

## Portland Heights Birdwatching Breaks April 22<sup>nd</sup> – 24<sup>th</sup> 2016



**Saturday April 23rd**

**Weather: mainly sunny but in a cold northerly wind**

Portland Bill, 0900

Arriving at the Bill just as a large pod of at least 15 bottle-nosed dolphins passed close offshore was a superb start to the weekend. When we had recovered from this amazing sight we found that there were also plenty of seabirds about including fulmar, gannet, guillemot, razorbill and shag. Away from the sea there were rock pipits and wheatears amongst the rocks of the Bill Quarry. Walking along the Eastcliffs we had excellent views of a group of 3 whimbrels. Approaching Portland Bird Observatory we started to see land migrants attracted by the cover provided by the Observatory's gardens. Soon we had seen (or glimpsed) chiffchaff, willow warbler and whitethroat. At the Observatory we were treated to the sight of a lovely male blackcap in the hands of warden Martin Cade.



A walk around Topfields to find look for a ring ouzel produced very few birds but we did enjoy some more views of the dolphins which were by now getting very playful and jumping clear of the water!

For a very shaky video of these dolphins please go to <https://youtu.be/t5SXwmeRuVk>

Walking back to the bus we passed the Observatory Quarry and enjoyed a very close look at the resident little owl, who was his usual sleepy, grumpy self.

Southwell, 1200

As we approached the Eastcliffs at Southwell we were approached by a very nervous raven, suggesting that there was a nest nearby. Looking over the cliffs we found not only the huge nest but also 4 very large young. As the peregrines were nowhere to be seen we instead looked for reptiles in a cliff-edge quarry and soon found 3 very tame wall lizards. As we were watching and photographing these lovely animals there was a cry from overhead and no less than 3 peregrine appeared, presumably the resident pair seeing off an intruder.



Ferrybridge, 1300

After a very pleasant picnic lunch we searched the mudflats for waders and found a small flock of ringed plovers and dunlins with several oystercatchers in the distance. Also some way off was a flock of about 10 sandwich terns and a pair of red-breasted mergansers.

Lodmoor RSPB Reserve, 1400

This excellent reserve gave us the opportunity to add a number of wetland birds to the list including shelducks, gadwall, little egret and grey heron. A singing lesser whitethroat was never found but we did see a very smart male common whitethroat. Probably the highlight here was the beautiful adult male white wagtail feeding out on the saltmarsh.

Radipole RSPB Reserve, 1600

Our old friend Hoodie the hooded merganser was a very welcome sight here especially as he is now in his ninth year at Weymouth! The flock of black-tailed godwits that are often

seen here numbered four today and included a very bright summer-plumaged individual. The walk to the north hide produced brief views of bearded tit and Cetti's warbler for one or two lucky members of the group whilst we all saw plenty of swallows and house martins overhead. From the hide we experienced the unique sight of a male marsh harrier first catching a frog and then delivering it to the female with a very skillful flight-pass. When the male then started a dramatic swooping and diving flight display we assumed it was for the female's benefit, but the real reason soon became apparent when a buzzard arrived, seemingly very interested in eating either the harrier's frog or their young. Both harriers were now involved in seeing off the buzzard, with the female still carrying the frog! An exciting end to an outstanding day's birding.



*Dartford Warbler photo by Mike Russell*

### **Sunday April 24<sup>th</sup>**

**Weather: very similar to yesterday, but not as cold**

Furzebrook, 1030

Parking at Furzebrook Village Hall we walked out onto Stoborough Heath in a very cold northerly wind that kept all the birds well-hidden. After much effort and a lot of walking we eventually found some Dartford warblers, including a very smart adult male that was uncharacteristically well-behaved and gave us a prolonged if distant view through the telescope. Stonechats were easier to find as were several meadow pipits.

Hartland Moor, 1200

A quick stop here to look for a hen harrier which had been seen the day before produced very little other than a distant buzzard and a kestrel.

Arne RSPB Reserve, 1300

Soon after arriving at this outstanding reserve we started adding birds to the weekend list with nuthatch and siskin on the bird feeders. On the way to Shipstall Point we found a large herd of Sika deer feeding with some very handsome English Longhorn cattle. Out on the heathland near the point we enjoyed some close views of Dartford warblers which were

following a pair of stonechats around. Walking out to the hide overlooking Poole we found a very tame female sand lizard and some very beautiful examples of the fungus known as the bog beacon.



Reaching the hide we were able to see a good range of waders on the marshes including a very close redshank and several whimbrel which we could compare with nearby curlews. Our final session of the weekend was the return walk to the bus which was made in the warmest weather of the weekend and produced a number of sightings, the highlight being a very charming tree creeper.

Altogether an exceptional weekend and one that I very much hope we can all repeat soon.

Bob

**Birds:**

Fulmar	Portland Bill
Shag	Portland Bill
Cormorant	Portland, Radipole, Arne
Gannet	Portland Bill
Little Egret	Lodmoor, Radipole
Grey Heron	Lodmoor, Radipole, Hartland Moor
Mute Swan	Lodmoor, Radipole
Canada Goose	Radipole
Shelduck	Lodmoor, Radipole, Arne
Teal	Lodmoor, Radipole
Mallard	Lodmoor, Radipole, Arne
Gadwall	Lodmoor, Radipole
Pochard	Lodmoor, Radipole
Tufted Duck	Lodmoor, Radipole
Red-breasted Merganser	Ferrybridge
Hooded Merganser	Radipole
Marsh Harrier	Radipole
Sparrowhawk	Portland
Kestrel	Portland, Hartland Moor
Peregrine	Portland, Radipole
Buzzard	Radipole, Portland, Hartland Moor
Pheasant	Arne
Coot	Lodmoor, Radipole
Moorhen	Lodmoor, Radipole
Black-tailed Godwit	Radipole, Arne
Oystercatcher	Ferrybridge, Arne
Redshank	Arne
Whimbrel	Portland Bill, Arne
Curlew	Arne
Ringed Plover	Ferrybridge
Dunlin	Ferrybridge
Black-headed Gull	Arne
Herring Gull	various sites
Great Black-backed Gull	various sites
Lesser Black-backed Gull	Radipole
Common Gull	Lodmoor
Sandwich Tern	Ferrybridge, Arne
Guillemot	Portland Bill
Razorbill	Portland Bill
Wood Pigeon	various sites
Little Owl	Portland Bill
Green Woodpecker	Arne (heard)
Skylark	Portland Bill, Hartland Moor
House Martin	Radipole
Sand Martin	Radipole
Swallow	Portland Bill, Radipole
Rock Pipit	Portland Bill
Meadow Pipit	Portland, Furzebrook
Pied Wagtail	Ferrybridge
White Wagtail	Lodmoor
Wren	various sites
Dunnock	various sites
Robin	various sites
Stonechat	Furzebrook, Arne
Wheatear	Portland Bill, Ferrybridge
Blackbird	various sites
Cetti's Warbler	Radipole
Reed Warbler	Radipole (heard)
Dartford Warbler	Furzebrook, Arne
Common Whitethroat	Lodmoor, Radipole

Lesser Whitethroat	Lodmoor (heard)
Blackcap	Portland Bill, Radipole
Willow Warbler	Portland Bill, Radipole
Chiffchaff	Portland Bill, Lodmoor, Radipole
Nuthatch	Arne
Treecreeper	Arne
Bearded Tit	Radipole
Long-tailed Tit	Arne
Coal Tit	Arne (heard)
Blue Tit	various sites
Great Tit	various sites
Raven	Portland
Magpie	various sites
Jackdaw	Portland
Carrion Crow	various sites
House Sparrow	Portland Bill
Goldfinch	various sites
Chaffinch	various sites
Greenfinch	Radipole, Arne
Linnets	various sites
Siskin	Arne

**Other sightings:**

Rabbit	Arne
Grey Squirrel	Arne
Otter (spraint)	Radipole
Sika	Arne
Bottle-nosed Dolphin	Portland Bill
Wall Lizard	Portland
Sand Lizard	Arne