

## Portland Heights Birdwatching Breaks Sept 19th – 21st 2008

Saturday September 20<sup>th</sup>

Weather: Long sunny spells all day, warm in the afternoon

Portland Bill, 0700

We were hoping for plenty of raptors here and we certainly weren't disappointed. Our first raptor, a Common Buzzard, was seen from the vehicle on the Bill. As soon as we reached the car park several Kestrels were seen including one unusually dark individual. Walking out towards the sea a small falcon dashed overhead pursuing a flock of migrating Meadow Pipits. From its small size and compact shape we immediately recognised it as a Merlin, probably a small male. Catching up with its prey well out to sea it made a series of dramatic stoops but failed to connect with the aerobatic pipit. We would have been pleased with this sighting alone but shortly after this a much larger raptor appeared from the north. Looking at first like another Common Buzzard we soon noticed that it glided with wings drooped below the horizontal, identifying it categorically as a Honey Buzzard. Within 15 minutes or so another had flown over, this time almost directly overhead! Anything else now was definitely a bonus but we also saw some gorgeous Yellow Wagtails along with hundreds of migrating Swallows and Meadow Pipits.

Portland Bill, 0930

Returning to the Bill after breakfast Sparrowhawk became our 5<sup>th</sup> raptor species of the day. Calling in at the Observatory Quarry we had good views of a Little Owl and a very bright Willow Warbler and glimpses of a Whitethroat. After checking with the warden, Martin Cade, in the Observatory itself we went on to Culverwell, a patch of elder and sycamores around an ancient spring. Here we saw an unusually well-behaved Melodious Warbler, the first of this species ever to be seen on a Birdbreak weekend. Next we moved on to the coastal path along the Westcliffs, where we saw more pipits, wagtails and swallows along with an incredible easterly movement of butterflies, mostly Large Whites but with a few Red Admirals and Small Whites.



*a sleepy Melodious Warbler*



*one of many Kestrels seen this morning*

Langton Herring, 1300

We had a most pleasant walk from the road to the shores of the Fleet in beautifully warm weather. A Roe Deer ran across the hillside in front of us and a Whinchat appeared on the hedgerow alongside the path. A Peregrine here made our 6<sup>th</sup> raptor of the day – all before lunch! Reaching the coast we found a huge collection of wildfowl including hundreds of Wigeon, 5 Pintail and a Merganser. A passing Kingfisher was an unexpected bonus.

Radipole Lake RSPB Reserve, 1500

The highlight here amongst many memorable sightings was a Kingfisher that perched a few feet away from us in front of the hide and then proceeded to hover repeatedly high over the water before diving in to catch fish. We also found the Hooded Merganser (of unknown origin) and a couple of Mediterranean Gulls.

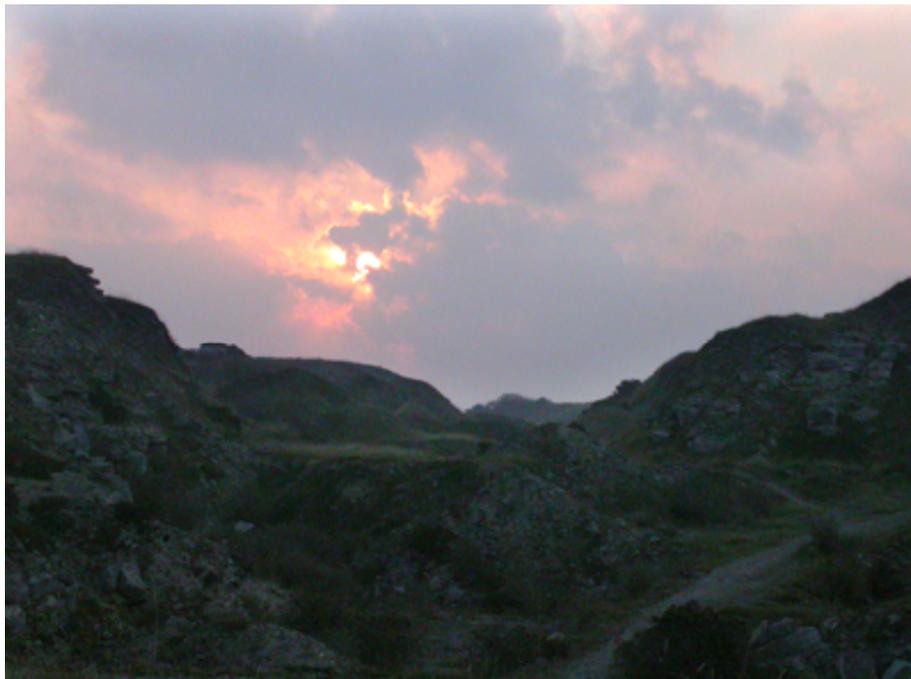
Ferrybridge, 1730

Our final visit of the day added Dunlin, Ringed Plover and Sanderling to the list as well as a pair of Ravens seen flying over Chesil Beach as we drove home.

Sunday September 21<sup>st</sup>

Weather: Bright and sunny in a cool easterly wind.

Kingbarrow Quarry, 0700



It was in beautifully calm weather that we started our day with an early walk into the quarry next to the hotel. Swallows, House Martins and Sand Martins streamed past all the time along with smaller numbers of Meadow Pipits. A good variety of other migrants was also recorded here with Tree Pipit, Wheatear, Chiffchaff and Blackcap all being seen or heard. A family of Foxes was watching us from a high rock face overlooking the quarry.

Ferrybridge, 0930

Disappointingly few waders here this morning with only a solitary Curlew different from yesterday.

Middlebere Farm, 1100

The heath here (part of Hartland Moor) produced several Dartford Warblers and, less expected, a Whinchat. From a hide overlooking Wych Lake (an inlet of Poole Harbour) a distant Osprey hunting high over the harbour. In the heat haze several white blurry lumps may have been Spoonbills, possibly. The next hide overlooking Middlebere Lake was much more productive with hundreds of Avocets and Black-tailed Godwits along with 7 Grey Plovers and a single Greenshank. As usual for this site there was a Yellow-legged Gull sat near the freshwater inlet at the head of the creek. Lunch was had back at the roadside with a flock of 7 Ravens calling high overhead.

Lodmoor RSPB Reserve, 1500

A remarkable run of luck here with several target species being found one after another. First on the list was Green Woodpecker which we found easily on the mini-golf course. Next a juvenile Bearded Tit was found quietly sunning itself in the reeds and shortly after a Little Stint was located in the marshland. But putting all these in the shade was a fabulously smart juvenile Little Gull feeding over the water. Finally a Bahama Pintail was an exotic sight even though it must have been an escape from a wildfowl collection.

Elated with our find (especially the Little Gull!) we returned to the hotel and cream teas. Adding up the tally we found we had seen a remarkable 104 species for the weekend.

Looking forward to our next trip out together,

Bob