

Heights Hotel Birdwatching Breaks
Friday April 15th – Sunday April 17th 2011



Raft Spider, Arne

Saturday April 16th

Weather: Mostly overcast and warm, but with a cool easterly breeze at times

Portland Bill, 0600

Our weekend got off to a great start with the first of two superb sea-watches of the weekend. A Puffin was found almost as soon as we arrived amongst hundreds of Guillemots and Razorbills. Offshore a resting flock of Kittiwakes was found to contain a single Little Gull. Further out a single Manx Shearwater drifted past amongst the Gannets.

Walking towards the Bird Observatory we found a Common Sandpiper on the cliffs and a group of 4 Whimbrel heading east. Our first Whitethroat of the year was singing from a bramble right next to the Observatory where a male Pheasant was calling from the top of a 5-bar gate. All was quiet at the obs so we headed back to the bus, stopping to listen to a singing Grasshopper Warbler on the way.

Portland Bill, 0930

After breakfast we went back to the Bill and spent some time watching the seabird colony on the Westcliffs. Undoubtedly the highlight was the Grasshopper Warbler we had heard earlier on which now gave us brief views of it singing and in flight.

(see http://www.portlandbirdobs.org.uk/bp_grasshopper_warbler_17_160411_500.jpg for a superb photo by Martin Cade, warden of Portland Bird Observatory).

We stopped to look at a family of Slow-worms under a shelter before calling in at the Bird Observatory again. This time the head ringer Peter Morgan told us that they were catching a few warblers and then proceeded to show us a Chiffchaff and a Willow Warbler in the hand, explaining the detailed identification features. You can see what else they have caught on their web site at http://www.portlandbirdobs.org.uk/aa_latestnews.htm

Grove Point, 1200

Little Owl was our main target here but we also saw Peregrine, Stock Dove and Buzzard nearby. Further north along the Eastcliffs we found all 10 of the herd of British Primitive Goats, introduced to control the scrub on the undercliff.

Ferrybridge, 1400

The big surprise here was the flock of 150 Pale-bellied Brent Geese which flew over Chesil Beach from Portland Harbour. As all the wintering dark-bellied geese had long since departed these must have been migrants from across the Channel. Looking along the Fleet we found some late Red-breasted Mergansers and a Sandwich Terns, whilst on Chesil Beach a huge Raven was eating a left-over picnic.

Lodmoor RSPB Reserve, 1500

Here we found a good selection of waders with 3 Black-tailed Godwits alongside 2 summer-plumaged Dunlin and the long-staying Long-billed Dowitcher close-by. A pair of Whimbrel were found out on the marsh and both Cetti's and Sedge Warblers were seen briefly.

Radipole RSPB Reserve, 1600

Our final stop added lots of new birds to the list, including 4 Common Sandpipers, the Hooded Merganser and the splendid male Marsh Harrier hunting over the reeds just in front of the hide.



Sunday April 17th

Weather: Warm and sunny in completely calm conditions



Middlebere Lake, Arne RSPB Reserve

Portland Bill, 0630

Our second visit to the Bill added Common Scoter and Common Tern to the list with dozens of Manx Shearwaters offshore and a constant stream of Gannets heading east. A couple of Red-throated Divers were a surprise as they flew east at some height.

Creech Heath, 1100

This was a new site for a Birdbreak weekend and produced Woodlark singing overhead and some very smart Stonechats as well as the only Jays of the weekend. The Dartford Warblers that breed here took a bit more finding but we persevered and eventually located a singing male over on the eastern side of the heath. A beautiful Downy Emerald was the first example of this rare dragonfly seen on one of these weekends. A number of close views of Sika Deer were had on the way back to the bus.

Arne RSPB Reserve, 1030

In very warm conditions we had a very pleasant afternoon trying to push the weekend's list up to 100. In the end we didn't quite succeed but in the process found some great birds including dozens of summer-plumaged Black-tailed Godwits and several Curlews. We weren't just looking at birds though and enjoyed watching a very colourful Red Fox running through a field of yellow Dandelions and had the chance to compare Roe and Sika Deer. The highlight though was a superb male Raft Spider – a life tick for this writer!

The final count over the cream tea came to an astounding 106 species – even if we did have to count the birds we only heard!

See you all again soon,

Bob

Birds: 106 species

Red-throated Diver	Portland
Great Crested Grebe	Radipole
Little Grebe	Radipole
Fulmar	Portland
Manx Shearwater	Portland
Gannet	Portland
Cormorant	Radipole
Shag	Portland
Little Egret	Arne
Grey Heron	Lodmoor, Radipole, Arne
Mute Swan	Lodmoor, Radipole
Brent Goose	Ferrybridge
Canada Goose	Lodmoor, Radipole, Arne
Shelduck	Lodmoor, Radipole, Arne
Gadwall	Radipole
Teal	Lodmoor, Radipole
Wigeon	Lodmoor
Tufted Duck	Radipole
Hooded Merganser	Radipole
Red-breasted Merganser	Ferrybridge
Common Scoter	Portland
Kestrel	Portland, Arne
Peregrine	Portland
Marsh Harrier	Radipole
Buzzard	Portland, Arne
Sparrowhawk	Arne
Pheasant	Portland
Water Rail	Radipole (heard)
Moorhen	Lodmoor, Radipole
Coot	Lodmoor, Radipole
Curlew	Arne
Whimbrel	Portland, Lodmoor, Ferrybridge
Oystercatcher	Lodmoor, Arne
Black-tailed Godwit	Lodmoor, Arne
Long-billed Dowitcher	Lodmoor
Common Sandpiper	Radipole, Portland
Dunlin	Lodmoor
Ringed Plover	Ferrybridge
Lapwing	Wool
Black-headed Gull	Lodmoor, Arne
Herring Gull	various sites
Great Black-backed Gull	various sites
Lesser Black-backed Gull	Portland
Common Gull	Portland
Little Gull	Portland
Kittiwake	Portland
Sandwich Tern	Portland, Ferrybridge, Lodmoor
Common Tern	Portland
Guillemot	Portland
Razorbill	Portland
Puffin	Portland
Wood Pigeon	various sites
Collared Dove	Portland
Great Spotted Woodpecker	Arne
Green Woodpecker	Arne (heard)
Nuthatch	Arne
Rock Pipit	Portland
Tree Pipit	Portland (heard)
Meadow Pipit	Arne
Pied Wagtail	Portland
Yellow Wagtail	Portland (heard)
Skylark	Portland
Woodlark	Creech Heath

Swallow	various sites
Sand Martin	Radipole
Wren	various sites
Dunnock	various sites
Stonechat	Portland, Arne, Creech
Wheatear	Portland, Lodmoor
Robin	various sites
Blackbird	various sites
Song Thrush	Radipole (heard)
Cetti's Warbler	Radipole, Lodmoor
Sedge Warbler	Radipole, Lodmoor
Reed Warbler	Radipole (heard)
Chiffchaff	Portland
Willow Warbler	Portland
Whitethroat	Portland
Grasshopper Warbler	Portland
Dartford Warbler	Arne
Blackcap	Portland, Creech, Arne
Goldcrest	Creech (heard)
Long-tailed Tit	Radipole
Coal Tit	Creech (heard)
Blue Tit	various sites
Great Tit	various sites
Magpie	various sites
Jackdaw	various sites
Rook	Ferrybridge
Carrion Crow	various sites
Raven	Portland, Ferrybridge
Starling	various sites
House Sparrow	various sites
Greenfinch	various sites
Goldfinch	various sites
Chaffinch	various sites
Linnet	various sites
Siskin	Creech, Arne
Bullfinch	Creech
Reed Bunting	Radipole

Inverts:

Raft Spider	Arne
Wood Ant	Arne
Brimstone	Creech, Arne
Small White	Lodmoor
Peacock	Arne
Downy Emerald	Creech

Reptiles:

Slow-worm	Portland
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Mammals:

Grey Squirrel	Arne
Sika Deer	Arne, Creech
Roe Deer	Arne
Rat	Radipole
Rabbit	Arne
Red Fox	Arne