

THE WIND ABOVE THE TREES

We took our holiday in Pembrokeshire, Wales this year, 3 mile from St. David's, just at the beginning of the long period of stormy, windy weather. The rain that hit the cottage windows where we were staying was amazing, and luckily most of it fell once we were indoors in the warm. Our walks took us along the coastal footpaths along the high cliffs tops, where it became very perilous at times. The storms that battered the coasts came in straight from the Atlantic with tremendous force and had an adverse effect on the pacific grey seals that were pupping at the time in what would normally have been sheltered coves and beaches. We found many dead new born pups that had been swept into the sea and drowned. but we also saw a lot of survivors as well, some of them having their first swimming lessons with mum or just lying like little white fat fluffy beached whales after filling up on mums rich milk. The waves were spectacular, and it amazed us to see sea birds such as Gulls and Guillemots gliding so calmly in the dips and troughs of these huge waves and high winds. The tip of one wing would just seem to touch the water as though keeping in contact with the sea and be in total control with such ease all the time. Two other birds we were lucky enough to see were the Choughs, which do very well along that coast, and Peregrine Falcons. These too could sore and play in the strong winds with no trouble at all, and when they came in to land on the cliff face, they could pin-point the spot and land exactly where they needed to, even with winds whipping up the face of the cliff. There was an obvious lack of small birds around inland, and I don't think it was simply the bad weather. There are not a lot of trees or hedgerows around because of the constant battering from the winds straight off the sea, and so there are no natural corridors for the birds to use to keep safe. We saw one robin and a few blue tits in our cottage garden, but that was about all. It was nice to get back home again and have the enormous verity of birds around us once more.

We have had more than our fare share of strong winds in the past few weeks and I have been watching the birds around here playing on these winds and having a wonderful time. They all have skills of flight next to none, and a mastery of the sky that man can never quite achieve. *We* may not like these strong winds, but my goodness they do. As I walk along the lanes every day, I often stop to lean on my favourite gate and look across to Dartmoor, and last week I noticed the Rooks way up high simply playing on these winds. All the smaller birds had disappeared into the hedgerows and were keeping their heads down or they would have been blown to goodness knows where, but the bigger birds were up there, and it was quite humbling to watch them as they dived and somersaulted on the wind in complete control of what they were doing. The more I watched them, the more I could see that it really was play and they were having such fun. That's the only way I could describe it, simply play. As I walked further along, I began to notice other birds such as Buzzards Jackdaws and Crows, and they too were all doing the same thing. Their aerials skills were fantastic to watch and at no time did they loose control. The next time we have strong winds up here in Puddington, which I am sure will not be too long in coming, just take a little time out to look up at the birds and see how they play on the wind above the trees.

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