

Portland Heights Birdwatching Breaks

Friday March 17th – Sunday March 19th 2017



Wheatear (Bob Ford)

Saturday March 18th

Weather: mostly overcast in a strong westerly wind

Weston, 0900

We started our weekend with an attempt to see the Hume's warbler that has spent the winter on Portland (instead of northern India where it should be). It was not at home this morning but we did see a very vocal chiffchaff, the first spring migrant of 2017 for most of the group.

Southwell, 0930

A brief stop to check on the progress of a nesting pair of sparrowhawks gave us a couple of close but fleeting views of the very brightly-coloured male bird. An unexpected bonus was the buzzard that flew low overhead calling.

Portland Bill, 1000

Looking out on the sea in the shelter of the Lobster Pot café we found that gannets were much in evidence with several birds passing very close in. Our second male sparrowhawk of the day passed close overhead, probably chasing the rock pipits that were feeding all around us. Walking along the Eastcliffs towards the Bird Observatory we found yet more rock pipits. Turning inland we walked through the Hut Fields before reaching the Observatory Quarry where the resident little owl was crouched in its usual spot. The Observatory was very quiet with just a few goldfinches and a passing fulmar to look at so we walked back to the Bill to look for a black redstart that had been seen there. Needless to say we didn't find it but the male wheatear that popped up on top of Pulpit Rock was a good substitute.

Ferrybridge, 1230

After lunch we had a quick look at the mud-flats which today held just a couple of ringed plovers and a small flock of dunlins.

Bingleaves, 1330

The northern corner of Portland Harbour turned up a couple of distant black-necked grebes and one somewhat closer Slavonian grebe, with two or three more further out. Great crested grebes and red-breasted mergansers were present as well.

Radipole RSPB Reserve, 1430

Lots of birds here with the highlight being the views of three or four different marsh harriers that were watched at close quarters displaying or hunting over the reed beds. No less than six species of gull were here, with second-year and first-year Mediterranean gulls compared directly with similarly-aged black-headed and common gulls. This is why this has to be my favourite reserve! Wildfowl were also abundant here with shelduck, pochard, teal, gadwall and shoveler seen well. The long-staying hooded merganser showed up as well, now in his ninth year at Radipole! Some distant sand martins were a reminder that it really was spring as the low cloud started to produce a very light rain. As we got back to the van we noticed that four black-tailed godwits had arrived, bringing an excellent day to a satisfying end.



Curlew (Ian West)

Sunday March 19th

Weather: brighter today but still a strong westerly wind

Arne RSPB Reserve, 1000

Our walk out to the hide at Shipstall Point produced a range of woodland species with particularly good views of great spotted woodpecker. A Dartford warbler put in a brief appearance on the hillside and also gave us a few short snatches of song. From Shipstall point we enjoyed a close view of a curlew (see Ian's photo above), and out in the channel a

grey seal appeared briefly. From the hide we saw a group of seven spoonbills, one of which was colour-ringed. When I hear back from its ringers I will add the details here, but it is very likely that this is the same bird that we saw here in January 2016, which was ringed in 2014 at Schiermonnikoog in the Frisian Islands (53,38N 6,23E).

Here is what Bob Loos, the leader of the spoonbill ringing team in the Netherlands, had to say:

thanks for forwarding your observation! An interesting one because it was not reported this winter (last observation 01.09.2016 in France), so the big question is where did it winter? Last winter it was seen several times in Dorset, so you would expect that the bird has chosen the same winter location this winter. Nevertheless, very curious to know how long the bird will stay in Dorset; he/she is sexually mature now, so you would expect that it will return to its breeding grounds in The Netherlands!

The full history of this bird is as follows:

Ringng site: Schiermonnikoog, Oosterkwelder

Ringng Date: 1-7-2014

Name Ringer: Petra de Goeij The Netherlands

Ringnr 8059257

Ageclass pullus

Species: Eurasian Spoonbill

Sex: male

Behaviour Transmitted? No

Date	Site	Distance to ringing site	Observer
26-7-2014	Lauwersmeer, Jaap Deensgat, The Netherlands	11 km	Oscar Verhoeven
14-8-2014	Lauwersmeer, Jaap Deensgat 53,38N 6,23E The Netherlands	11 km	Peter Matthijssen
4-10-2014	Dorset, Brownsea island 50,68N -1,95E United Kingdom	641 km	Chris Thain
5-10-2014	Dorset, Brownsea island 50,68N -1,95E United Kingdom	641 km	Chris Thain
30-8-2015	Dorset, Brownsea island 50,68N -1,95E United Kingdom	641 km	Shaun Robson
9-10-2015	Dorset, Brownsea island 50,68N -1,95E United Kingdom	641 km	Chris Thain
19-11-2015	Dorset, Poole Harbour 50,68N -2,00E United Kingdom	644 km	Shaun Robson
24-1-2016	Dorset, Arne 50,68N -2,03E United Kingdom	646 km	Robert Fort
23-3-2016	Dorset, Brownsea Island 50,69N -1,97E United Kingdom	642 km	Chris Bollen
1-9-2016	Somme, Marquenterre 50,33N 1,68E France	470 km	Philippe Carruette
19-3-2017	Dorset, Arne 50,68N -2,03E United Kingdom	646 km	Bob Ford

Lunch was enlivened by close views of a number of siskins, some of which were engaged in courtship displays. After this we walked out across Coombe Heath to the Middlebere Lake hide, where we saw one of the few avocets remaining from the wintering flock. The screen on the shore nearby showed us a flock of hundreds of black-tailed godwits with smaller numbers of curlew and dunlin. Searching through the flock we eventually picked out two bar-tailed godwits, still in full winter plumage. Next to the screen another Dartford warbler gave us an even more fleeting view than this morning's individual.

The walk back to the van produced no more sightings, but after a weekend in which we saw and heard no less than 93 species we were well-satisfied!

Looking forward to the next time,

Bob

Bird List:

Great Crested Grebe	Portland Harbour, Radipole, Arne
Black-necked Grebe	Portland Harbour
Slavonian Grebe	Portland Harbour
Little Grebe	Radipole
Fulmar	Portland Bill
Cormorant	Portland, Radipole, Arne
Shag	Portland
Gannet	Portland Bill
Little Egret	Ferrybridge, Arne
Grey Heron	Radipole, Arne
Spoonbill	Arne
Mute Swan	Radipole
Canada Goose	Arne
Dark-bellied Brent Goose	Arne
Shelduck	Radipole, Arne
Wigeon	Arne
Teal	Radipole, Arne
Gadwall	Radipole
Mallard	Radipole, Arne
Pintail	Arne
Shoveler	Radipole
Tufted Duck	Radipole
Pochard	Radipole
Red-breasted Merganser	Portland Harbour, Arne
Hooded Merganser	Radipole
Kestrel	Portland, Arne
Peregrine	Arne
Marsh Harrier	Radipole
Sparrowhawk	Portland
Buzzard	Portland, Arne
Pheasant	Portland
Water Rail	Radipole (heard)
Coot	Radipole
Moorhen	Radipole
Oystercatcher	Ferrybridge, Arne
Curlew	Arne
Redshank	Arne
Black-tailed Godwit	Radipole, Arne
Bar-tailed Godwit	Arne
Ringed Plover	Ferrybridge
Dunlin	Ferrybridge, Arne
Avocet	Arne
Common Gull	Radipole, Portland
Black-headed Gull	various sites
Mediterranean Gull	Radipole
Herring Gull	various sites
Lesser Black-backed Gull	Radipole
Great Black-backed Gull	various sites

Sandwich Tern	Portland Bill
Guillemot	Portland Bill
Wood Pigeon	various sites
Stock Dove	Arne
Collared Dove	Portland
Feral Pigeon	various sites
Little Owl	Portland Bill
Great Spotted Woodpecker	Arne
Green Woodpecker	Arne
Skylark	Portland Bill, Ferrybridge
Sand Martin	Radipole
Meadow Pipit	Portland Bill
Rock Pipit	Portland Bill
Pied Wagtail	Ferrybridge
Wren	various sites
Dunnock	various sites
Robin	various sites
Wheatear	Portland Bill
Blackbird	various sites
Redwing	Arne
Mistle Thrush	Arne
Cetti's Warbler	Radipole (heard)
Dartford Warbler	Arne
Blackcap	Arne (heard)
Chiffchaff	Radipole, Arne
Goldcrest	Arne
Long-tailed Tit	Arne, Radipole
Coal Tit	Arne
Blue Tit	various sites
Great Tit	various sites
Nuthatch	Arne
Treecreeper	Arne
Jay	Arne
Magpie	various sites
Raven	Portland Bill
Jackdaw	Portland Bill
Rook	Arne
Carrion Crow	various sites
Starling	various sites
House Sparrow	various sites
Goldfinch	various sites
Siskin	Arne
Greenfinch	Arne
Chaffinch	Arne
Brown Rat	Radipole
Sika Deer	Arne
Grey Squirrel	Arne
Grey Seal	Arne