Portland Heights Birdwatching Breaks

Friday December 9th – Sunday December 11th 2016

Cattle egrets at Nottington - see video at https://youtu.be/5C5h1OOrGGQ

Saturday December 10th
Weather: damp and overcast but no serious rain until late afternoon, wind light southerly increasing during the day

Portland Harbour, 0900
We started the weekend with a quick look at the south western end of the harbour. The first birds we saw were a flock of meadow pipits put up by a passing kestrel, closely followed by a fly-over rock pipit. Out in the harbour there were plenty of red-breasted mergansers and one or two great crested grebes, but little else.

Ferrybridge, 0930
The mud-flats here held a variety of birds including a curlew and a flock of a hundred or so brent geese. Nearby were a couple of dunlins with a single grey plover. Five linnets flew over and a pair of ravens sat on the beach. In the distance a female goosander was picked out amongst the mergansers.

Nottington, 1000
A real stroke of luck here when we found not only the five cattle egrets we were hoping for but also a parking space right next to them! We spent a very pleasant half hour watching these very rare birds and comparing them with the little egrets.

Maiden Castle, 1100
Another memorable thirty minutes with a record-breaking count of fifty corn buntings. As impressive as this was, the sight that will stick in my mind was the huge flock of golden plovers circling overhead.

Arne RSPB Reserve, 1200
The hide at Shipstall Point looked out across flocks of hundreds of ducks, mostly wigeon and shelduck with smaller numbers of teal, pintail and gadwall. Further out in the channel was a small mixed flock of common scoter and goldeneye which annoyingly flew off just as they were found. A rather sick-looking spoonbill was next to arrive, closely followed by a huge female peregrine.

Reaching the shores of Poole Harbour we found the goldeneyes again but not the scoter. The salt marsh had a large number of feeding waders including avocet, curlew and redshank.

Back at the car park a great-spotted woodpecker was found high in an oak tree with a coal tit much closer to us on a bird feeder.

Sunday December 11th
Weather: sunny all day with little or no wind

Portland Bill, 0900
On a beautifully calm morning the Bill would have been a very pleasant place to be even without birds – but we had both! First we added a range of seabirds to our list including guillemot, razorbill and gannet. We then started searching for our main target, purple

sandpiper, and at first drew a complete blank. But as soon as we got to the obelisk viewpoint we found a pair of them quietly preening in the warm sunshine.

Portland Harbour, 1030
A remarkable scene greeted us as we arrived outside the Sailing Academy with eighty or so mergansers feeding on a shoal of fish just in front of us. Further out in the harbor a great northern diver could just about be picked out using the telescopes.

Ferrybridge, 1045
We transferred a short distance along the coast in search of the flock of goosanders that we had spotted from the last location only to see them disappear into the distance in front of a kayaker. With the goosanders out of view we searched the harbor for other seabirds and found a couple of black-necked grebes a long way away but looking very distinctive in the strong sunlight. Just then we had one of the instances of remarkable good luck which was a feature of the weekend – the goosanders turned and swam right past us at very close range!

Abbotsbury Swannery, 1130
Flushed with our successes in the harbour we attempted a far more difficult challenge at the other end of the Fleet lagoon. With the sun in our eyes we had to use all our combined skills to find and identify not one but two long-tailed ducks at considerable distance. A large number of little grebes were seen as well along with several buzzards.

Radipole RSPB Reserve, 1230
A snipe was the first new bird seen after lunch closely followed by water rail and Cetti's warbler both heard clearly. From the Buddleia viewpoint we enjoyed good views of a pair of bearded tits and a kingfisher perched in the reeds. Then the resident adult male marsh harrier appeared hunting out over the reedbeds.

Lodmoor
RSPB Reserve, 1400
It seemed that our luck had finally run out here when we failed to find our two target birds, water pipit and scaup. However we did see good numbers of tufted duck, pochard and shoveler with a female marsh harrier hunting over the marshy pools. Three black-tailed godwits flew past as we were searching for the pipits and a couple of chiffchaffs were seen feeding in the brambles.

Weymouth Bay, 1530
We ended an outstanding weekend by enjoying the last of the afternoon's light at the end of Weymouth's Pavilion Pier. Another great northern diver was found, at even greater range than the earlier one, as were a couple of guillemots. A flock of ducks passing overhead turned out to be the goosanders we had seen earlier, presumably heading off to Lodmoor to roost. Our final new bird was added when a passing flock of turnstones was found to contain two knots.

Back at the hotel before enjoying our cream teas we totaled up the list and found that a remarkable 98 species were seen or heard over the weekend!

Looking forward to the next time,

Bob

Birds:

Great Northern Diver	Portland Harbour, Weymouth Bay
Great Crested Grebe	Portland Harbour, Arne, Abbotsbury
Black-necked Grebe	Portland Harbour
Little Grebe	Abbotsbury
Cormorant	Portland, Radipole, Lodmoor, Arne
Shag	Portland, Weymouth Bay
Gannet	Portland Bill
Little Egret	Nottington, Ferrybridge, Arne
Cattle Egret	Nottington
Grey Heron	Radipole, Portland Harbour
Spoonbill	Arne
Mute Swan	Radipole, Lodmoor
Canada Goose	Lodmoor, Arne
Dark-bellied Brent Goose	Ferrybridge
Shelduck	Radipole, Arne, Lodmoor, Abbotsbury
Teal	Radipole, Arne, Lodmoor, Abbotsbury
Mallard	Radipole, Arne, Lodmoor, Abbotsbury
Shoveler	Radipole, Arne, Lodmoor, Abbotsbury
Wigeon	Arne
Pintail	Arne
Tufted Duck	Radipole, Lodmoor
Pochard	Lodmoor
Red-breasted Merganser	Ferrybridge
Goosander	Portland Harbour, Weymouth Bay
Hooded Merganser	Radipole
Long-tailed Duck	Abbotsbury
Goldeneye	Arne
Common Scoter	Arne

Kestrel	various sites
Peregrine	Arne
Marsh Harrier	Radipole, Lodmoor
Sparrowhawk	Arne
Buzzard	various sites
Pheasant	Abbotsbury
Water Rail	Radipole (heard)
Coot	Radipole, Lodmoor
Moorhen	Radipole, Lodmoor
Curlew	Ferrybridge, Arne
Oystercatcher	Ferrybridge, Arne
Avocet	Arne
Redshank	Arne
Black-tailed Godwit	Lodmoor
Dunlin	Ferrybridge
Purple Sandpiper	Portland Bill
Knot	Weymouth Bay
Snipe	Radipole
Golden Plover	Maiden Castle
Grey Plover	Ferrybridge
Lapwing	Lodmoor, Arne
Turnstone	Weymouth Bay, Ferrybridge
Common Gull	various sites
Black-headed Gull	various sites
Mediterranean Gull	Radipole, Weymouth Bay, Lodmoor
Herring Gull	various sites
Great Black-backed Gull	various sites
Razorbill	Portland Bill
Guillemot	Portland Bill, Weymouth Bay
Wood Pigeon	various sites
Collared Dove	various sites
Stock Dove	Arne
Feral Pigeon	various sites
Kingfisher	Radipole
Green Woodpecker	Arne
Great Spotted Woodpecker	Arne, Abbotsbury
Nuthatch	Arne
Skylark	Arne, Ferrybridge
Meadow Pipit	Portland, Arne
Rock Pipit	Portland Bill
Pied Wagtail	various sites
Grey Wagtail	Lodmoor
Wren	various sites
Dunnock	various sites
Robin	various sites
Stonechat	Portland, Maiden Castle
Song Thrush	Abbotsbury
Mistle Thrush	Arne
Blackbird	various sites
Cetti's Warbler	Radipole (heard)
Chiffchaff	Radipole, Lodmoor
Goldcrest	Arne

Bearded Tit	Radipole
Coal Tit	Arne
Blue Tit	Arne
Great Tit	Arne
Jay	Arne
Magpie	various sites
Raven	Portland, Arne
Jackdaw	various sites
Rook	Ferrybridge, Arne
Carrion Crow	various sites
Starling	various sites
House Sparrow	various sites
Goldfinch	various sites
Chaffinch	various sites
Greenfinch	Arne, Radipole
Linnet	Ferrybridge, Portland Bill
Corn Bunting	Maiden Castle
Reed Bunting	Radipole

Mammals:

Rabbit	Portland
Grey Squirrel	Arne
Sika Deer	Arne