

Portland Heights Birdwatching Breaks November 14th – 16th 2008

A weekend full of great sightings including Yellow-browed Warbler, Firecrest, Red-necked Grebe, Water Pipit and 2 Hen Harriers!

Saturday November 15th

Weather: Overcast with brief sunny intervals in a brisk north-westerly wind

Portland Bill, 0900

Our first visit of the weekend was to an unusually calm Portland Bill. We hoped to see Rock Pipits here and succeeded in our aim even before we left the car park. The cliffs held some early-returning Guillemots whilst on the sea were lots of Common Gulls and the occasional Gannet. A line of 7 Common Scoter were seen well as they flew past and landed on the sea. Walking round to the east side we found 4 Purple Sandpipers, achieving our other main aim for this site.



Pennsylvania Castle, 1000

The trees here were alive with Long-tailed Tits and Goldcrests, even if looking directly upwards into the treetops was a pain in the neck at times. A Yellow-browed Warbler put in a brief appearance as did a Firecrest, both being very active and restless birds. Looking out over Church Ope Cove we found a distant Black Redstart and a much closer Peregrine. While we were walking back up through the trees the Yellow-browed Warbler appeared again but this time we were above it and managed to get much better views.

Portland Castle, 1200

Not much here apart from 3 or 4 Little Grebes and a Great-crested Grebe.

Ferrybridge, 1300

The highlight here was a family party of 5 Pale-bellied Brent Geese amongst several hundred Dark-bellied birds. Looking beyond them to the sand bars in the Fleet we realised that all the gulls were Mediterranean Gulls, at least 50 altogether. Waders were represented by Dunlins and Ringed Plovers roosting on the beach. Good numbers of Red-breasted Mergansers were feeding in the waters of the Fleet with several Little Egrets on the shoreline.

Portland Harbour, 1400

From viewpoints at Downclose and Bincleaves Portland Harbour yielded an excellent range of birds including 3 or 4 Great Northern Diver and both Slavonian and Red-necked Grebes. Several more Mediterranean Gulls were found out in the harbour where there were also many more Mergansers.

Radipole Lake, 1530

A very brief stop here to see the Hooded Merganser and just one Mediterranean Gull.

Wyke Regis, 1600

The hoped-for Short-eared Owls never turned up here but we did see a very impressive flock of probably a thousand Brent Geese (which apparently contained 2 Black Brants) and heard a distant Curlew calling very atmospherically in the dusk.

Sunday November 16th

Weather: Longer sunny intervals in a lighter wind.

Ferrybridge, 0900

Just 4 Dark-bellied Brent Geese at high tide, with 15 Mediterranean Gulls on the sea.

Lodmoor, 0930

Stopping at the far eastern end on a whim paid off as the first Water Pipits of the winter were found to be already in residence. The rest of the reserve was less productive apart from a distant view of one of the Water Pipits again and a single Black-tailed Godwit.

Sherford Bridge, 1130

This corner of Wareham Forest gave us lots of woodland birds but not the little stripy woodpecker we were hoping for. The highlight was a huge flock of Siskins containing several Redpolls and Bramblings as well.

Arne, 1400

A brief stop for lunch and good views of Marsh and Coal Tits on the bird table.

Middlebere Farm, 1500

This delightful spot provided an excellent finale to our weekend with male and female Hen Harriers, 2 Spoonbills and hundreds of Teal, Wigeon and Black-tailed Godwits. For once the regular Yellow-legged Gulls were joined by several Herring Gulls as well as a Lesser Black-backed and 2 Great Black-backed Gulls giving us a great opportunity to compare shades of grey on the birds' wings and mantles.

****UPDATE ON HOODED MERGANSER ORIGINS****

The plot thickens. One theory is that our 'Hoodie' migrated north in the spring of 2008 from the Azores, where genuine American birds frequently turn up. This means that when it was found in Portland Harbour in June it would already have been a year old, having crossed the Atlantic the previous autumn. Most ducks will be in more or less adult plumage at this age but apparently male Hooded Mergansers do not acquire full adult plumage until they are in their second or even third year. However, some adult plumage should have been evident in June if this was really a year-old bird. Looking at the photos taken by Martin Cade when it was first discovered (http://www.portlandbirdobs.org.uk/latest_jun2008.htm) it looks as if this is indeed a year-old bird, in first-winter plumage. So it could have travelled from North America to the Azores in the previous autumn, and then continued its normal migration route north in the spring of 2008, bringing it to Portland in June in a tired and bedraggled state. Still doesn't explain why it was so tame from the first day it arrived at Radipole Lake...

***A different Hooded Merganser
– one from Slimbridge***



Birds: 94 species

Great Northern Diver	Portland Harbour
Little Grebe	Radipole, Lodmoor, Portland
Great Crested Grebe	Lodmoor, Portland Harbour
Red-necked Grebe	Portland Harbour
Slavonian Grebe	Portland Harbour
Gannet	Portland Bill
Cormorant	various sites
Shag	Portland Bill, Portland Harbour
Little Egret	Radipole, Lodmoor, Middlebere
Grey Heron	Portland Harbour, Middlebere
Spoonbill	Middlebere
Mute Swan	Radipole, Lodmoor
Dark-bellied Brent Goose	Ferrybridge
Pale-bellied Brent Goose	Ferrybridge
Shelduck	Radipole, Lodmoor, Middlebere
Wigeon	Middlebere
Gadwall	Lodmoor
Teal	Radipole, Lodmoor, Middlebere
Mallard	Radipole, Lodmoor, Middlebere
Shoveler	Radipole, Lodmoor
Tufted Duck	Radipole, Lodmoor
Pochard	Lodmoor
Red-breasted Merganser	Ferrybridge, Portland Harbour
Hooded Merganser	Radipole
Common Scoter	Portland Bill
Hen Harrier	Middlebere
Buzzard	Wareham Forest, Middlebere
Kestrel	various sites
Peregrine	Portland
Sparrowhawk	Portland
Pheasant	Weymouth, Middlebere
Moorhen	Radipole, Lodmoor
Coot	Radipole, Lodmoor
Oystercatcher	Ferrybridge
Ringed Plover	Ferrybridge
Lapwing	Lodmoor
Curlew	Middlebere
Dunlin	Ferrybridge
Purple Sandpiper	Portland Bill
Snipe	Radipole
Black-tailed Godwit	Middlebere
Mediterranean Gull	Ferrybridge, Radipole
Black-headed Gull	various sites
Lesser Black-backed Gull	Radipole, Middlebere
Herring Gull	various sites
Great Black-backed Gull	various sites
Yellow-legged Gull	Middlebere
Common Gull	Portland Bill, Radipole
Guillemot	Portland Bill
Wood Pigeon	various sites
Collared Dove	Portland
Tawny Owl	Arne (heard)
Great-spotted Woodpecker	Wareham Forest, Arne
Green Woodpecker	Arne
Treecreeper	Wareham Forest
Nuthatch	Wareham Forest, Arne
Water Pipit	Lodmoor
Meadow Pipit	Portland Bill
Rock Pipit	Portland Bill

Pied Wagtail	various sites
Wren	various sites
Duncock	various sites
Robin	various sites
Stonechat	Portland, Middlebere
Black Redstart	Portland
Redwing	Wareham Forest
Blackbird	various sites
Song Thrush	Middlebere
Mistle Thrush	Wareham Forest
Cetti's Warbler	Lodmoor (heard)
Chiffchaff	Portland
Yellow-browed Warbler	Portland
Goldcrest	various sites
Firecrest	Portland
Long-tailed Tit	various sites
Marsh Tit	Arne
Coal Tit	Wareham Forest, Arne
Blue Tit	various sites
Great Tit	various sites
Magpie	various sites
Jackdaw	various sites
Rook	Ferrybridge
Carrion Crow	various sites
Raven	Portland, Lodmoor
Jay	Wareham Forest
Starling	various sites
House Sparrow	various sites
Chaffinch	various sites
Brambling	Wareham Forest
Greenfinch	various sites
Goldfinch	various sites
Linnet	Portland
Siskin	Wareham Forest
Redpoll	Wareham Forest
Bullfinch	Middlebere
Reed Bunting	Lodmoor

Insects: 1 species

Red Admiral	Radipole
-------------	----------

Fungi: 4 species

Field Blewits	Portland
Dryad's Saddle	Portland
Puffball	Wareham Forest
Artist's Fungus	Wareham Forest

Mammals: 5 species

Brown Rat	Radipole
Grey Squirrel	various sites
Sika Deer	Middlebere
Red Fox	Middlebere
Rabbit	Middlebere

Fish: 1 species

Greater Pipefish	Portland Harbour
------------------	------------------

