

What we do...

Cory's Shearwater passes
Bishop Rock Lighthouse
© Joe Pender

The short-range pelagic trip season off Scilly is now as much a part of the annual birding calendar as is the October 'bird fest'. The pelagic season centres on July and August, although trips occasionally are offered June, September and October depending on weather and demand. Popularity is growing year-on-year. There are many reasons why short-range pelagic trips off Scilly have become popular. Scilly is the most reliable site in Britain to see Wilson's Storm-petrel *Oceanites oceanicus*. The trips enjoy 100% success rate in locating European Storm-petrel *Hydrobates pelagicus*. Views of seabirds are often exhilarating with the gallery of photographs accruing on this web site a testament to the fact. The islands are also a wonderful destination for an extended weekend birding vacation.

Furthermore, Scilly short-range pelagic trips are establishing a track record of very rare seabirds with Britain's first Fea's Petrel *Pterodroma feae*, first Scopoli's Shearwater *Calonectris diomedea diomedea*, first Madeiran Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma castro*, first well-documented at-sea sighting of Swinhoe's Petrel *Oceanodroma monorhis*, and first Red-billed Tropicbird. To boot, Scilly has a tremendous record for the 'large shears' Great Shearwater *Puffinus gravis* and Cory's Shearwater *Calonectris d. borealis*.

Scilly lies 29 miles west of Land's End towards the Western Approaches in the Atlantic Ocean. Thus, it needs only a short-range pelagic trip to be at-sea and amongst the seabirds and trips rarely go more than nine miles offshore. We will use our many years of experience to find the best places to go birding on any particular day. Undersea features are found near Scilly at Poll Bank three miles southwest of Bishop Rock and Seven Stones Reef nine miles northeast of St Martin's. They generate upwellings bringing food items to the surface, which benefit seabirds and stimulate further food production. Poll Bank and Seven Stones reef are magnets for seabirds and prime locations for our short-range pelagic trips. We also explore the waters to the south of the islands. In addition, we search out trawlers in Scillonian waters and when found investigate the seabirds that it has attracted.



To attract seabirds to our boat we use two basic chumming techniques, 'steam and chum' and 'drift and chum'. When we steam and chum gulls collect behind the boat and follow, acting as a visual attractor to skuas, Sabine's Gull and other gulls, Gannets, Fulmars and shearwaters. Oily waste also draws storm-petrels into the wake. A good 'steam and chum' may yield many birds and a diverse species mix with the challenge to pick out the particularly interesting seabirds. When we spot birds (or cetaceans, or other marine life for that matter) we will alert everyone on deck, and if possible, try to get the boat in a better position for best viewing.



With 'drift and chum' the boat drifts whilst chum is used to send scent down wind to draw in smell sensitive tubenoses like our main target species Wilson's Storm-petrel. The challenge is patience since it takes time for the scent to disperse and we operate a 'three hour rule', meaning once started a 'drift and chum' will normally last at least three hours. A few participants question the duration of our 'drift and chum' so we reinforce the importance of patience and remind them of the rewards of watching a Wilson's close

up. The oily slick that forms up wind generally holds Wilson's for some time enabling all pelagic

goers to enjoy stunning views of this most accomplished of storm-petrels and to hone their identification skills.



We also take note of cetaceans and other marine life during our pelagic birding trips, and may take a few minutes to study some whales or dolphins if we are lucky to encounter any, but we don't tend to stay around for a long time waiting for them to resurface, nor do we follow a particular group or animal for long periods of time. Nevertheless, our trips have yielded some very interesting encounters with various cetaceans, and we have been able to document the occurrence of some rare visitors to our waters.



Although synoptic conditions are an important factor, short-range pelagic trips are scarcely cancelled off Scilly due to poor weather. There is always a leeward side affording sufficient protection for several miles offshore making trips possible and acceptably comfortable up to Force 7 winds. The very worst weather conditions are strong winds with heavy rain, thick fog (although this often clears

out at-sea); and hot, still, flat-calm days when seabirds are inactive. Thankfully none of these conditions are the norm, nor do they prevail for long.

One of the most frequently asked questions is, 'What is the best time to join a Scilly pelagic trip?' The answer is, 'It depends.' Most block-busting rarities have been seen in July and very early August. Wilson's Storm-petrel on average is most reliable mid-July to about 10 August. The main window for Fea's Petrels is 20 August to 9 September. Sabine's Gull, scarce skuas, and Grey Phalarope tend to be most prevalent in September and October. However, birds can turn up at any time demonstrated by records of Sabine's Gull in June, and Fea's Petrel and Long-tailed Skua in July.

If you want to see a Blue Shark tagged, then July and August are the favourite months. Cetaceans are encountered more frequently in the second-half of the season.

So, the best time to join a Scilly pelagic depends entirely on what you hope to see. The following summary of sightings by species from pelagic trips and land-based sightings mainly in the period 2000-2008 will assist you to choose your dates.

THE BIRDS

FEA'S PETREL

	Jun W1	Jun W2	Jun W3	Jun W4	Jul W1	Jul W2	Jul W3	Jul W4	Aug W1	Aug W2	Aug W3	Aug W4	Sep W1	Sep W2	Sep W3	Sep W4	Oct W1	Oct W2	Oct W3	Oct W4
1996											1									
1999												2								
2001						1														
2002													1							
2004												1	1							

CORY'S SHEARWATER

	Jun W1	Jun W2	Jun W3	Jun W4	Jul W1	Jul W2	Jul W3	Jul W4	Aug W1	Aug W2	Aug W3	Aug W4	Sep W1	Sep W2	Sep W3	Sep W4	Oct W1	Oct W2	Oct W3	Oct W4
2000					662	1		1	1	117	123	4	392	12		1	1	1		
2001						1	2		4		1									
2002			1					63		4		4	9							
2003							13				1	2								
2004			1		1			1	3	1		3	1					1		
2005					1		12	4	44		15	13		3		8				
2006							2	3	3		2			2	4					
2007					46		1				1									
2008					53	10		124	51	75	85	1								

SCOPOLI'S SHEARWATER

The **first for Britain** was seen from a Scilly pelagic trip on 2 August 2004.

GREAT SHEARWATER

	Jun W1	Jun W2	Jun W3	Jun W4	Jul W1	Jul W2	Jul W3	Jul W4	Aug W1	Aug W2	Aug W3	Aug W4	Sep W1	Sep W2	Sep W3	Sep W4	Oct W1	Oct W2	Oct W3	Oct W4
2000										5	3	63	2				9	1		
2001									4						3					
2002						2	3	20	13	43	14	455	122	88		3	868	45	1	
2003							1			1	3									
2004						1	3		1	1			2							
2005							1	6	5	16	12			35	25	9				
2006								13	1		20	2				2		1		
2007								2	1	6	7			2					3	
2008								4	9	4	7		4					1		

SOOTY SHEARWATER

	Jun W1	Jun W2	Jun W3	Jun W4	Jul W1	Jul W2	Jul W3	Jul W4	Aug W1	Aug W2	Aug W3	Aug W4	Sep W1	Sep W2	Sep W3	Sep W4	Oct W1	Oct W2	Oct W3	Oct W4
2000										1				2			7	10		
2001	1					1	2	1	1	2	4	3	5	1		15	11	9	4	
2002	1		5	1		1	3	3		10	1	28	19	9	3	23				
2003	2				1		1	1	1	2	4			5	15	1	1	27	1	
2004				1	1		3		2	2	15	5	6		6	1	4	4		
2005						1	1	2	4	8	7	6	12	14	3	3	13	3	7	4
2006					1	1	4	6	4		16	3		1	14	7	6			
2007					2			1	5	1	10		3	1	2	6	17	9	2	
2008					1	1	3		3	9	41	12	1			1	10	6		

BALEARIC SHEARWATER

	Jun W1	Jun W2	Jun W3	Jun W4	Jul W1	Jul W2	Jul W3	Jul W4	Aug W1	Aug W2	Aug W3	Aug W4	Sep W1	Sep W2	Sep W3	Sep W4	Oct W1	Oct W2	Oct W3	Oct W4
2000					4			2			1		4				2	1		
2001		2					3				1	1				5	12	3		
2002			1					1		1	1									
2003							4	2		1		4	2	1	1	2	1	3		
2004					7		2	1			4							1		
2005							2	4	1	2	2	3		1		1	2		4	
2006				1	1		3	2	2	1	2	1	1		1	2	1	1	1	
2007		1			1		1	1	5		2			2	3	2	1	2		
2008			1		1	1			3	5	4	3		1						

MANX SHEARWATER

A local breeder found around the islands April-September that is seen in small numbers from pelagic trips throughout the breeding season. **Best views** are attained from 'Shearwater Special' trips run by St Mary's Boatmen's Association with commentary given by Will Wagstaff. The specials leave St Mary's Quay mid evening to witness birds rafting off Annet prior to returning to their burrows after dark. These trips run once a week throughout the breeding season.

WILSON'S STORM-PETREL

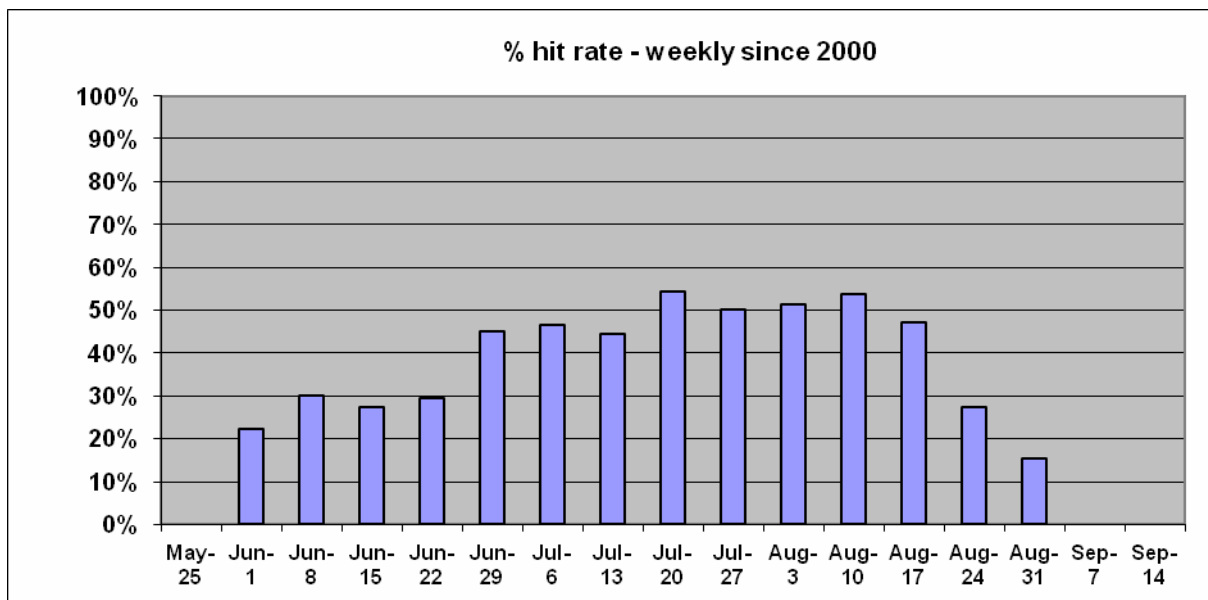
WB	2000			2001			2002			2003			2004		
	Trips	Score	Birds	Trips	Score	Birds	Trips	Score	Birds	Trips	Score	Birds	Trips	Score	Birds
May-25	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Jun-01	1	0	0	2	2	2	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	0	0
Jun-08	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	1	1	0	0
Jun-15	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	2	0	0	3	0	0
Jun-22	2	1	2	1	0	0	2	1	1	4	0	0	2	0	0
Jun-29	3	2	3	2	0	0	2	1	3	4	2	2	1	1	1
Jul-06	1	1	1	2	0	0	5	2	3	5	1	1	4	3	4
Jul-13	3	3	6	3	1	1	5	1	1	4	1	1	5	1	4
Jul-20	3	3	4	3	3	4	5	4	6	4	3	4	5	0	0
Jul-27	4	3	4	2	1	1	5	3	11	4	1	1	4	2	2
Aug-03	4	2	3	2	2	3	4	2	3	5	1	2	4	3	7
Aug-10	3	2	4	4	3	3	6	3	9	5	2	4	3	2	3
Aug-17	4	3	4	2	1	2	4	1	1	6	1	1	3	2	2
Aug-24	6	1	2	5	0	0	6	1	1	6	2	2	4	1	3
Aug-31	2	0	0	2	1	1	5	1	1	3	0	0	4	1	1
Sep-06	2	0	0	2	0	0	3	0	0	2	0	0	1	0	0
Sep-13	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0

WB	2005			2006			2007			2008		
	Trips	Score	Birds	Trips	Score	Birds	Trips	Score	Birds	Trips	Score	Birds
May-25	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Jun-01	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Jun-08	3	1	4	1	1	3	1	0	0	0	0	0
Jun-15	2	1	2	2	2	9	0	0	0	0	0	0
Jun-22	2	1	1	2	2	8	1	0	0	1	0	0
Jun-29	3	2	6	3	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	2
Jul-06	5	3	5	3	2	3	4	1	3	1	1	3
Jul-13	4	1	1	5	3	4	5	4	7	2	1	1
Jul-20	5	1	1	5	2	4	3	2	3	2	1	2
Jul-27	5	1	1	3	2	9	6	3	5	3	2	2
Aug-03	3	1	2	4	2	3	5	4	8	4	1	1
Aug-10	5	3	4	4	2	4	4	3	4	5	1	1
Aug-17	5	2	2	5	4	14	4	3	10	3	0	0
Aug-24	4	1	1	4	3	5	6	2	3	3	1	1
Aug-31	3	0	0	2	0	0	5	1	1	0	0	0
Sep-06	2	0	0	2	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0
Sep-13	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0

Table 1 Occurrence of Wilson's Petrels in Scillonian Waters 2000-2008: Weekly Analysis. WB = week beginning; Trips = number of pelagic trips in the week for the given year; Score = number of trips in the week for the given year on which Wilson's were seen; Birds = total number of Wilson's seen on all trips over the week in the given year.

WB	CUMULATIVE WEEKLY			
	Trips	Score	Birds	%
May-25	4	0	0	0%
Jun- 1	9	2	2	22%
Jun- 8	10	3	8	30%
Jun-15	11	3	11	27%
Jun-22	17	5	12	29%
Jun-29	20	9	17	45%
Jul- 6	30	14	23	47%
Jul-13	36	16	26	44%
Jul-20	35	19	28	54%
Jul-27	36	18	36	50%
Aug- 3	35	18	32	51%
Aug-10	39	21	36	54%
Aug-17	36	17	36	47%
Aug-24	44	12	18	27%
Aug-31	26	4	4	15%
Sep- 7	16	0	0	0%
Sep-14	3	0	0	0%

Table 2 Occurrence of Wilson’s Petrels in Scillonian Waters 2000-2008: Weekly Analysis. WB = week beginning; Trips = total number of pelagic trips for the week across the nine years; Score = total number of trips in the week across the nine years on which Wilson’s were seen; Birds = total number of Wilson’s seen in the week on all trips across the nine years; % is the percentage of trips for the week across the nine years on which Wilson’s were seen.



Graph 1: Percentage of trips on which Wilson’s were seen for each week across the nine years 2000-2008 (dates are ‘week beginning’ and the percentage data is extracted from Table 2).

LEACH'S STORM-PETREL

	Jun W1	Jun W2	Jun W3	Jun W4	Jul W1	Jul W2	Jul W3	Jul W4	Aug W1	Aug W2	Aug W3	Aug W4	Sep W1	Sep W2	Sep W3	Sep W4	Oct W1	Oct W2	Oct W3	Oct W4	
2002														2							
2003															1	1		5			
2004														1		2				1	
2005														1			1				
2006																				1	

MADEIRAN STORM-PETREL

The **first for Britain** was seen from a Scilly pelagic trip on 28 July 2007.

SWINHOE'S STORM-PETREL

The **first at-sea record for Britain** was seen during a Scilly pelagic trip on 21 July 2005.

EUROPEAN STORM-PETREL

A local breeder with most pairs found on Annet. Pelagic trips in the breeding season May-September have a **100% hit rate** of finding these tiny storm-petrels, whilst trips out of season invariably find a few.

RED-BILLED TROPICBIRD

The **first for Britain** was seen from a yacht 18 miles SSE of Scilly on 7 June 2001.

GREY PHALAROPE

	Jul W1	Jul W2	Jul W3	Jul W4	Aug W1	Aug W2	Aug W3	Aug W4	Sep W1	Sep W2	Sep W3	Sep W4	Oct W1	Oct W2	Oct W3	Oct W4
2000												4	1			1
2001						2		2		1	3	32	434	191	4	1
2002		1											6	1		
2003													4	2		
2004									1		1		3	1	1	6
2005								2			1	10	10	1	13	2
2006												1	1			
2007									1		2	4	2	1	11	
2008						3	2	2	13	21	7			32	41	5

POMARINE SKUA

	Jun W1	Jun W2	Jun W3	Jun W4	Jul W1	Jul W2	Jul W3	Jul W4	Aug W1	Aug W2	Aug W3	Aug W4	Sep W1	Sep W2	Sep W3	Sep W4	Oct W1	Oct W2	Oct W3	Oct W4
2000					1	1	8	4		1	8	1								
2001						1	2			2									1	
2002														1				2	2	
2003															3		3			
2004														1						
2005																	1		2	
2006					2				1			2	1	1				1		
2007													1			1			1	
2008						1	1	1		2	1						4	4		

ARCTIC SKUA

	Jun W1	Jun W2	Jun W3	Jun W4	Jul W1	Jul W2	Jul W3	Jul W4	Aug W1	Aug W2	Aug W3	Aug W4	Sep W1	Sep W2	Sep W3	Sep W4	Oct W1	Oct W2	Oct W3	Oct W4
2000	3			1	2		1			1	8	4	4	1		1	2	4		
2001			1							1		1	2	3	2	2	5	9	6	2
2002		2		1	1			1		1	2	13	7	7	3	3	1			
2003		1						1		3	1	6	1		3	1	6	6		
2004							1			2		3	4	3	3		1	12	5	1
2005					2		1	3	3	1	1	3	3	8	2	5	3	1	4	1
2006							1			1	1	3	3	3	1	4	13	2		
2007										1	1	3	2	1	1	3	3	4	1	
2008								1	2	4	2		1	1	3		3	4	1	3

LONG-TAILED SKUA

	Jun W1	Jun W2	Jun W3	Jun W4	Jul W1	Jul W2	Jul W3	Jul W4	Aug W1	Aug W2	Aug W3	Aug W4	Sep W1	Sep W2	Sep W3	Sep W4	Oct W1	Oct W2	Oct W3	Oct W4
2001						1														
2002															1		1	2		
2004											1	2	1							
2005														1						
2006								1			1									
2007											2					2				1
2008						1							1		1					

GREAT SKUA

	Jun W1	Jun W2	Jun W3	Jun W4	Jul W1	Jul W2	Jul W3	Jul W4	Aug W1	Aug W2	Aug W3	Aug W4	Sep W1	Sep W2	Sep W3	Sep W4	Oct W1	Oct W2	Oct W3	Oct W4
2000					3		1			7	1	4						1		
2001		1	2	2		1	4	2		9	1	3	7	14	13	16	18	11	1	
2002	1	2	1		1	1	4	3	12	14	26	51	38	24	8	19	23	7	7	1
2003	1		1	1	2	3	5	4	6	5	25	6	1	4	7	2	8	14	2	2
2004	1			2	5	8	7	4	3	7	4	5	8	11	5	7	1	6	24	
2005					2	5	2	3	12	5	13	4	8	7	6		11	13	12	4
2006		1	2	1	6	3	4	3	3		27	1	3	8	2	6	12	9	4	
2007					1	4	5	2	7	9	14	5	8	6	2	13	50	11	12	7
2008			2	1		4	6	4	11	7	8	4	8	1	7	14	15	10	5	8

SABINE'S GULL

	Jun W1	Jun W2	Jun W3	Jun W4	Jul W1	Jul W2	Jul W3	Jul W4	Aug W1	Aug W2	Aug W3	Aug W4	Sep W1	Sep W2	Sep W3	Sep W4	Oct W1	Oct W2	Oct W3	Oct W4
2000																			2	
2001												1	1	1			2			
2002												1	1			1		2		
2003	1									2		1		6	7			1		
2004									1	1	1	1								
2005										1			1		1					
2006							1			1		1	2					1		
2007								2							2	2	21			
2008							1	2	1	2	4				5			2	17	