



Marsh Harrier, photo by Gerry Studd

Saturday March 17th

Weather: cloudy with frequent snow showers in a very cold easterly wind

Portland Bill, 0900

In very cold conditions we started the weekend with excellent views of rock pipits on the ground and gannets out at sea. Other seabirds were present as well including shag, cormorant and guillemot with a grey seal joining them just off the shore. Flocks of meadow pipits were passing north overhead in spite of the viciously cold wind. Moving away from the cliffs to the shelter of the Lobster Pot cafe we resisted the temptation of going inside for a hot chocolate opting instead to stay outside and scan the Bill Common for wheatears. It took a while but we eventually found one in the distance and then went on to enjoy close views of a pair of them from the minibus.

Chesil Cove, 1030

Walking to the very start of Chesil Beach we struggled to find any birds at first but we persevered and finally added fulmar to the list along with a distant buzzard and some excellent views of Raven. It was on our return journey that we found one of the best birds of the day, a female black redstart.



Black Redstart, photo by Gerry Studd

Ferrybridge, 1200

In increasingly cold and windy conditions we chose to birdwatch from the bus as we ate our lunch, a strategy which paid off very well as we had close views of brent goose and dunlin with a few ringed plovers out on the mudflats. The two highlights of the lunch stop though were the chiffchaff feeding almost underneath the bus and the flock of golden plovers heading south, presumably fleeing the bad weather.

Sandsfoot, 1300

This outstanding viewpoint at the edge of Portland Harbour produced no less than six black-necked grebes, the closest of which was in its superbly coloured breeding plumage. The big surprise though was the sandwich tern that flew past while we were watching the grebes.



Montage of black-necked grebe photos by Ian West

Radipole RSPB Reserve, 1400

As the snow stopped just as we arrived at this superb reserve we took the hint and walked out to the far end of the reserve, where we had great views of a pair of male marsh harriers. Several snipe were seen here as well along with teal, shelduck and a beautiful drake wigeon. The walk back produced two pairs of great crested grebes, a small flock of pochard and, for a few of us, an unexpected glimpse of a Cetti's warbler in the reeds.

Portland Bill, 1530

We finished the day by looking for short-eared and barn owls, but none were out tonight.

Sunday March 18th

Weather: heavy snow overnight with the wind still from the east



Kingbarrow Quarry, 0900

We woke up to an island covered in snow, an unusual event for here. With more snow forecast we decided not to risk the roads and opted instead for a walk round the quarries near the hotel. Very few birds were seen but we very much enjoyed a unique view of the island's north east quarries, as shown in the following photos.



New Ground, approaching Kingbarrow



Kingbarrow Quarry



Kingbarrow Quarry



Kingbarrow Quarry



Withies Croft Quarry



Admiralty Quarries

Lodmoor RSPB Reserve, 1400

After a break back at the hotel, extending into lunch, we ventured out on to the now safe roads and spent the afternoon at Radipole's sister reserve just to the east of Weymouth.

Parking in Lodmoor Country Park the route to the RSPB reserve took us past a mini golf course that today held a large number of redwings along with a few fieldfares. Reaching the main reserve some of the first birds seen were some very smart Mediterranean gulls, the only ones seen all weekend. Snipe were very much in evidence here, being seen in flight and at rest. Walking right round the reserve we had the chance to see both birds of the resident breeding pair of marsh harriers, accompanied for a time by a hunting sparrowhawk. The sparrowhawk put up large numbers of fieldfares with many more arriving from the east at the same time.

Reaching the far side of the reserve we found a group of black-tailed godwits, some of which were already almost in breeding plumage. Nearby was a much paler bar-tailed godwit, the two species looking completely different in the harsh light of this snowy day.

Portland Bill, 1630

Once again we finished the day with an unsuccessful search for owls, but this time we were pleased to be rewarded with flocks of golden plovers flying right next to the bus as we drove slowly along the Bill road.

Looking forward to the next time,

Bob

The weekend list:

Little Grebe	Radipole, Ferrybridge
Black-necked Grebe	Portland Harbour
Great Crested Grebe	Radipole
Gannet	Portland Bill
Cormorant	Portland Bill
Shag	Portland Bill
Fulmar	Chesil Cove
Grey Heron	Radipole
Mute Swan	Radipole
Dark-bellied Brent Goose	Ferrybridge
Canada Goose	Lodmoor
Shelduck	Radipole, Lodmoor
Teal	Radipole, Lodmoor
Mallard	Radipole, Lodmoor
Shoveler	Radipole, Lodmoor
Gadwall	Radipole, Lodmoor
Wigeon	Radipole, Lodmoor
Tufted Duck	Radipole
Pochard	Radipole
Red-breasted Merganser	Portland Harbour
Kestrel	Portland
Buzzard	Portland
Marsh Harrier	Radipole, Lodmoor
Sparrowhawk	Lodmoor
Pheasant	Portland
Coot	Radipole
Moorhen	Radipole
Oystercatcher	Portland Harbour
Ringed Plover	Ferrybridge
Golden Plover	Ferrybridge, Portland
Snipe	Radipole, Lodmoor
Dunlin	Radipole, Lodmoor
Bar-tailed Godwit	Lodmoor
Black-tailed Godwit	Lodmoor
Black-headed Gull	Ferrybridge etc
Mediterranean Gull	Lodmoor
Herring Gull	Ferrybridge etc
Great Black-backed Gull	Ferrybridge etc
Common Gull	Portland Bill
Lesser Black-backed Gull	Radipole, Lodmoor
Sandwich Tern	Portland Harbour
Guillemot	Portland Bill
Wood Pigeon	Portland etc
Collared Dove	Lodmoor
Feral Pigeon	Radipole
Stock Dove	Portland

Meadow Pipit	Portland Bill, Lodmoor
Rock Pipit	Portland Bill
Pied Wagtail	Ferrybridge
Wren	Portland, Radipole
Dunnock	Radipole
Robin	Portland etc
Stonechat	Portland Bill
Wheatear	Portland Bill
Black Redstart	Chesil Cove
Song Thrush	Radipole
<i>Continental Song Thrush</i>	Lodmoor
Blackbird	Portland etc
Redwing	Lodmoor
Fieldfare	Lodmoor
Cetti's Warbler	Radipole
Chiffchaff	Ferrybridge, Lodmoor
Long-tailed Tit	Radipole, Lodmoor
Blue Tit	Portland, Lodmoor
Great Tit	Lodmoor
Magpie	Portland etc
Jackdaw	Portland etc
Carrion Crow	Portland etc
Raven	Portland Bill, Ferrybridge
Starling	Ferrybridge, Lodmoor
Greenfinch	Lodmoor
Goldfinch	Radipole

Mammals

Grey Seal	Portland Bill
Brown Rat	Radipole
Bunny	Portland