

Saturday February 18th

Weather: Mostly overcast with brief sunny intervals in the morning, wet and windy in the afternoon.

Kingbarrow Quarry, 0700

A quiet start to the weekend which enabled us to explore some of the geology of the Portland and Purbeck beds. Several stromatolitic tree bowls were found as well as the underlying fossil soil of the Great Dirt Bed. Walking along one of the gullies separating the stacks of overburden we used an ancient quarry tunnel to complete our circuit of the quarry. By the time we had returned to the hotel we had heard a number of birds but seen very few. Species heard included Linnet, Song Thrush, Greenfinch and Great Tit.

Ferrybridge, 0900

A quick look here revealed several Red-breasted Mergansers and a small flock of waders including Ringed Plovers, Dunlins and Turnstones. Several Skylarks were singing over Hamm Beach on the edge of Portland Harbour.

Radipole RSPB Reserve, 1000

We stopped here with a single aim in mind – to find the first-year Iceland Gull which has been seen here on and off for the last month. At first we could find nothing more rare than Mediterranean Gulls but then a pale gull flew in and landed just in front of us. We had found our Iceland Gull!

Lodmoor RSPB Reserve, 1100

Some good views of Snipe were had here as well as a female Marsh Harrier hunting over the marsh.

Radipole RSPB Reserve, 1200

The Iceland Gull had gone now but there were still plenty of Med Gulls about and the Hooded Merganser was still performing. Plenty of other wildfowl were seen as well including a superb drake Pintail. By the time we got to the North Hide the anticipated rain had arrived and we were marooned for the best part of an hour. A huge female Peregrine gave us a good view as it dived down into the ducks in front of the hide and made off with a Teal or Coot, while a Roe Deer appeared at the edge of the reeds.



Underbarn, 1400

Searching the northern end of Portland Harbour we found a good range of birds including Brent Geese, Oystercatchers and Great Crested Grebes. However the wind was now increasing all the time and the sea was too rough to find anything else.

Portland Castle, 1500

We had hoped to find calmer waters here but by now the wind was very strong indeed and we could only find Great Crested Grebes, Shags and a few Red-breasted Mergansers.

Eastcliffs, 1600

Walking in the shelter of Portland's eastern coast we soon found the resident pair of Peregrines on the cliffs. Offshore were Gannets, Shags and a single Fulmar. At last the weather system passed over us and the weather suddenly improved with clear skies and decreasing winds. A beautiful end to the day.

Sunday February 19th

Weather: Much sunnier, but still a cold north-westerly wind

Portland Bill, 0900

In bright sunshine the black and white plumage of the Guillemots and Razorbills really made them stand out as they flew busily back and forth off the Bill. Over the rough waters of the Race hundreds of birds were feeding, mostly Kittiwakes and Gannets but all very distant. The Observatory Quarry held the resident Little Owl but sadly it only gave the briefest of views.

Grove Point, 1000

Standing above the largest colony of Fulmars on the island gave us great views of these wonderful birds. Even closer was the pair of Ravens on top of a comms mast right next to the car, but again the Little Owl we found would not oblige by remaining in one place for long enough for us to see it properly. The nearby Stock Doves on the cliffs of Broadcroft Quarry were much more well-behaved and looked most attractive in the bright sunshine.

Wyke Regis Bridging Camp, 1100

A walk around this army camp on the shores of the Fleet added Curlew to the list but little else, although we did get some good flight views of mergansers.

Abbotsbury Swannery, 1300

This was meant to be no more than a convenient lunch stop but ended up producing the bird of the weekend – a Red Kite! Not a close view but still very enjoyable as this is still a rare bird in Dorset.

West Bexington, 1400

Walking along the northern end of Chesil Beach gave us the opportunity to study the geology of the area – just as well as apart from a notable exception there weren't many birds around. The notable exception was the pair of Velvet Scoters that remained well offshore but allowed identification when they flew off showing us their white wing-bars. The geology consisted of rocks from the local strata that somehow had made their way onto the beach, consisting of pieces of Forest Marble and Cornbrash, both limestones full of marine debris including one piece that contained no less than 6 crinoid segments.

Woodsford Bridge, 1600

Our final stop took us on a long detour by way of Poundbury. Woodsford Bridge is an ancient crossing of the River Frome just east of Dorchester and a traditional wintering site for Bewick's Swan. Today though we could only find Mute Swans, although we did see some lovely South Devon Red cattle and a couple of Yellowhammers on the way there. On the way back we passed Woodsford Castle, not a Dorset Longhouse as I said it was but a fortified mediaeval manor house, now belonging to the Landmark Trust and available for hire. Now there's an idea...



see <http://youtu.be/eJLmsvqWN2o>

Birds: 79 species

Great Crested Grebe	Portland Harbour, Fleet	Guillemot	Portland Bill
Little Grebe	Weymouth Harbour	Razorbill	Portland Bill
Fulmar	Portland	Wood Pigeon	various sites
Gannet	Portland Bill	Stock Dove	Grove Point
Cormorant	Lodmoor, Radipole	Feral Pigeon	Radipole
Shag	Portland Bill	Collared Dove	Portland
Little Egret	Radipole, Fleet	Little Owl	Portland
Grey Heron	Lodmoor, Radipole	Skylark	Ferrybridge, Portland
Mute Swan	Radipole, Woodsford	Rock Pipit	Portland Bill
Brent Goose	Portland Harbour, Fleet	Meadow Pipit	Kingbarrow Quarry
Canada Goose	Lodmoor, Radipole	Pied Wagtail	Portland
Shelduck	Lodmoor, Radipole	Wren	various sites
Shoveler	Lodmoor, Radipole	Duncock	various sites
Pintail	Radipole	Robin	various sites
Gadwall	Lodmoor, Radipole	Blackbird	various sites
Teal	Lodmoor, Radipole	Song Thrush	Kingbarrow Quarry
Mallard	Lodmoor, Radipole	Cetti's Warbler	Radipole
Tufted Duck	Radipole	Long-tailed Tit	Radipole (heard)
Pochard	Radipole	Blue Tit	various sites
Hooded Merganser	Radipole	Great Tit	various sites
Red-br Merganser	Portland Harbour, Fleet	Raven	Portland
Velvet Scoter	West Bexington	Magpie	various sites
Red Kite	Abbotsbury	Jackdaw	various sites
Kestrel	Portland, Abbotsbury	Rook	Radipole, Fleet
Peregrine	Portland, Radipole	Carrion Crow	various sites
Buzzard	Portland, West Bexington	Starling	various sites
Sparrowhawk	Radipole	House Sparrow	various sites
Marsh Harrier	Lodmoor	Greenfinch	various sites
Pheasant	Abbotsbury	Goldfinch	Portland
Moorhen	Lodmoor, Radipole	Chaffinch	Grove Point
Coot	Lodmoor, Radipole	Bullfinch	Underbarn
Curlew	Fleet	Linnet	Kingbarrow Quarry
Oystercatcher	Portland Bill	Yellowhammer	Tincton (nr Woodsford)
Snipe	Lodmoor, Radipole	Reed Bunting	Radipole
Ringed Plover	Ferrybridge		
Lapwing	Lodmoor, Abbotsbury	Mammals: 2 species	
Dunlin	Ferrybridge	Rabbit	Kingbarrow Quarry
Turnstone	Ferrybridge	Roe Deer	Radipole
Iceland Gull	Radipole		
Common Gull	Radipole		
Black-headed Gull	various sites		
Mediterranean Gull	Radipole, Fleet		
Herring Gull	various sites		
Great Black-b Gull	various sites		
Lesser Black-b Gull	Radipole		
Kittiwake	Portland Bill		