14th century chapel has an impressive list of feathered visitors. A walk here, could include Polhawn Cove and Penlee Battery, and some of the birds that can be spotted along the way draw 'bird watchers' from all over the county.



Other headlands in West Penwith (essentially the far tip of Cornwall west of Marazion and Hayle), such as **Cape Cornwall** and **Tatur-du** lighthouse by Lamorna Cove may produce some nice birds. In good conditions you may increase your chances.

On the north side of the peninsula, **Trevoze Head** and **The Rumps** can also perform well, especially a little later in the season and at times when conditions would otherwise suit Pendeen well.

The main sites are probably popular down to a combination of access, height above sea-level, comfort and shelter available, in addition to being 'perfectly located' in the far south west. Land's End is not ideal as a site, with height above sea level, and offshore rocks two factors leading to birds being rather distant in addition to birds already being pushed out by nearby headlands.

Lizard Point is another good option in south westerlies especially (and sometimes on south easterlies) – and has been generally under-watched in the past. It actually juts out further south into the channel than the traditional West Penwith sites. Car parking is in the main NT car park (pay & display) by the toilet block / lighthouse a short walk from the point (it should be noted that as a popular tourist destination car parking and congestion in the area can be a big problem in the summer months).

Viewing is generally from the **Watchpoint** by the tea rooms down by the end of the point itself, with the National Trust sea-watching hut manned by volunteers generally being open from 10am to 4pm in the summer. There are also guided sea watch events throughout the year, see the NT website or **CBWPS events calendar** for dates and more information.

Nearby **Bass Point** can also be rewarding as birds swing out of Falmouth Bay on south easterly winds, and does offer much closer view of shearwaters in some conditions compared to the Point .

Further east and again, any headland in Cornwall can be worth watching from in strong winds or gales (again essentially, north coast when north or north west, south in southerlies), but not recommended if you are able to get to one of the top sites already mentioned. Good birds can occur throughout the year, but the summer specialities (large shears and rarities) do seem to genuinely drop off away from the far SW of the county.

The Scillonian III ferry to the Scilly Isles, not quite Cornwall, or sea-watching, and not normally to be recommended for guaranteed scarce seabirds but can sometimes perform well especially if you are heading over to see the puffins. A day trip can produce a handful of large shears, in addition to other wildlife.

Closer offshore, and other mini holiday excursions can be taken – the **Mermaid II** mini evening birders excursion from Penzance has certainly proved itself in the past with both Cory's and Great Shearwater and multiple Wilson's Petrels.



Staying with Cornish Holiday, in St Columb Major gives a great central location for reaching the many ideal sites for sea watching. Centrally based between Newquay and Padstow with Trevoze Head only a short drive away we offer a warm, cosy retreat for that out of season Bird and Sea Watching experience. Check availability or book today by visiting www.cornishholiday.info

Some useful websites to help you enjoy and plan your stay are:-

Sennen Birdwatching <http://www.sennen-cove.com/seawatch.htm>

Cornwall Birding and Preservation Society <https://www.cbwps.org.uk/cbwpsword/>

RSPB <https://www.cornwalls.co.uk/wildlife/birdwatching>

Lots of information is courtesy of Dan Chaney, CBWPS.org.uk