

Berry Head – SeaWatch SW in 2008

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Plate 1: Seawatching at Berry Head (on a dry day!), 2008.

Summary

In 2008 I put in 276 hours of seawatching at Berry Head, between 18 June–10 November, as a contribution to the SeaWatch SW Project. An extremely unsettled summer contributed to ideal seawatching conditions on many days. Good numbers of Balearic Shearwater *Puffinus mauretanicus* (the main target species) were seen, with over 700 birds recorded and a mean passage rate of 2.5 birds/hr. Passage occurred in three main peaks, the first being notable as it appeared earlier than usual. The main peak occurred in late August, following strong southerly-biased winds, when a record day passage count for Devon of 109 birds was recorded. The data have reconfirmed Berry Head as an important site for monitoring this species in UK waters.

In early July, the earliest Great Shearwater *Puffinus gravis* for 2008 in UK and Irish waters was seen, and later in the month there was a large movement of Cory's Shearwaters *Calonectris diomedea*. The passage of Cory's was a site record, and there were other site records for Manx Shearwater *Puffinus puffinus* in early July and Common Tern *Sterna hirundo* in early August. During the autumn, the watch period was notable for Long-tailed Skua *Stercorarius longicaudus* and particularly Sabine's Gull *Xema sabini*, with both these Devon rarities making it into double figures.

Observations have also shown interesting trends for different species in relation to morning and afternoon sightings. This may be of interest to any seawatchers with a morning or afternoon preference.

Introduction

In recent years I have found myself drawn more and more towards seawatching, both in Devon and further afield. In 2008, I was in the fortunate position of being able to spend a lot of time indulging my passion, with the added bonus of collecting valuable data for the SeaWatch SW Project – seawatching for a worthy cause, what could be better?

This project was set up in 2007 by Dr Russell Wynn (National Oceanography Centre, Southampton), with the specific aim of collecting effort-based data on some of the key marine animals using SW waters. The main bird target species is the globally threatened Balearic Shearwater, which in a UK context is now included on the revised Birds of Conservation Concern 3 (BoCC3), Red list (Eaton *et al.*, 2009). This species has shown a recent increase in its use of the coastal waters of SW England (Wynn & Yésou, 2007), which may prove to be an important post-breeding area. The project helps to provide national data on distribution and peak occurrence in UK waters, which should prove valuable for conservation of the species both within the UK and internationally. In addition, sighting data are also collected on a range of migratory seabirds and (visible) marine animals (e.g., Basking Sharks *Cetorhinus maximus*, and cetaceans). The main thrust of the project's monitoring takes place at Gwennap Head in Cornwall, where the watch point is manned every day by a team of volunteers (including separate seabird and marine wildlife observers), in all weathers from 15 July to 15 October. These data are supplemented by observations from Berry Head in Devon, Strumble Head in Pembrokeshire, and Trevoise Head in Cornwall, as well as by boat-based data from the western English Channel, collected as part of the Marinelife survey programme; and casual UK records submitted via Birdguides. Much of these data will be used for a PhD thesis, on how environmental and biological factors affect the distribution and occurrence of migratory marine apex predators off SW England.

As my contribution to the project, I watched at Berry Head for 276 hours between 18 June–10 November 2008. While my efforts could not match the team effort at Gwennap Head, they did produce some interesting sightings, which are detailed here. For consistency in data collection, this account focuses on the days when I was present at Berry Head. However, extra counts of Balearic Shearwaters from this site are included, where data are available. More specific information on the whole project can be found at <http://www.seawatch-sw.org/>; where a full report for 2008 (Wynn & Brereton, 2009) is also available.

The watch point - why Berry Head?

Berry Head (a National Nature Reserve) is a limestone headland marking the southern edge of Torbay and jutting out into the larger Lyme Bay (bounded by Portland Bill and Start Point). Seawatchers watch from the end of the quarry on the north side of the headland, which affords good projection from SW - SSE winds, which tend to be the best direction for producing good seabird passage. From the watch point, you look out to the north and east, with a field of view ranging N – SSE (6°–152° Magnetic North), depending on position, while my preferred scanning area is around NE – ESE (40°–120°). This angle

of view can be tricky during the morning on bright sunny days because of glare; such conditions are best avoided. Seabird passage tends to be southwards, as birds move SW through Lyme Bay, although they may pass in either direction, depending on the species involved. The headland also holds the extra bonus of being close to the fishing port of Brixham. Trawlers either fishing Lyme Bay, or heading back to port from further afield, also attract seabirds such as Balearic Shearwaters, particularly while hauling or cleaning nets, which they often do close to the headland.

Strangely, Berry Head is a seawatch point than has only found favour with watchers and shown its true potential in more recent years. While many observers have dabbled with it over the years, Hope's Nose on the northern side of Torbay was once the favoured site, but this is no longer the case. I have watched both sites, and either is likely to be equally good for picking up Balearic Shearwater passage. But for me, Berry Head, being closest to where I live, has been my preferred watch point for over 12 plus years. It also has the edge over Hope's Nose for the larger pelagic species, as has been proved in recent years, although views of some species (particularly smaller seabirds) are probably better and closer at Hopes Nose!

Other sites along the south coast such as Prawle and Start Point are also very good for shearwater passage – probably even better for the larger pelagic species – but are not so good for skuas and terns. To the east, well-watched sites such as Seaton and Dawlish Warren can also produce good passage. Taking all factors into account, however, I put my efforts into Berry Head.

Recording and Species

Visits

In 2008, I seawatched from Berry Head from February to December, putting in a total of 303hrs, the majority of my watches were between 18 June and 10 November. Data collected during this period was broadly to the same level of detail as the Seawatch SW project (see below, Species and level of recording) and forms the basis of the analysis in this report. During this period I made 41 visits totalling 276 hrs, giving a mean coverage of around 7 hrs watching per visit. Although the total of hours watched was less than during the constant-effort survey at Gwennap Head (15 July–15 October), the data collected from Berry Head provide a vital regional context, and are already yielding new insights into migration pathways through the western Channel. The Berry Head data also sampled one extra month either side of the core period. The extra month into June appeared to be particularly important for Balearic Shearwaters off Berry Head, at least in 2008. I targeted visits mainly to coincide with favourable conditions, avoiding bright sunny days when glare hampers identification (e.g., separating Manx and Balearic Shearwaters). Table 1 gives coverage; numbers of visits and hours watched by each month, split by morning (a.m.) and afternoon (p.m.). One question (which I hope to answer here for some species) is “Is morning better than afternoon?”

On one day I was unable to get to Berry Head and watched at nearby Sharkham Point (some 2 km to the south), I have added these data to Berry Head totals, as seabird passage was in a southerly direction. These data only amounted to 5 hrs of observation.

Table 1: Visits and hours watched by month, Berry Head 18 June 2008–10 November 2008

Month	Visits	Total Hrs	a.m. Hrs	p.m. Hrs
June ¹	2	11.5	7.0	4.5
July	9	72.9	47.9	25.0
August ²	14	95.3	54.3	41.0
September	5	31.8	12.3	19.5
October ¹	9	53.5	29.0	24.5
November ¹	2	11.0	8.5	2.5
Total	41	276.0	159.0	117.0

¹ Visits which are outside the SeaWatch SW survey window included: 7 visits (53.1hrs) before 15 July and 5 visits (32.7hrs) after 15 October

² Includes one 5hr watch from nearby Sharkham Point

Weather

Weather including: wind direction and strength, cloud cover, visibility and sea state, was noted. This was recorded at the start and finish of the watch, as well as any major shifts in conditions during the watch (e.g., a front clearing). Perhaps the most important factors are wind speed and direction, coupled with visibility. Figure 1 shows wind strength and direction on days when recording took place.

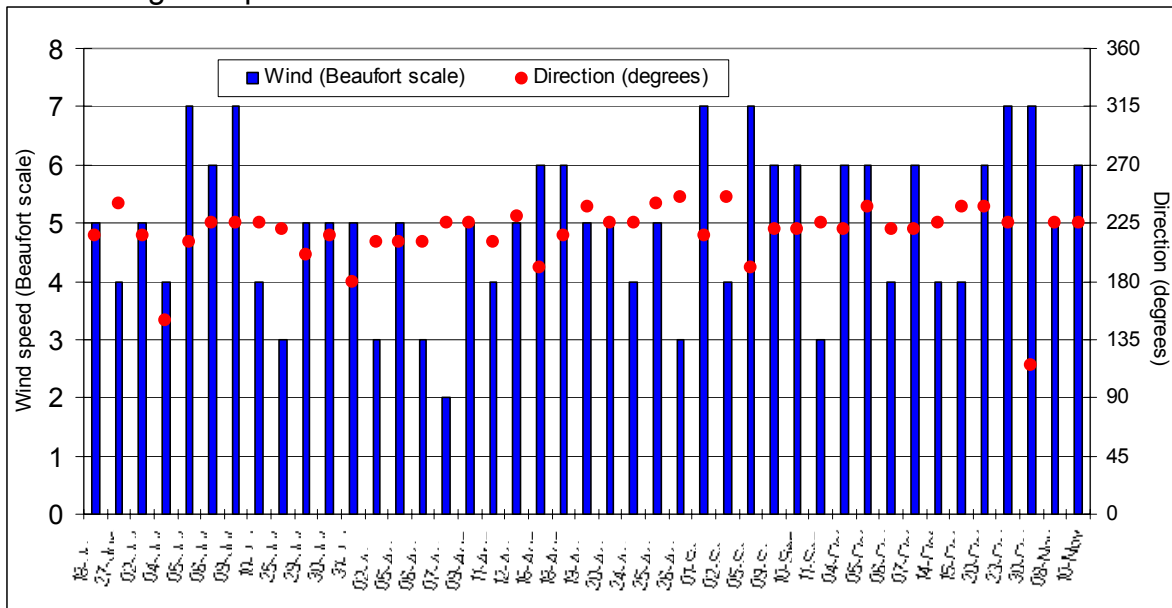


Figure 1: Wind speed (Beaufort scale) and direction (degrees) on days watched, Berry Head, 18 June 2008–10 November 2008.

Both wind parameters were estimates made on site, with wind direction noted in degrees using a compass, while wind strength was estimated using the Beaufort scale (1–12). It is difficult to summarise these measures in a simple graphical way, as conditions often changed throughout the day, especially when fast-moving low-pressure systems arrived. Generally the conditions recorded roughly agreed with Met Office or Shipping forecasts, although there is always an element of observer error. Figure 1 gives an indication of the average wind conditions on any one-day and should be viewed in this light. Wind direction, while plotted in degrees in Figure 1, is simplified in the

accompanying text to eight-point compass direction, (i.e. WSW = 245°; SW = 225°; SSW = 200°; S = 180°; SSE = 160°; SE = 135°; ESE 110°; E = 90°). Within the species text, wind directions are also accompanied by the strength (e.g., SSW5).

The summer of 2008 was exceptionally unsettled between late June and August, with a series of low-pressure systems moving through. Winds were SSW–WSW on 92% of watches during the period (SSW on 42% of watches, SW on 31% and WSW on 19%, S on 4% and SE on 4%), with associated rain and restricted visibility at times. Similar conditions persisted during the first-half of September, but from mid-September high pressure dominated, making morning seawatching conditions difficult because of glare, so this period was not covered. More low pressure systems moved through from early October into early November. During September–November winds were SSW to WSW on the majority of watches: SSW on 41% of watches, SW on 29%, WSW on 24% and ESE on 6%.

Visibility and cloud cover are extremely subjective measures and change rapidly when active weather systems are moving through. During the unsettled summer between late June and August, precipitation reduced visibility on 52% of watches, with cloud cover >50% on 96%. From September to November precipitation reduced visibility on 59% of watches with cloud cover >50% on 94%. The best seabird passage was generally recorded with restricted visibility (<6km, when you cannot, or can just see Hope's Nose). However, for Balearic Shearwaters, reasonable passage was noted on days when visibility was >10km, although cloud cover is needed at Berry Head to eliminate early morning glare and allow confident identification. For instance, on 10 July 2008, 35 Balearic Shearwaters passed, despite visibility being more than 10km and a moderate breeze (SW4); but importantly cloud cover was 60-80% eliminating glare.

Species and level of recording

Species were recorded at three levels of detail, broadly in line with SeaWatch SW methodology, but with some site adaptations for Berry Head.

Level 1 species included: Balearic Shearwater; Basking Shark; Ocean Sunfish *Mola mola*; any cetaceans (whales, dolphins); any rare seabirds considered by BBRC, e.g. Fea's Petrel *Pterodroma feae* etc – generally your dream-birds! For this group the following information was recorded: day/half-day/hourly total, time, direction, age/plumage, length/size and behavioural notes. Only selected elements are presented here, but the full dataset was submitted to the Seawatch SW project for further analysis. Within this first grouping, only Balearic Shearwater and Harbour Porpoise *Phocoena phocoena* feature strongly at Berry Head. There was one submission to BBRC and a couple of "ones that got away", one of which is mentioned later.

Level 2 comprised scarce seabirds, generally those species that feature on Devon's 'A' and 'B' lists. These included: Cory's Shearwater; Great Shearwater; Sooty Shearwater *Puffinus griseus*; Pomarine Skua *Stercorarius pomarinus*; Long-tailed Skua; Sabine's Gull; Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis*; Roseate Tern *Sterna dougalli*, Little Auk *Alle alle* and Puffin

Fratercula arctica. For this group the following were recorded: day/half-day/hourly total, time, direction, age/plumage and behavioural notes.

Level 3 included most other seabirds, except local breeders. Day/half-day/hourly total and direction were recorded for the following: Common Scoter *Melanitta nigra*; Manx Shearwater; European Storm-petrel *Hydrobates pelagicus*; Arctic Skua *Stercorarius parasiticus*; Great Skua *Stercorarius skua*; Mediterranean Gull *Larus melanocephalus*; Little Gull *Hydrocoloeus minutus*; and any wildfowl (swans, geese and ducks), divers, grebes, waders and terns not already listed above or mentioned below. Also included in the above were some counts of Gannet *Morus bassanus*, but only when there was a noticeable southward movement, as there is tendency for feeding birds to range around Lyme Bay so that the same birds can wander back and forth during the day.

Some additional resident breeding species were also recorded at level 3, but only post-breeding, as localised movement (from nearby colonies) made counting difficult. These included: Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla* (including proportion of juvenile/first-winter) and Razorbill *Alca torda*. For these species only day/half-day total and direction was noted. Although attempts were made to count Fulmar *Fulmaris glacialis* and Guillemot *Uria aalge*, localised movements to and from the nearby colony confused any meaningful data on passage. Both species regularly return to their breeding cliffs outside the breeding season, with the exception of post-breeding moult, while the main migration tends to be later in the autumn.

Sightings - Species totals and passage rates

The following table gives the number of each species recorded for levels 1–3 by myself. Tables 2 and 3 present the total number recorded and passage rates for seabirds, or birds that make use of marine environment for a proportion of the year. The measure given for mean passage rate is derived by dividing total number seen by hours watched. This measure effectively adjusts for effort, so that if I watched for 10 hours and saw 20 Balearic Shearwaters one day, but only managed four hours and saw eight on another, the passage rate is identical at 2.0 birds/hr. This measure is extremely useful for comparing sites and with past and future data; and allows such comparisons as the difference between morning and afternoon. Importantly this measure acts as an index, as is it includes any period where a species' passage was not recorded. Unfortunately, this valuable information is not recorded in many datasets; for instance, I was unable to derive a comparable passage rate from data held on the DBWPS database as nil records are not included.

Table 2: Level 1 (in bold) and level 2 seabirds, totals and passage rate (birds/hr), Berry Head 18 June 2008–10 November 2008.

Species	Whole day ¹		a.m. ¹		p.m. ¹	
	Total	rate	Total	rate	Total	rate
Balearic Shearwater	701	2.541	426	2.681	275	2.350
Yelkouan Shearwater ²	1	0.004	1	0.006	0	0.000
Cory's Shearwater ³	106	0.384	104	0.654	2	0.017
Great Shearwater ³	8	0.029	4	0.025	4	0.034
Large Shearwater sp.	2	0.007	2	0.013	0	0.000
Sooty Shearwater	92	0.333	44	0.277	48	0.410
Pomarine Skua	65	0.236	29	0.182	36	0.308
Long-tailed Skua ^{3,4}	10	0.036	5	0.031	5	0.043
Sabine's Gull ³	13	0.047	8	0.050	5	0.043
Yellow-legged Gull	5	0.018	1	0.006	4	0.034
Roseate Tern ³	1	0.004	0	0.000	1	0.009
Little Auk	2	0.007	1	0.006	1	0.009
Puffin	31	0.112	23	0.145	8	0.068

¹ Hours recorded: Total = 275.9; a.m. = 158.9; p.m. = 117.0

² Under consideration by BBRC, so should be considered putative

³ Devon 'A' list species. Accepted by DBRC

⁴ Includes one bird seen passing Sharkham Point, heading from Berry Head

A more detailed analysis of individual species or groupings follows this section. No statistical analysis of significant differences between 'morning' and afternoon' passage rates has been carried out, but this information is given, for general interest, within the more detailed accounts of individual species.

Within the text, for some key species, I have included records from other observers who covered periods when I was not present. These data are, however, not included in calculations of passage rates, as in some instances I do not have the watch duration, or any watches with nil recordings needed for calculating this measure. In addition, these extra data have a very strong bias towards the mornings.

Several of the species in Table 2 require full supporting details to be submitted to DBRC; those shown have been accepted.

A range of waders and wildfowl were seen migrating past Berry Head, these are listed in Appendix I for interest. Generally these are more casual recordings, as more emphasis was placed on seabird passage. Certain species like Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus* are probably under-recorded as many sneak under the observation position unnoticed unless they call, and many passing waders were simply unidentified. No further analysis or interpretation is given to these species. Passerines were recorded but are not included in this report. Perhaps, for me, a Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* on 9 August 2008 was of the most appeal, as they are seldom seen migrating past this headland.

Table 3: Level 3 seabirds, totals and passage rate (birds/hr), Berry Head 18 June 2008–10 November 2008.

Species	Whole day ¹		a.m. ¹		p.m. ¹	
	Total	Rate	Total	Rate	Total	Rate
Eider	3	0.011	3	0.019	0	0.000
Common Scoter ²	324	1.174	268	1.839	25	0.242
Velvet Scoter	1	0.004	1	0.006	0	0.000
Red-throated Diver	2	0.007	1	0.006	1	0.009
Black-throated Diver	1	0.004	1	0.006	0	0.000
Great Northern Diver	12	0.043	6	0.038	6	0.051
Great Crested Grebe	1	0.004	1	0.006	0	0.000
Manx Shearwater ³	7562	27.407	3542	25.255	2497	23.895
European Storm-petrel	586	2.124	251	1.579	335	2.863
Gannet ⁴	6884	38.244	-	-	-	-
Grey Phalarope	3	0.011	0	0.000	3	0.026
Arctic Skua	550	1.993	307	1.932	243	2.077
Great Skua	215	0.779	131	0.824	84	0.718
Skua sp.	10	0.036	4	0.025	6	0.051
Mediterranean Gull	14	0.051	11	0.069	3	0.026
Common Gull	32	0.116	32	0.201	0	0.000
Little Gull	3	0.011	3	0.019	0	0.000
Kittiwake ⁵	7769	51.880	-	-	-	-
Little Tern	1	0.004	1	0.006	0	0.000
Black Tern	18	0.065	4	0.025	14	0.120
Sandwich Tern	424	1.537	369	2.322	55	0.470
Common Tern ⁶	2130	7.720	1362	9.055	760	7.070
Arctic Tern	30	0.109	16	0.101	14	0.120
'Commic' Tern	48	0.174	0	-	-	-
Razorbill ⁷	309	1.120	183	1.187	22	0.193

¹ Hours recorded: Total = 275.9; a.m. = 158.9; p.m. = 117.0

For some species the total hours recorded was restricted and/or splitting counts by a.m. or p.m. was not carried out on all watches, as follows:

² Hours recorded: Total = 275.9; a.m. = 145.8; p.m. = 103.5

² Hours recorded: Total = 275.9; a.m. = 140.3; p.m. = 104.5

⁴ Hours recorded: Total = 178.5; no a.m./p.m. split

⁵ Hours recorded (from 25 July 2008): Total = 157.8; no a.m./p.m. split

⁶ Hours recorded: Total = 275.9; a.m. = 150.4; p.m. = 107.5

⁷ Hours recorded: Total = 275.9; a.m. = 154.2; p.m. = 114.0

Species and species groups

Balearic Shearwater

This was the headline species that was of greatest interest to the Seawatch SW Project, and most weight is given to it here. In 2008 Balearic Shearwaters were recorded in every month off Devon – making an exceptional spread of records and the first year when the species was recorded in every month. However, the main (post-breeding) movement into SW waters takes place in the summer, with 2008 being no exception. Figure 2 shows the passage rate

of Balearic Shearwater (birds/hr) between 18 June 2008–10 November 2008 at Berry Head. Balearic Shearwaters were seen on every day when recording took place during this period, with the exception of 14–15 October 2008 and 13 November 2008.

In all, I recorded 701 Balearic Shearwaters during the period, with at least one bird seen on 93% of watches, with a mean passage rate of 2.5 birds/hr. There was little difference between rates for morning or afternoon watches, although morning rates were marginally higher (2.7 versus 2.4 birds/hr). In addition, c. 26 birds were recorded when I was not present, bringing the total to c. 727 Balearic Shearwaters in c. 295 hrs (c. 2.5/hr). These extra data are not included in Figure 2 nor used in further analysis.

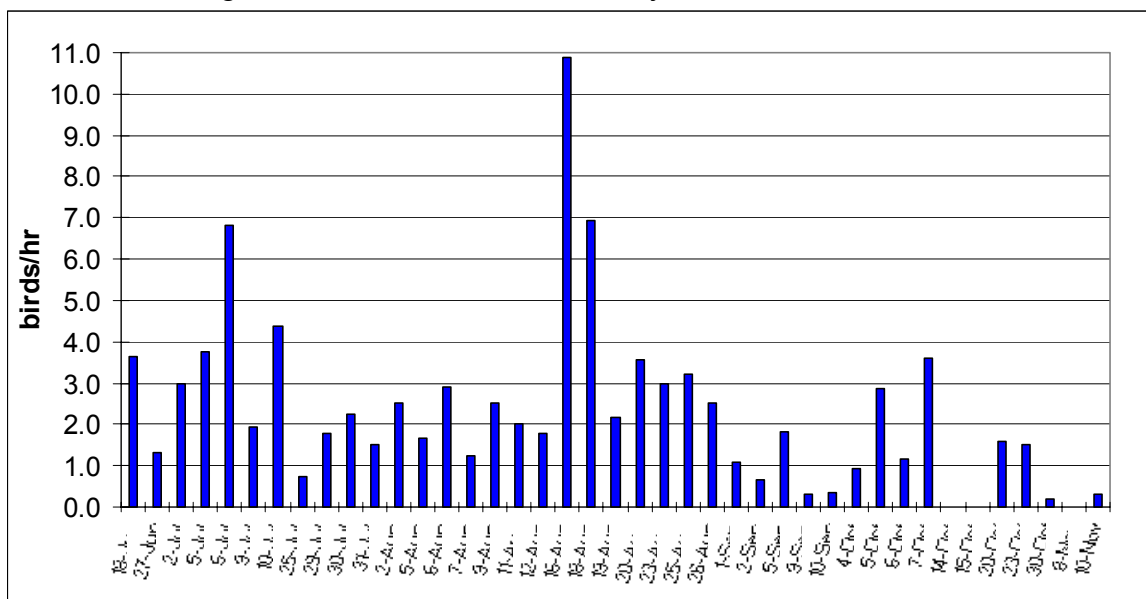


Figure 2: Balearic Shearwater passage rate (birds/hr) on days watched, Berry Head, 18 June 2008–10 November 2008.

Figure 2 appears to show three passage peaks in Balearic Shearwater occurrence during the observation period. The lack of coverage during late September perhaps exaggerates the third peak, but the first two appear real.

The first peak occurred in early July, before the official Seawatch SW start date of 15 July 2008. For watches prior to this date, 18 June 2008–10 July 2008, the passage rate was 3.3 birds/hr (178 birds in 53.2 hrs observation), with a peak day count of 44 birds in 11.7 hrs (3.8/hr) on 5 July 2008. It is worth noting that calculation of mean passage rate for the Seawatch SW monitoring period (15 July 2008–15 October 2008) gives 2.6 birds/hr (496 birds in 190 hrs), very similar to the 2.5 birds/hr recorded for the period 18 June 2008–10 November 2008. This indicates that at Berry Head at least, late June to early July is well worth covering, as birds already appear to be moving through if conditions are suitable.

The arrival of good numbers in 2008 seemed earlier than usual (although this also appeared to happen in 2001, 2003 and 2006; see Table 4), coinciding with unsettled weather, with a relatively deep low-pressure system (for the time of year) running in on the 5 July 2008, giving SSW7–8 winds, followed by another on 9 July 2008 with SW–SSW6–7 winds. Balearic numbers were not too dissimilar to those at Portland Bill, where 60 were recorded on 4 July

2008, indicating an influx of birds into the central English Channel, which then moved out through Lyme Bay (Wynn & Brereton, 2009). Whether birds then moved on down the Cornish coast is not known, as Gwennap Head was not covered, but they may have just moved back across to the French side of the channel. Although the weather remained unsettled to the end of July, day counts did not match those earlier in the month, with half-monthly passage rates of 3.6 birds /hr (150 birds in 41.7hrs) in the first half of July but only 1.6 birds/hr (50 birds in 31.3hrs) for the second-half.

Most birds occurring at this time of year appeared to be in moult, with the first fresh (moult completed or juvenile) bird noted on 5 July 2008. It seems likely that most of these early-moulted birds are non-breeders. However, one photographed on 10 July 2008 (see Plates 2 and 3) appeared to be in pristine plumage, perhaps being one of the first youngsters of the year making it up to our waters! The photograph was sent to Pierre Yésou (the French authority on Balearic Shearwaters) who confirmed that the bird was most likely a juvenile. By the end of July the majority of birds appeared to be in fresh plumage.



Plates 2 and 3: Balearic Shearwater (presumed juvenile), Berry Head, 10 July 2008

Unsettled conditions persisted through August. During the first half of the month, daily counts were regularly of 10–25 birds, giving an mean passage rate of 2.0 birds/hr (116 birds in 57.5hrs), but the major passage peak of the year occurred early in the second half of August (see Figure 2) where a mean of 6.3 birds/hr (239 birds in 37.8hrs) was recorded. The bulk of this passage took place in just two days. The movement started on 16 August 2008, when another low-pressure system arrived from the west, giving S5–6 winds increasing and shifting SSE7, and then veering SSW6; resulting in 109 birds passing in 10hrs (10.9 birds /hr). At the time of writing this represents the highest Balearic passage count recorded in one day in Devon (but only just!). Two days later, yet another low-pressure system moved through giving SSW6-7 winds. This system produced another good count with 83 birds recorded in 12hrs (6.9 birds/hr).

The large Balearic movements on these two days were intriguing, as neither was replicated at either Portland Bill or Gwennap Head. This implied that birds may have been pushed up into Lyme Bay from the French side of the channel on the front of these two weather systems, and then returned, perhaps leaving coastal waters around Start or Prawle Points (both to the SW of Berry Head). There are data from 16 August 2008 from Prawle Point and Torcross, which is

approximately 9km NE of Prawle and, importantly, before Start Point. On this day 58 birds were recorded in 10 hrs (5.8 birds /hr) at Prawle Point – seemingly a lower passage rate than Berry Head, while at Torcross, 40 were recorded in 4hrs (10.0 birds/hr), a very similar rate to that at Berry Head. It would appear, on this occasion at least, some birds were leaving the coastal waters around Start Point, which often appears to be the case with other seabird groups such as skuas and terns.

In September numbers generally declined, and during the first-half of the month the mean passage rate was only 1.0 bird/hr (32 birds in 31.8hrs). Even a vigorous low on 5 September 2008 with strong SSW6–7 winds only produced 21 birds (1.8/hr), and suitable conditions on 9 September 2008 only produced three birds (0.3 birds /hr), suggesting that larger numbers were not in this part of the Channel at the time. However, it is interesting to note that on 1 September 2008, 30 birds (including an impressive flock of 27) were recorded in 4hrs (7.5 birds/hr) at Seaton (further E on the Devon coast); such numbers were not replicated at Berry Head either on this or the next day. During the second-half of September, high-pressure dominated and conditions were generally more settled; neither myself nor other observers visited during this period.

In October yet more low-pressure systems moved through from the west, and produced another influx of Balearic Shearwaters, although not as pronounced as the two earlier peaks. During the first-half of the month passage rate was 2.0 birds/hr (59 birds in 30hrs), with peak counts of 20 in 5 hrs (2.9 birds /hr) on 5 October 2008 and 28 birds in 7.75 hrs (3.6 birds/hr) on 7 October 2008. Passage then tailed off, with no birds recorded during watches on 14–15 October 2008. During the second half of the month, the passage rate was 1.1 birds/hr (26 birds in 23.5hrs), with the highest count of 13 in 8.25hrs (1.6/hr) on 20 October 2008. On two watches made in early November in favourable conditions only one bird was seen, showing that numbers had really tailed off. During this period Gwennap Head actually recorded their highest count of the survey, with 115 passing on 6 October 2008. This adds further weight to the theory of birds pushing up from the French coastline (R.B.Wynn *pers comm.*), as high numbers were reported off both Brittany and the Cherbourg Peninsula in October (Wynn and Brereton, 2009). Although Berry Head was covered on both 5 and 7 October, the 6th was not, so it is unknown whether this was just a localised movement off Gwennap Head.

Balearic Shearwaters often feed behind trawlers hauling their nets and this was noted on eight watches, mostly in August. The most observed doing this were eight Balearic Shearwaters with two Sooty Shearwaters on 20 August 2008; these followed the trawler right into Torbay. Seabird feeding frenzies also form out in Lyme Bay, with Balearic Shearwaters often participating before moving on. This was noted on seven dates, with a maximum of 12 birds involved in one large mixed frenzy on 2 July 2008.

I attempted to note plumage variation, but this was very difficult to standardise, as a wide range of birds was seen. Light (visibility) and distance are important factors in influencing perception of underside plumage tone. Birds ranged from dark, having dark bellies with a hint of paleness, superficially resembling a Sooty Shearwater, through to extremely pale birds

with white bellies extending to the throat and rear vent and undertail coverts (but generally not beyond), also with a paler look to the underwing. These pale birds may indeed cause confusion with Manx or perhaps, Yelkouan Shearwater *Puffinus yelkouan*, but they are more robust looking, with thicker necks and that pot-bellied Balearic look. However, one bird was not so and is mentioned later.

Whether 2008 was an exceptional year for Balearic Shearwaters in Devon is hard to say without directly comparable data from previous years. It was certainly notable in that birds were recorded every month, and in producing the highest number of birds recorded (1,355) for any year to date. It is interesting to note that in 2008, the monthly mean for the previous 10-year period (1998–2007) was exceeded in every month except September (see Table 4). What these data cannot take into account is effort, or duplication of counts between sites. The extra effort at Berry Head in 2008 would certainly skew this data.

Based on 2008 Berry Head data I would recommend a watch period of July to mid-October at least, which would cover the majority of Balearic Shearwater occurrence off this watch point. The period 1 July 2008 to 15 October 2008 would capture 92% of sightings, giving 2.8 birds/hr (646 birds in 232hrs). 15 June 2008 to 15 October 2008 would capture 96% of the Balearics sightings, giving 2.8 birds/hr (674 birds in 243hrs); and 1 July 2008 to 30 October 2008 would also capture 96% of the Balearics sightings: 2.7 birds /hr (672 birds in 254hrs). These passage rates are marginally higher than those in the SeawatchSW survey period, due to birds already moving from late June and early July. However, no one-year is likely to be the same!

Table 4: Total Balearic Shearwaters in Devon, 1998–2008.

Year	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
1998	1	0	0	0	0	14	78	80	307	41	2	1	524
1999	0	0	0	0	2	6	31	107	296	29	0	0	471
2000	1	0	0	0	0	1	20	49	60	6	0	0	137
2001	0	0	0	0	0	6	429	369	250	107	0	0	1161
2002	0	0	0	0	25	5	8	82	65	41	2	1	229
2003	0	0	1	1	2	45	270	83	32	6	8	0	448
2004	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	52	18	8	0	0	78
2005	0	0	0	0	1	0	44	50	19	28	2	0	144
2006	0	0	0	0	5	2	272	414	480	69	12	9	1263
2007	1	2	0	0	5	44	85	170	233	33	0	0	573
2008	35	12	13	12	15	50	257	617	139	197	7	1	1355
Mean ¹	<1	<1	<1	<1	4	12	124	146	176	37	3	1	503

¹ 10 year mean 1998-2007

Of more recent years with good coverage (see Table 4), it appears 2001 and 2006 were also extremely good years for Balearic Shearwater occurrence in Devon's coastal waters, during the peak period at least. Taking Berry Head as the key Devon site for monitoring passage, it is possible to compare passage rates (which to some extent takes into account effort) with some recent years such as 2006. In the peak period July–October, from my own Berry Head

coverage, the average passage rate was 3.6 birds/hr (369 in 101.8 hrs), which is higher than the 2.6 birds/hr for the same period in 2008. Ironically this did not include 13 September 2006, when 102 birds passed. If the few watches I missed during this period are also added in, there is a remarkable mean passage rate of 4.1 birds/hr (520 birds in 128 hrs), so 2006 would appear to be the best year recorded to date. This is backed up from national data, showing that large numbers of birds penetrated up into the Irish Sea (Wynn, 2009). Although in 2006, in Devon at least, data would be skewed towards watches taking place in the most optimal conditions (mornings and bad weather), when in 2008 there was a broader spectrum of conditions covered! But for comparison, in 2007 my recorded mean passage rate was 1.6 birds/hr (138 in 85.0 hrs) for the same period, lower than both 2006 and 2008.

Other Shearwaters

The highlight of the season occurred on 29 July 2008, when Mike Langman and myself saw a very interesting shearwater at reasonably close range feeding behind a fishing boat for more than 15 mins. The bird showed plumage characteristics and jizz consistent with our present knowledge of **Yelkouan Shearwater**. Not only were we able get photographs (see Plates 3 and 4) to complement Mike's sketches, it was also seen with a Balearic Shearwater for direct comparison. This record is being considered by the BBRC.



Plates 3 and 4: Putative Yelkouan Shearwater, Berry Head, 29 July 2008

Manx Shearwaters were recorded on 83% of watches during the period, with a total of 7562 birds (27.4 birds/hr). On days where I recorded hourly and half-day totals, the morning counts were slightly greater than those in the afternoon, with 25.2 versus 23.9 birds/hr respectively. In all there were 12-day counts of 100 or more birds, mostly during June–July. The highest count was 3318 in 13hrs (255 birds/hr) on 9 July 2008 – nearly half of the total recorded throughout the whole period. This also represented a site record for Berry Head. This movement was associated with rain and SW–SSW6–7 winds, following a deep low-pressure system. The second highest day total was 618 (51.5 birds/hr) on 18 August, when good numbers of Balearic Shearwaters were also seen during rough conditions. *The record mentioned above was, however, short-lived, as 7,458 passed on 9 April 2009.*

The watch period starts after good numbers of Manx have already entered the western Channel, so reasonable numbers may be recorded from March onwards; e.g., I saw 452 in 6hrs on 29 March 2008. Numbers tailed off after August, although the odd bird was recorded right through to November.

Cory's Shearwater is a species one hopes to see, but in some years we see none. 2008 was a good year, with 106 birds (0.4 birds/hr), recorded on 7% of watches. The first was seen on 5 July 2008, with a bird heading north at 11:25 and then two coming south not long afterwards (12:10 and 12:35). On this particular day the predicted front giving rain and SSW7–8 winds, did not arrive until 11:00. These birds appeared shortly afterwards, implying that they were already out in the channel. Fascinatingly, the first bird gave us a good snapshot of how these larger pelagic species react to land in such conditions. It was initially seen heading north into Lyme Bay on the prevailing winds, and disappeared into the murky conditions. It would have been confronted with a land barrier along the East Devon/Dorset coastline, and been forced to turn and head back south to avoid land, but against the prevailing SSW wind. This would then push the birds closer to headlands such as Berry Head in restricted visibility. Not all movements are so predictably linked to the strong winds. On 30 July 2008 I arrived to a murky morning with a moderate SSW5 wind (not really the conditions in which you would predict a large movement of Cory's, but I'm learning!); Cory's were moving through from the start of my watch at 06:00hrs. In all 102 were logged, with hourly counts of 66, 18, 13, 4 and then just one, with no passage after 11:00. The movement was also recorded further west along the South Devon and Cornwall coasts, with increasing numbers: c.200 at Prawle, c.700 off the Lizard (the peak), then lower again to the west, with 170 past Gwennap Head.

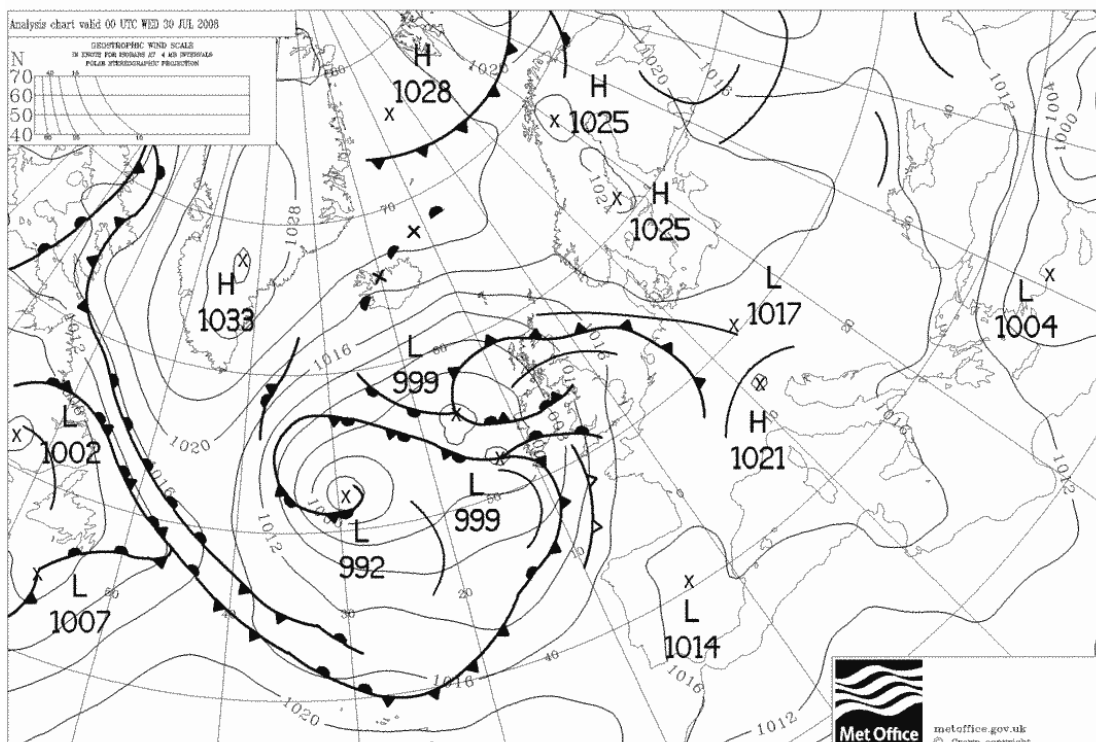


Figure 3: Synoptic chart for 00hrs on 30 July 2008.

It seems likely that this large group of birds wandered up into the Channel during the previous night. The synoptic chart (see Figure 3) may explain what triggered this movement, which coincided roughly with peak Cory's occurrence in the NE Atlantic. The chart shows warm air being dragged up from the south by a complex low-pressure system to the west of Ireland. Not only would this have the effect of raising sea surface temperatures (Wynn & Brereton, 2009); but this warm air also produced humid conditions restricting visibility, so that birds moved into the Western Approaches and up into the western Channel. This poor visibility was the key condition at Berry Head; as visibility improved during the morning; the birds became more and more distant as they avoided the sight of land. The next day just a single bird was seen; visibility had remained good. Any morning versus afternoon passage comparison is greatly skewed by the morning of 30 July 2008, which was another site record. The birds seen were most probably of the Atlantic race Cory's Shearwater *Calonectris diomedea borealis*, but there's always the possibility of the Mediterranean race, 'Scopoli's Shearwater' *C. d. diomedea*, now proved to breed in Northern Biscay!

Great Shearwater, like Cory's, is another pelagic species that you hope to see. In a good year they outnumber Cory's, but in 2008 only eight were recorded during the watch period. However, they were recorded on 12% of visits - more days than Cory's! The first, on 5 July 2008, was early for the species (see Cory's above for conditions) and appeared to be the first recorded in UK and Irish waters for that year. The highest count was three on 30 July 2008, associated with the large Cory's movement that day (also see Cory's for conditions). This species can often be seen following trawlers dragging their nets; as on both 9 August 2008 and 11 August 2008, when single birds were seen following trawlers during moderate SW-SSW winds. Both times the birds gave good views; the second bird was watched for an hour as the trawler slowly lumbered in cleaning its nets. Another two birds were seen on 16 August 2008, when conditions produced the record Balearic passage count (see Balearic Shearwater for conditions).

Not all large shearwaters can be specifically identified from brief or poor views. Two on the morning of 30 July 2008, were recorded as Cory's/Great, but were probably Cory's as this was the more numerous species that day.

Sooty Shearwaters were recorded on 42% of watches. In all 92 were seen with a mean rate of 0.33 birds/hr during my watches. Another 13 birds were seen on watches when I was not present giving a total of 105. This species tended to be seen rather more frequently in the afternoon, with mean rates of 0.41 versus 0.28 birds/hr respectively. The first bird was seen on 9 July 2008, but most were seen from mid-August onwards, with double figure counts of 11 on 16 August 2008 (1.1 birds/hr), the maximum 27 on 18 August 2008 (2.3 birds/hr), 13 on 9 September 2008 (1.3 birds/hr) and 11 on 11 September 2008 (5.5 birds/hr). All these higher counts were associated with active weather systems producing strong winds (≥ 6) with a southerly bias (i.e. SE-SW). The last bird seen was on the last watch of 10 November 2008.

Storm-petrels

European Storm-petrels (or should we now call them 'British Storm-petrels' (Robb *et al.*, 2008)) were recorded on 37% of watches. The first was seen on 5 July 2008, and the last on 9 September 2008. A total of 586 were recorded during the period, with a mean rate of 2.1 birds /hr. This species tended to be more frequently seen in the afternoon than in the morning, with mean passage rates of 2.9 versus 1.6 birds/hr. This may be because these birds often follow trawlers, which mostly start returning during the afternoon. Most birds were seen in July and August, with the highest count of 283 (21.8 birds /hr) on 09 July 2008, the same day as the highest Manx Shearwater count. Other double-figure counts were: 26 on 6 July 2008 (5.2/hr), 41 on 10 July 2008 (5.1/hr), 110 on 11 August 2008 (13.8/hr) and 62 on 12 August 2008 (6.9/hr). The occurrence of this species often seems quite unpredictable with none seen under optimum seawatching conditions on 16 August 2008 and only three on the 18 August 2008!

One species we have hoped to see off Berry Head over the years, but to no avail, is Wilson's Storm-petrel *Oceanites oceanicus*. We have assumed that, like European Storm-petrels, a bird may be attracted to a returning trawler, especially during the right weather conditions in August – if we are very lucky! On the 11 August 2008 (a key time for Wilson's in the SW approaches), a good run of early-returning trawlers attracted a total of 110 European Storm-petrels. At 12:25, I picked up a more robust Storm-petrel, flying with the 'swallow-like' jizz (with much gliding) of Wilson's, heading back southwards from a trawler! Unfortunately I just could not see some of the crucial plumage features, which would be needed for acceptance of Wilson's. Sadly, I was on my own at the time, but risked changing eyepieces from 30x up to 45x, in the hope of seeing those extra details. This was a mistake and I never found the bird again; despite a desperate call to Mike Langman, who arrived and helped search behind more returning boats with attendant European Storm-petrels; both of us hoping the bird might join another trawler and get drawn back in, but it never did. A very frustrating one that got away in 2008, but one for the future may be!

Skuas

Arctic Skua was the most frequently seen, and was recorded on 78% of watches. In all 550 were counted, with a mean passage rate of 2.0 birds/hr. At least another 25 were seen on days I was not present making total of c.575. Passage rates were marginally higher in the afternoons, with 2.1 versus 1.9 birds/hr in the mornings. The first was seen on 9 July 2008; and numbers slowly increased from late July, generally linked to the previously described periods of unsettled weather. Figure 4 shows the daily passage rate during the watch period.

Good numbers of birds appeared in mid-August, perhaps indicating earlier than usual dispersal linked to poor breeding success. This was noteworthy, as this species has also now moved to the BoCC3 Red list (Eaton *et al.*, 2009), due to a severe breeding population decline over the last 25 years. The highest count was 94 on 16 August 2008 (9.4/hr), coinciding with the highest Balearic Shearwater count. Other counts of 20 or more around this mid-

August peak were 33 on both 11 August 2008 (4.1/hr) and 18 August 2008 (2.8/hr). There was another peak in early September (normally the peak time for passage), with 32 on 5 September 2008 (2.8/hr), followed by the second highest count of 71 on 9 September 2008 (6.9/hr) and 24 on 11 September 2008. A third pulse of birds in early October saw counts of 40 on 4 October 2008 (4.2/hr) and 66 on 5 October 2008 (9.4/hr), 26 on 7 October 2008 (3.4/hr) while 16 on 20 October 2008 (1.9/hr) was the last sizeable count. The last was seen on the last watch reported here, on 10 November 2008.

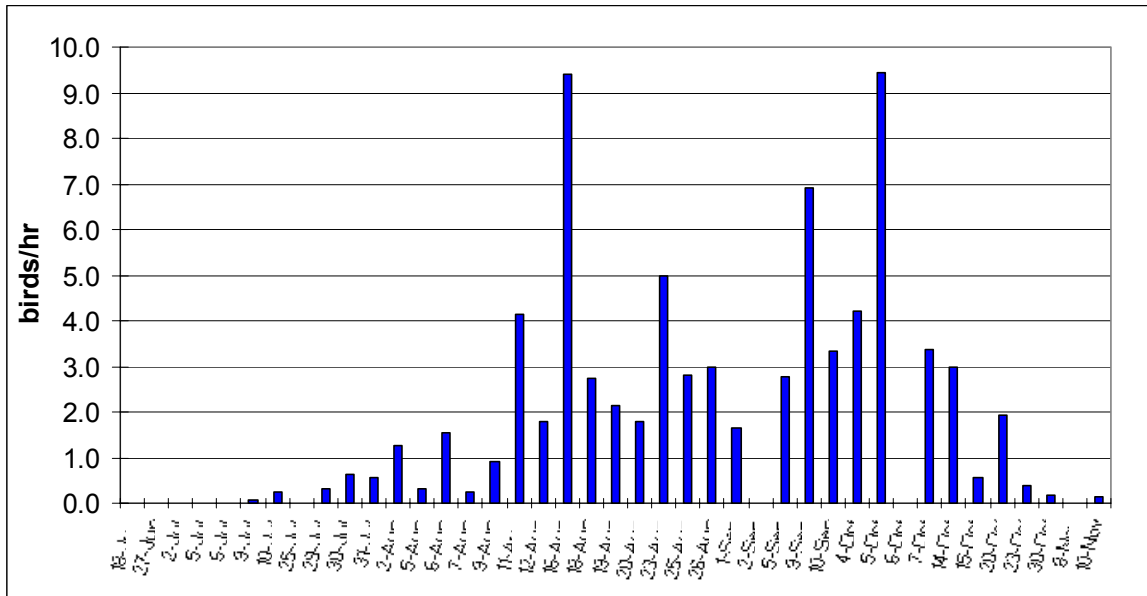


Figure 4: Arctic Skua passage rate (birds/hr), Berry Head on days watched, 18 June 2008–10 November 2008.

Great Skuas were recorded on 66% of watches. A total of 215 were seen, with a mean passage rate of 0.78 birds/hr. A further nine were seen on days when I was not present, making a total of 224. Morning and afternoon watches were quite similar, although the morning just edged the afternoon with rates of 0.82 versus 0.72 birds/hr. The first were four on 29 July 2008. Double figure counts were associated with active weather systems, with 23 on 11 August 2008 (4.1/hr), 32 on 16 August 2008 (3.2/hr), 19 on 5 September 2008 (1.7/hr) and 14 on 19 September 2008 (1.4/hr). The highest count was 43 on 5 October 2008 (6.1/hr), around the time of peak Devon occurrence, which is typically later than Arctic Skua. The last were six on 10 November 2008 (the last watch reported here) - not surprising as birds of this species sometimes winter off the Western Approaches.

Pomarine Skuas tend to be scarcer than Arctic or Great. However, it was a good summer/autumn, with birds recorded on 44% of watches. A total of 65 were seen, with a mean passage rate of 0.24 birds/hr. A further six were seen on days when I was not present making a total of 71. Afternoon watches appeared more productive, with morning and afternoon rates of 0.18 versus 0.31 birds/hr respectively. This species tends to move through later in the autumn than Arctic Skua, yet atypically many occurred before late September–October. The first were two on 31 July 2008, followed by the highest count of 10 on 11 August 2008, which included eight full-spooned birds, most likely failed breeders; the wind on this day was only SSW4, but visibility was poor throughout the afternoon. Other counts of five or more were

seven on 16 August 2008, nine on 5 September 2008 and six on 9 September 2008, all associated with active weather systems. Then more typically into October, five were seen on 5 October 2008 and nine on 7 October 2008. The species can occur well into the winter and two were seen on the last watch reported here on 10 November 2008.

Long-tailed Skuas are the rarest of the four skuas and are not recorded at all in some years off Berry Head. 2008 was a good year with 10 seen during the period, on just 12% of watches. The first bird was an adult on 25 August 2008, seen from Sharkham Point, coming from the direction of Berry Head. The next was a juvenile on 1 September 2008, then an immature (second or third summer) on 5 September 2008. Just two days then produced the rest of the birds, with five (one adult and four juveniles) on 5 October 2008 and two juveniles on 7 October 2008. Typically these birds tend to come through later in the day than Arctic Skuas after the main front of a weather system has moved through. Thus on the 5 October 2008, more than half the 66 Arctic Skuas recorded had come through before the first Long-tail and on 5 September 2008 and 7 October 2008 the majority (80%) of Arctics recorded had come through before any Long-tails were seen. This may be because Long-tails have a less powerful flight and therefore a greater tendency to be storm-driven than Arctic Skua, and /or sit out bad weather for longer.

Ten skuas were seen either inadequately or too distantly for confident identification. Usually suspected to be scarcer species, these were noted as six Pomarine/Arctic and four Long-tail/Arctic.

I conclude the skua account on an ironic note. In May 2008 I had headed up to Ard an Runair on North Uist (Outer Hebrides) to watch the famous Long-tail and Pomarine Skua passage, which I have been lucky enough to witness in previous years. However, the wind was consistently from the east and we did not see a single one. In 2008, Berry Head was far more productive during Seawatch SW!

Gulls

Numerous gulls pass by the headland, but recording was limited to scarcer species and Kittiwake passage outside the breeding season.

Of the scarcer gulls, five **Yellow-legged Gulls** were recorded. An adult was seen feeding behind a trawler on 10 July 2008, while the rest were juveniles, with singles on 25 July 2008 and 9 August 2008; and two on 11 August 2008. This species is increasingly recorded along the South Devon coast, especially as juveniles in summer. **Mediterranean Gulls** were seen on 20% of watches, with 14 birds on eight dates throughout the period, with maxima of four juveniles on 29 July 2008 and three adults on 30 October 2008. **Little Gulls** were seen on just two dates with a juvenile on 11 September 2008 and three (two adults and a first-winter) on 30 October 2008.

Sabine's Gull is to me the ultimate seawatcher's gull, as outside its breeding season it is a truly pelagic species. 2008 proved to be a memorable year for this delightful gull, which is not seen at all in some years. They were recorded on 15% of watches with a total of 13 birds. There was a distinct peak in early September, with the first, a juvenile on 1 September 2008, followed by four (one adult and three juveniles) on 5 September 2008, four on 9 September

2008 (three adults and one juvenile) and two juveniles on 10 September 2008. The next were in early October with an adult on 5 October 2008 and juvenile on 7 October 2008. A greater proportion of adults (38%) were recorded than usual, all in full breeding plumage. All these records were, unsurprisingly, linked to active weather systems.

Kittiwakes are seen right through the survey period (95% of watches), but as they breed, or at least attempt to do so, locally, recording of passage was restricted to late July onwards. Before late July birds can be seen moving both north and south most days to and from the colony, complicating passage counts. Although not counted on all watches (only 158 hrs), 7769 birds were recorded at a mean rate of 49.2 birds/hr. There were 11 passage counts of 200 birds or more, with the first of these on 29 July 2008, and the highest, 2137 on 30 October 2008 (388.5 birds/hr) and the next 1138 on 16 August 2008 (113.8/hr). The proportion of juvenile/first-winter birds was also recorded, which proved quite interesting given the present plight of this species. Overall around 11% of passage birds recorded were juvenile/first-winter, implying poor breeding success. Many local colonies produced no young in 2008, with none at all known to fledge at Berry Head (Nigel Smallbones *pers comm.*). Generally movements during July–August had very few juvenile/first-winter birds, in the range 0–2%. However, into October this picked up to 5–6% on two counts. The only exception to this was during an ESE7 wind on 30 October 2008 (the highest count), when 25% (543 birds) of those passing were juvenile/first-winter birds, implying that breeding had been successful at least somewhere!

Terns

Sandwich Terns *Sterna sandvicensis* were recorded on 49% of watches. A total of 424 were seen, with a mean passage rate of 1.5 birds/hr. Morning watches were considerably better than afternoon with rates of 2.3 versus 0.5 birds/hr respectively. The first was on 2 July 2008 and the last on 15 October 2008. High counts were typically during August–early September, when all seven counts of 20 or more occurred, the highest being 92 on 9 September 2008 (9.0/hr).

Common Terns showed some notable passage during the watch period. Birds were recorded on 63% of watches, with a total of 2130 seen, with a mean passage rate of 7.7 birds/hr. With this species there was a tendency for the morning to be better than afternoon, with mean rates of 9.1 versus 7.1 birds/hr respectively. The first birds recorded were 10 on 2 July 2008, while most were seen from late July–early September, with the peak in early August. The highest count was a site record of 1018 in 12hrs (84.8/hr) on 5 August 2008. The wind that day was SSW4–5 with drizzle cutting down visibility, thus birds moving down the English Channel were closer to land than usual. It is noteworthy, that on 3 August 2008 a large movement of 1270 birds passed Dungeness, perhaps the same birds taking around two days to move between the two watch points. Other counts of 50 or more were: 69 on 31 July 2008 (6.6/hr), 92 on 6 August 2008 (14.2 birds/hr), 314 on 9 August 2008 (31.4/hr), 259 on 16 August 2008 (25.9/hr), 125 on 5 September 2008 (10.9/hr) and 91 on 9 September 2008 (8.9/hr). The last bird seen was on the last watch of 7 October 2008.

Arctic Terns *Sterna paradisaea* are much scarcer than Common Tern off Berry Head and quite difficult to separate at any distance. Therefore this species was probably under-recorded, although during the large movement of terns on 5 August 2008, very few Arctic Terns were seen despite tern flocks moving past close enough for scrutiny. A total of 30 (plus a further 3 on days when I was not present) were seen. The highest count was 10 on 5 August 2008 but otherwise counts were typically in the range 1–4, and were generally associated with the Common Tern movements described above. The last were two on 9 November 2008.

A further 48 birds were assigned to 'Commic' Terns (not identified as either Common or Arctic) occurring on 5 September 2008.

Black Terns *Chlidonias niger* were only recorded on 10% of watches, with a total of 18 seen. Overall mean passage rate was 0.07 birds/hr, with afternoon watches far more productive, (0.12 versus 0.03 birds/hr). The first birds were



two on 31 July 2008; most were seen in early September, with five on 5 September 2008 and the highest count of 10 on 9 September 2008. Other terns recorded were a single juvenile **Little Tern** *Sternula albifrons* on 16 August 2008; and an adult **Roseate Tern** (see Plate 5) on 9 September 2008 – a day when five species of tern were seen.

Plate 5: Roseate Tern (adult), Berry Head, 9 September 2008

Auks

Guillemot passage was not recorded because the daily movement from nearby colonies complicates this. The largest colony is on Berry Head itself, so passage counts are not included in this paper. **Razorbills**, however, are less numerous local breeders and strong passage is often seen from October onwards. In all 309 (1.1 birds/hr) were recorded with a maximum of 125 on 15 October 2008. From past experience this seems rather low and the main passage probably occurred after the watch period.

Puffin passage generally peaks in the spring off Berry Head, when double figure counts are not unusual; the watch period would therefore not produce the most useful data for the species. They were, however, recorded on 29% of watches, with 31 birds seen (0.12/hr). Mornings were more productive for this species, with rates of 0.15 versus 0.07 birds/hr. The majority (94%) were seen before early August, with a maximum of seven on 10 July 2008; the only ones outside this period were two on 9 September 2008. **Little Auk** is at the other extreme, with passage usually in late October - November (if at all). Just two birds were seen on the morning of 30 October 2008, during an ESE7 wind, which also produced the largest Kittiwake count.

Gannet, sea ducks, diver, grebes and phalaropes

Gannets were very numerous and seen throughout the survey period (100% of watches). Although not counted on all watches, 6884 were recorded in

179hrs observation (38.5 /hr). The highest count was 1293 on 5 September 2008 (112 birds/hr), while there were 18, 100+ counts right through the period.

Common Scoter were seen on 49% of watches and recorded through out the watch period. In all 324 were seen with a mean passage rate of 1.2 birds/hr, mornings appeared far more productive than afternoon with 1.8 versus 0.2/birds hr. The maximum counts were 69 on 6 August 2008 and 52 on 30 October 2008. Passage was generally south although a few birds headed north. Just one **Velvet Scoter** *Melanitta fusca* was seen on 5 October 2008 and the first **Eider** *Somateria mollissima* were three on the 8 November 2008.

Diver sightings tend to increase after the count period, with birds mainly moving through from late autumn; and some winter. **Great Northern Diver** *Gavia immer* was the most frequently seen. Recorded on 15% of watches, with a total of 12 seen. Typically the first was seen in mid-autumn, on 5 October 2008, with the maximum of five on 10 November 2008. Just two **Black-throated Divers** *Gavia arctica* were recorded; singles on 14 October 2008 and 10 October 2008, both heading north. There were also just two **Red-throated Divers** *Gavia stellata* with singles on 30 October 2008 and 10 November 2008. One **Great Crested Grebe** *Podiceps cristatus* passed on 6 August 2008.

Grey Phalaropes *Phalaropus fulicarius* tend to be a rare sight off the headland. In what proved to be an exceptional autumn elsewhere (notably Cornwall) just three were seen during the watch, all on 5 September 2008.

Cetaceans and large fish

Although this account has concentrated on seabird passage a number of marine animals were also seen. Perhaps the best position for viewing cetaceans and other marine animals in calm conditions would be from the top of the headland, where there is a more panoramic view. However, data from the bird seawatch point may be most consistent, as most weather conditions can be covered, while at other positions on Berry Head it would not be



possible to scan during windy/wet conditions. It is noteworthy that some unusual cetaceans were seen passing during rougher conditions. Berry Head certainly is a poor relation to sites such as Gwennap Head for the range and number of marine animal species seen. This is no doubt because of to its location tucked up further into English Channel, and in Lyme Bay.

Plate 6: Harbour Porpoise, Berry Head, 27 June 2008

Harbour Porpoises (see Plate 6) were the most regularly recorded cetacean, and were seen on 63% of watches right through the period, with a range of 1–7 animals. The first sighting was three on 27 June 2008, including a mother and calf, which was also seen on 5 July 2008 (when seven animals present) and again on 29 July 2008. **Bottlenose Dolphins** *Tursiops truncatus* were

seen on two dates; seven headed north on 20 August 2008 and 11 including a calf, headed south on 5 October 2008. Two or three **Risso's Dolphins** *Grampus griseus* headed south on 6 August 2008. A very distant group of 10–20 unidentified **Dolphins** were seen on 5 September 2008.

Large marine fish included a single **Ocean Sunfish** on 9 July 2008 and 29 July 2008. While the highlight for me was a **Thresher Shark** *Alopias vulpinus* on 25 July 2008 and on 5 August 2008 a **Basking Shark** drifted north.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to the many seawatchers who assisted at Berry Head. In particular, to Berry Head stalwart Mike Langman, with whom I shared exciting views of the 'shearwater' and who also provided some extra data, as well as giving useful feedback on an earlier draft of this paper. Paul Albrechtsen, Simon Geary, Josh Marshall and David Norman who also provided additional Balearic sightings, for periods when I was not present. Julia Harris who speedily supplied Devon data from other observers in 2008 and previous years. Also thanks to Nigel Smallbones (Berry Head NNR manager) for access and who on many occasions phoned a lone bedraggled seawatcher to give moral support; and thanks to Russell Wynn for his inspiration in setting up Seawatch SW. Lastly, thanks are due to Mike Lock and Peter Reay for their editorial support in the production of this article.

On a small plug: in 2008 my watch was totally self-funded.



Plate 7: Fulmar, Berry Head, 2008

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Appendix I

Level 3 wildfowl, herons, waders and Kingfisher, totals and passage rate (birds/hr), Berry Head 18 June2008 – 10 November 2008.

Speices	Total	Rate
Brent Goose	2	0.007
Shelduck	11	0.040
Wigeon	3	0.011
Teal	1	0.004
Pochard	1	0.004
Little Egret	2	0.007
Grey Heron	1	0.004
Oystercatcher	5	0.018
Ringed Plover	1	0.004
Grey Plover	1	0.004
Knot	2	0.007
Dunlin	118	0.428
Bar-tailed Godwit	1	0.004
Redshank	11	0.040
Whimbrel	57	0.207
Common Sandpiper	1	0.004
Turnstone	4	0.014
Kingfisher	1	0.004

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