

Portland Heights Birdwatching Break May 15th – May 17th 2009

Saturday May 16th

Weather: Mostly sunny in a strong south westerly wind.

Portland Bill, 0630

Our weekend started with an hour's sea-watch at the Bill which produced Razorbills, Guillemots, Fulmars and Kittiwakes in abundance. As well as these locally-breeding birds we saw flocks of Manx Shearwaters and Gannets migrating up the English Channel to their arctic breeding islands. Brief and distant views of a Puffin were somewhat less than we had hoped for.

Kingbarrow Quarry, 0900

We were pleased to see the resident Little Owl here but the strong winds kept most other birds out of the way. A Raven proved up to the challenge of coping with the gale and gave us good views as it dropped into Admiralty Quarry. Over on the Eastcliffs we found a large female Adder and several Slow-worms. The moat of the Verne prison held a number of nesting Stock Doves.

Cheyne, 1100

As expected the male of the resident pair of Peregrines was at his post and allowed reasonable views through the telescopes. A pair of Linnets were insistent, refusing to leave before we all had a good look at them.

Ferrybridge, 1300

The Little Terns were the stars here with Dunlins, Ringed Plovers and a Sanderling also on the shoreline.

Portland Harbour, 1400

Reports of a Red-throated Diver led to this unscheduled stop, producing distant views of the winter-plumaged diver and closer views of a Sandwich Tern.

Radipole, 1500

As well as the expected Hooded Merganser we had excellent views of several Grey Herons and a brief view of a Cetti's Warbler. Bearded Tits and Reed Warblers were heard in the reeds and a Blackcap was singing from some trees close to the path.



Sunday May 17th

Weather: Sunny for a while in the morning then overcast with light drizzle at midday. Wind strong and from the south east.

Portland Bill, 0930

The Gannets were still streaming past just off the coast and the sea was alive with feeding Razorbills, Guillemots, Fulmars and Kittiwakes. On land the Rock Pipits were singing and Linnets were dashing around in small flocks. Along the Westcliffs above the seabird colony we could smell the fishy nests of the Kittiwakes and hear their echoing calls as they flew in and out of the caves somewhere beneath us.

Penn's Weare, 1100

We walked the old railway line under the Eascliffs towards Grove Point, where we found nesting Fulmars (about 5 pairs), a family of Ravens and a male Peregrine, calling loudly to his partner who was out of sight, presumably on their nest. The only Lesser Whitethroat of the weekend was singing from the bushes under the cliffs.

Ferrybridge, 1400

With a higher tide we had much better views of the waders and Little Terns, with a Turnstone and a Sandwich Tern present as well.

Lodmoor, 1530

Our final visit was to the RSPB's second town-centre reserve in Weymouth. A Little Egret was the best bird seen, with a male Reed Bunting also a welcome sight of a species that has not been doing too well recently. A Sedge Warbler was singing well but refused to show himself, probably for fear of being blown into the next county by the increasingly blustery wind. Out on the marsh the sight of a group of Black-headed Gulls ended the longest period must of us had ever gone without seeing this old friend.

Bob Ford, May 18th 2009

