

Lizard Point

BIRD WATCHING AT THE SOUTHERN TIP OF THE UK

with Tony Blunden

The southern-most extremity of Cornwall is well known for the natural beauty of Kynance Cove, the rugged cliffs of Old Lizard Head and the opportunity to see our own Palores (the Chough). It is also the place I am lucky enough to explore as part of my local patch. One of the best features of birding around the Lizard village is the excellent network of footpaths and bridleways which centre on the village and lead out in every direction; they provide a great opportunity to explore a broad range of habitats within a two to three mile radius. The National Trust Lizard Point car park [SW703117] just south of the village is a good place to start the day. There is good access and plentiful refreshments available for those who need coffee and cake!



Chough (© Tony Blunden)

Local Naturalist Tony Blunden lives on The Lizard. He is an Ecological Consultant and volunteer for a range of organisations: the Conservation Officer for the Cornwall Bird Watching and Preservation Society (CBWPS), National Trust Lizard Watchpoint Volunteer, British Trust for Ornithology and Natural England.



Tawny Owl (© Tony Blunden)



Firecrest (© Tony Blunden)

If you visit in spring or summer, make sure to visit the Wildlife Watchpoint, where the friendly and knowledgeable volunteers have lots of information on local wildlife, including the popular Choughs and Grey Seals, the ever changing seabird spectacle, the range of Cetaceans (three regular species of Dolphins, Porpoise and occasional Minke Whale), and other local wildlife.

Lizard Point: This is a great spot to see in-coming migrants in spring and the more impressive and protracted exiting of migrants in autumn. What you see is very weather-dependent. The best winds for birds are often those blowing south round to southwest. But with so many other factors involved, such as migration patterns and food availability, it is always worth a look any time and in any weather.

Determined sea watchers should head east to Bass Point or west towards Old Lizard Head. Both sites can provide reasonably close views of more pelagic species. Highlights include the opportunity to spot the black belly of Great Shearwater and yellow bill of Corys Shearwater without binoculars.

The best conditions are often, although not always, associated with windy conditions and multiple, fast-moving rain fronts so take care on paths and go prepared to get wet, or just enjoy what you see from the comfort of the Café at the Point.

The Lizard Point area is also, of course, a good and reliable place to see Choughs, while later in the summer a walk north along the coast path to Kynance Cove and just beyond will usually locate them.

Pistol Meadow: Walking west from the Point along the coast path, you enter the Tamarisk clumps and valley at Pistol Meadow [SW698116], believed to be the burial site of over 200 people who drowned when the Royal Anne troop ship went down on the off-lying reefs in 1720. The rocks just offshore are a good place to look for Purple Sandpiper in winter and early spring, but don't expect them to be as easy to see here as at Jubilee Pool in Penzance. Here they have a large area of natural reef and cliff habitat in which to make use of their rather effective "purple" camouflage. The Tamarisks are worth a look in migration season as warblers often make for them when they first hit land. Yellow-browed Warbler, Redstart and Firecrest have all been recorded here on my walks in autumn.

Church Cove: If you head east from Lizard Point, Church Cove [grid reference: SW715127], with the largest concentration of tree cover in the area, draws woodland breeding birds and migrants. It is here that the resident "most southerly" Tawny Owls and Great Spotted Woodpeckers can be found. Spring birdwatching visits are often dominated by the sights and sounds of the rookeries. The lower tree canopy rookeries near the church offer an intriguing insight into the fascinating interaction between these very intelligent and complex birds.

Church Cove has built up quite a selection of scarce and rare migrants; these include Black and White Warbler, Red Eyed Vireo and Night Hawk from the west, and Olive-backed Pipits, Greenish, Raddes and Paddyfield, along with Pallas and regular Yellow-browed Warblers. From the south, Hoopoe, Woodchat Shrike, and Melodious and Subalpine Warblers have been temporary residents of the valley and the pond opposite the church car park has even hosted Cattle Egret!