

American Visitors

It cannot have escaped the notice of anybody living in these parishes that we have recently had a prolonged spell of wet and stormy weather. Whilst this can be miserable for most of us, it can be an exciting time for birdwatchers. This is because birds from America can get blown along by the storms and finish up in spots like Pembrokeshire. Usually the birds in question are migrating down the East coast of America when they get caught up in one of the big depressions which have been sweeping across the Atlantic.

On 6th November one such American visitor was spotted on an island in Pickleridge Pools. It was a Laughing Gull – a bit bigger than the Black Headed Gulls with dark legs and a heavy black bill. Much excitement was generated and pictures of this bird can now be seen on various “Birdy” web sites. In fact there were two individuals in the area – an adult and a “first winter” bird and they were around for several days. They looked quite content and healthy, but the question is “Will they ever get back to where they are supposed to be or are they destined to wander around on the wrong side of the Atlantic for ever?” My guess is that as gulls are long distance flyers which are happy out at sea, these gulls and the other Laughing Gulls which arrived in the western half of the UK at the same time, will eventually get to their correct winter destination.

The same may not be true, however, of the Chimney Swift which we saw on the same day whilst standing on the beach at Dale. This small brown swallow-like bird whizzed over our heads and we were able to watch it for just a few seconds. This is a real rarity in the UK and again there were a number reported in Ireland and Wales. Will they ever get back to America?? Possibly – they are very strong flyers and can feed on the wing. I don't suppose we will ever know.

Of course, we are assuming that the birds know they are in the wrong place – but all the evidence so far shows that they do know, and that they will try to get to the right place. We are still not sure how, but probably using a combination of magnetic fields, and sun and star movements. Amazing – all in that tiny “bird” brain!

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