

Heights Hotel Birdwatching Breaks  
Friday November 11<sup>th</sup> – Sunday November 13<sup>th</sup> 2011



*"A day to Remember" watercolour by Ernest Leahy*

**Saturday November 12<sup>th</sup>**

**Weather: Warm and sunny in a light south-easterly wind**

Ferrybridge, 0730

Our birding weekend started with a visit to the site where, 16 hours earlier, a probable Pallid Swift had been seen by Mike Langman from the Travelling Naturalist. This morning however no swifts were to be seen and we had to be content with a few Dark-bellied Brent Geese and some distant Red-breasted Mergansers. The flock of 10 Pintail which flew over us heading south was a rare sighting for Portland and the highlight of the morning so far.

Portland Castle, 0800

Still hoping a swift might appear in front of us we stopped off at this Tudor castle and had a quick look in Portland Harbour for any early grebes or divers. No luck and a search of the castle gardens for a late migrant produced no more than a good mix of finches.

Ferrybridge, 0930

Not intending to stop here the sight of several hundred Brent Geese had me stepping on the brakes and turning in to this famous site for the second time of the weekend. We were greeted by the sight of several hundred more geese arriving from the north, a process which continued until we had

probably as many as 1500 Dark-bellied Brent Geese in front of us. A handful of pale-bellied birds were found as well but alas no Black Brant. Dozens of Mediterranean Gulls were lined up along the shore and no less than 5 colour-ringed birds were found, most likely from France and Belgium. Bird of the day so far was the Short-eared Owl which appeared flying over Chesil Beach. Waders here were few and far between but we did eventually find 6 species including a Bar-tailed Godwit and 2 Grey Plovers.

Herbury Gore, 1100

Parking at the beautiful and luxurious Moonfleet Hotel we were still in the van when a Black Redstart was found on the roof of the hotel. Then we walked along the edge of the Fleet lagoon hoping to see the Crane which has been here for several days only to be met by the sight of said bird flying off to the west. So west we went.

Rodden Hive, 1300

We really wanted our lunch at this point but with an adult Common Crane waiting for us we just had to persevere. And what a good thing we did because 30 minutes later we were treated to absolutely amazing views of a genuine wild European Common Crane – all the way from Poland. Plenty of other birds were here too including Redshank, Greenshank, Pintail and 3 Buzzards. On the way back a superb juvenile Marsh Harrier flew over us and a Jay popped up in a tree nearby.



Abbotsbury Beach, 1500

We finally managed to eat our lunch here overlooking Chesil Beach on a gloriously warm and sunny afternoon. No birds here of any note apart from a field full of Pheasants.

Radipole, 1600

Lots of new birds here including Little and Great-crested Grebes, Shovelers and Gadwall. The North Hide added Green Sandpiper and Black-tailed Godwit to the list, with Bearded Tits calling in the reeds.



**Sunday November 13<sup>th</sup>**

**Weather: much colder in a strong easterly wind**

Kingbarrow Quarry, 0715

No sign of the expected Little Owl but we weren't too disappointed as we had a very close view of a Short-eared Owl as it flew up from almost under our feet. Plenty of Fieldfares and Redwings were in the quarry feeding on the cotoneaster berries.

Portland Bill, 0930

In a stiff wind the sea was alive with Gannets and Kittiwakes, mostly flying east into the wind. Further out the occasional flock of auks could be seen, at one time joined by a flock of 10 or so Common Scoter. Off the Eastcliffs 3 Purple Sandpipers were feeding with 3 Turnstones and a couple of Arctic Skuas flew past, the latter while some of us were inside the café sheltering from the wind!

*Purple Sandpiper photographed by Ernest Leahy*



Walking towards the Observatory Quarry we saw the only Raven of the weekend. The quarry held one of the resident pair of Little Owls and while we were watching this a small falcon was found perched on a fence post on a distant hill. Through the telescopes we could see it to be a Merlin, probably a female.

Ferrybridge, 1300

Not so much here this lunchtime with most of the Brent Geese flying off as we got there. We did enjoy a very close view of a Little Egret showing us just how easy it is to catch fish if you have the right fishing gear.

Radipole, 1400

What was meant to be a brief stop to see the Hooded Merganser turned out to be one of the highlights of the weekend when a first-year Little Gull turned up feeding over the main channel. More Snipe were seen as well along with 8 Black-tailed Godwits.

Lodmoor, 1500

A superb end to a great weekend was in store for us here when an obviously very hungry Peregrine treated us to an amazing display of high-speed aerobatics as it chased Starlings all over the reserve. After this the marsh was more or less devoid of birds but we did find a brave Green Sandpiper which was doing its best to look like a stone – it didn't move an inch for at least half an hour! We were just about to walk back to the van when the Starlings came back and we started to hunt for the Rose-coloured Starling we had heard reports of. After several fly-pasts one of the flocks was seen by several of us to include none other than the rarity mentioned, but sadly it could not be found again.

At the concluding cream tea our total of 93 species seen only did partial justice to a remarkable weekend's birdwatching. Here's looking forward to the next time...

Bob Ford

**Birds: 93 species**

<input type="checkbox"/>	Little Grebe	Radipole	<input type="checkbox"/>	Common Gull	Ferrybridge, Radipole, Portland
<input type="checkbox"/>	Great Crested Grebe	Radipole	<input type="checkbox"/>	Lesser Black-backed Gull	Radipole, Portland Bill
<input type="checkbox"/>	Gannet	Portland Bill	<input type="checkbox"/>	Herring Gull	various sites
<input type="checkbox"/>	Cormorant	various sites	<input type="checkbox"/>	Great Black-backed Gull	various sites
<input type="checkbox"/>	Shag	Portland Bill, Ferrybridge	<input type="checkbox"/>	Little Gull	Radipole
<input type="checkbox"/>	Little Egret	Ferrybridge, Radipole, Rodden	<input type="checkbox"/>	Kittiwake	Portland Bill
<input type="checkbox"/>	Grey Heron	Lodmoor, Radipole, Rodden	<input type="checkbox"/>	Razorbill	Portland Bill
<input type="checkbox"/>	Common Crane	Rodden Hive	<input type="checkbox"/>	Guillemot	Portland Bill
<input type="checkbox"/>	Mute Swan	Lodmoor, Radipole, Rodden	<input type="checkbox"/>	Stock Dove	Portland
<input type="checkbox"/>	Dark-bellied Brent Goose	Ferrybridge, Rodden	<input type="checkbox"/>	Feral Pigeon	Radipole
<input type="checkbox"/>	Pale-bellied Brent Goose	Ferrybridge	<input type="checkbox"/>	Wood Pigeon	various sites
<input type="checkbox"/>	Canada Goose	Lodmoor	<input type="checkbox"/>	Little Owl	Portland Bill
<input type="checkbox"/>	Shelduck	Radipole, Rodden	<input type="checkbox"/>	Short-eared Owl	Ferrybridge, Portland
<input type="checkbox"/>	Pintail	Ferrybridge, Rodden	<input type="checkbox"/>	Kingfisher	Rodden
<input type="checkbox"/>	Wigeon	Lodmoor, Rodden	<input type="checkbox"/>	Great Spotted Woodpecker	Rodden
<input type="checkbox"/>	Gadwall	Radipole	<input type="checkbox"/>	Skylark	Ferrybridge, Portland
<input type="checkbox"/>	Teal	Lodmoor, Radipole, Rodden	<input type="checkbox"/>	Meadow Pipit	various sites
<input type="checkbox"/>	Mallard	Lodmoor, Radipole, Rodden	<input type="checkbox"/>	Rock Pipit	Portland
<input type="checkbox"/>	Shoveler	Radipole, Rodden	<input type="checkbox"/>	Pied Wagtail	various sites
<input type="checkbox"/>	Tufted Duck	Radipole	<input type="checkbox"/>	Wren	various sites
<input type="checkbox"/>	Red-breasted Merganser	Rodden, Ferrybridge	<input type="checkbox"/>	Dunnock	various sites
<input type="checkbox"/>	Hooded Merganser	Radipole	<input type="checkbox"/>	Robin	various sites
<input type="checkbox"/>	Common Scoter	Portland Bill	<input type="checkbox"/>	Black Redstart	Moonfleet Hotel
<input type="checkbox"/>	Marsh Harrier	Rodden	<input type="checkbox"/>	Fieldfare	Portland
<input type="checkbox"/>	Kestrel	various sites	<input type="checkbox"/>	Blackbird	various sites
<input type="checkbox"/>	Peregrine	Portland, Lodmoor	<input type="checkbox"/>	Song Thrush	Portland
<input type="checkbox"/>	Merlin	Portland	<input type="checkbox"/>	Redwing	Portland
<input type="checkbox"/>	Buzzard	Portland, Rodden	<input type="checkbox"/>	Cetti's Warbler	Radipole (heard)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Pheasant	Rodden	<input type="checkbox"/>	Goldcrest	Rodden (heard)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Moorhen	Lodmoor, Radipole, Rodden	<input type="checkbox"/>	Bearded Tit	Radipole (heard)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Coot	Lodmoor, Radipole, Rodden	<input type="checkbox"/>	Blue Tit	various sites
<input type="checkbox"/>	Oystercatcher	Portland Bill	<input type="checkbox"/>	Great Tit	various sites
<input type="checkbox"/>	Dunlin	Ferrybridge, Lodmoor	<input type="checkbox"/>	Jay	Rodden
<input type="checkbox"/>	Purple Sandpiper	Portland Bill	<input type="checkbox"/>	Magpie	various sites
<input type="checkbox"/>	Green Sandpiper	Radipole, Lodmoor	<input type="checkbox"/>	Jackdaw	various sites
<input type="checkbox"/>	Redshank	Rodden	<input type="checkbox"/>	Rook	Ferrybridge, Rodden
<input type="checkbox"/>	Greenshank	Rodden	<input type="checkbox"/>	Raven	Portland
<input type="checkbox"/>	Snipe	Radipole	<input type="checkbox"/>	Carrion Crow	various sites
<input type="checkbox"/>	Black-tailed Godwit	Radipole, Lodmoor	<input type="checkbox"/>	Starling	various sites
<input type="checkbox"/>	Bar-tailed Godwit	Ferrybridge	<input type="checkbox"/>	Rose-coloured Starling	Lodmoor
<input type="checkbox"/>	Grey Plover	Ferrybridge	<input type="checkbox"/>	House Sparrow	Portland
<input type="checkbox"/>	Lapwing	Lodmoor, Rodden	<input type="checkbox"/>	Chaffinch	Portland
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ringed Plover	Ferrybridge	<input type="checkbox"/>	Greenfinch	Portland
<input type="checkbox"/>	Turnstone	Ferrybridge, Portland Bill	<input type="checkbox"/>	Goldfinch	Portland
<input type="checkbox"/>	Arctic Skua	Portland Bill	<input type="checkbox"/>	Linnet	Portland, Rodden
<input type="checkbox"/>	Mediterranean Gull	Ferrybridge, Radipole, Portland	<input type="checkbox"/>	Bullfinch	Rodden (heard)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Black-headed Gull	various sites	<input type="checkbox"/>	Yellowhammer	Rodden (heard)

<input type="checkbox"/>	Brown Hare	Herbury	<input type="checkbox"/>	Grey Squirrel	Rodden
<input type="checkbox"/>	Brown Rat	Radipole	<input type="checkbox"/>	Tompot Blenny	Portland Bill

Small Tortoiseshell  
 Red Admiral

Rodden  
various sites

Peacock  
 Common Wasp

Rodden  
various sites

Cowslip  
 Red Clover  
 Field Blewit

Rodden  
Portland Bill  
Portland Bill

Cornflower  
 Red Hot Poker  
 Puffball

Portland Bill  
Portland Bill  
Portland Bill



*First-year Little Gull, Radipole Monday November 14<sup>th</sup> 2011*