

HEIGHTS HOTEL WILDLIFE BREAKS

Friday December 8th – Sunday December 10th 2017



Purple sandpipers at Portland Bill by Liz Taylor

Saturday December 9th

Weather: wet overnight but then dry all day but very cold, especially in the morning

Portland Bill, 0900

On a very cold but calm morning we started at the Bill where we were pleased to find two purple sandpipers feeding on the rocks just in front of us. Looking out to sea we could see gannets, guillemots and razorbills flying around the bass-fishing boats. On the land were plenty of very tame rock pipits and a flock of twenty or so goldfinches.

Wakeham, 1030

We struggled to find many birds here, and when a male sparrowhawk appeared we could see why. A kestrel also turned up and gave us excellent views as it hunted over Church Ope Cove. The only redwing of the day was also seen here.

Portland Castle, 1130

One of the highlights of the day was found here when we had the chance to compare a huge great northern diver with two much smaller black-throated divers at fairly close quarters. A number of black-necked grebes were further out as was a very distant razorbill.

Ferrybridge, 1230

Before stopping for lunch we parked on the shore of Portland Harbour and found another three great northern divers, one of which was just off the beach. The two black-throated divers turned up again as did another distant flock of eight black-necked grebes. We found lots of red-breasted mergansers here, around fifty of them, as well as two female goosanders.

We drove across the other side of the road to our usual lunch stop where a redshank was found feeding near a small group of Mediterranean gulls, a small group of brent geese nearby. Within a few minutes a flock of waders arrived; turnstones, dunlins and ringed plovers.

Lodmoor RSPB Reserve, 1400

An impressive list of birds was seen at this superb reserve including good views of a couple of goldcrests and several chiffchaffs as well as many wildfowl and waders. These included black-tailed godwits,

lapwings, redshank and snipe. One of the first birds seen as we arrived was a second-year yellow-legged gull, not unusual here but nationally probably the rarest bird of the weekend. Out over the reedbeds a pair of marsh harriers were hunting and later the male gave us a short demonstration of his roller-coaster territorial display.

Radipole RSPB Reserve, 1600

We finished the day on a high note with a group of bearded tits watched in the fast-fading light.

Actually we hadn't quite finished as we made an unplanned stop at the side of Weymouth Harbour to watch a starling murmuration over the town centre.

Sunday December 10th

Weather: intermittent rain all day in a gale force northerly wind.

Maiden Castle, 0930

Leaving very nasty conditions indeed at Portland we stopped off at Dorchester en route to Cattistock. Straight away we found huge numbers of golden plovers, with much smaller numbers of lapwings. Searching the fields for smaller birds we soon found a few hardy corn buntings but never had the close views that we might expect at this site.

Cattistock, 1100

A new destination for a Birdbreak weekend due to the numbers of hawfinches that have been seen here recently. It didn't take us long to find them, but we did have to wait around in the rain for a bit before we got better views of them perched. A coal tit was also seen here and a nuthatch was heard.

Abbotsbury, 1230

Lunch was had in the warmth of the van, with huge waves pounding Chesil Beach just behind us.

Bincleaves, 1330

The northern corner of Portland Harbour was completely sheltered as expected but surprisingly there were very few birds here, with just great crested grebe added to the weekend list. On a tip-off from a member of the public we checked out nearby Newton's Cove, where a small group of local birders were assembled watching a newly-arrived red-necked grebe. The same site also showed us a distant red-throated diver and a group of three female common scoter.

Radipole, 1430

A quick look through the gulls on the car park revealed a Mediterranean gull with a white ring. After contacting the European ringing scheme I have now heard that this bird was ringed in Belgium in 2005, when the bird was already two years old. Since then it has spent most winters at Radipole but its nesting site is not known.

Ferrybridge, 1500

All birds seemed to have been blown away from this exposed site bar a lone brent goose and a very hardy kestrel.

Portland Bill, 1530

Our final stop gave us good views of fishing gannets just off the shore and, for one lucky member of the group, a fleeting glimpse of a merlin from the bus windows.

Looking forward to the next time,
Bob

Birds:

Red-throated Diver	Newton's Cove
Black-throated Diver	Portland Harbour
Great Northern Diver	Portland Harbour
Little Grebe	Portland Harbour
Great Crested Grebe	Portland Harbour
Red-necked Grebe	Newton's Cove
Black-necked Grebe	Portland Harbour
Gannet	Portland Bill
Cormorant	Portland Bill
Shag	Portland Bill
Little Egret	Ferrybridge, Portland Harbour
Grey Heron	Portland Harbour, Lodmoor, Radipole
Mute Swan	Radipole
Canada Goose	Lodmoor
Dark-bellied Brent Goose	Ferrybridge
Shelduck	Lodmoor
Teal	Lodmoor, Radipole
Mallard	Lodmoor, Radipole
Shoveler	Lodmoor
Gadwall	Lodmoor, Radipole
Tufted Duck	Lodmoor, Radipole
Pochard	Lodmoor
Common Scoter	Newton's Cove
Red-breasted Merganser	Portland Harbour
Goosander	Portland Harbour
Sparrowhawk	Portland
Kestrel	Portland, Abbotsbury
Merlin	Portland Bill
Buzzard	Lodmoor
Marsh Harrier	Lodmoor
Pheasant	Abbotsbury
Water Rail	Radipole, Lodmoor (heard)
Coot	Lodmoor, Radipole
Moorhen	Lodmoor, Radipole
Oystercatcher	Portland Bill, Ferrybridge
Redshank	Ferrybridge, Lodmoor
Black-tailed Godwit	Lodmoor
Dunlin	Ferrybridge, Lodmoor
Purple Sandpiper	Portland Bill
Ringed Plover	Ferrybridge
Lapwing	Lodmoor, Maiden Castle
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Snipe	Lodmoor, Radipole
Turnstone	Ferrybridge
Black-headed Gull	Lodmoor etc
Mediterranean Gull	Ferrybridge, Lodmoor, Radipole
Herring Gull	Portland Bill etc
Great Black-backed Gull	Portland Bill etc
Yellow-legged Gull	Lodmoor

Common Gull	Lodmoor, Radipole
Razorbill	Portland
Guillemot	Portland
Wood Pigeon	Portland etc
Collared Dove	Portland etc
Feral Pigeon	Portland
Kingfisher	Lodmoor
Skylark	Ferrybridge, Maiden Castle
Meadow Pipit	Maiden Castle
Rock Pipit	Portland Bill, Ferrybridge
Pied Wagtail	Ferrybridge etc
Grey Wagtail	Portland (heard)
Wren	Portland Bill etc
Duncock	Portland Bill etc
Robin	Portland Bill etc
Stonechat	Portland Bill, Maiden Castle
Blackbird	Portland Bill etc
Redwing	Portland
Cetti's Warbler (heard)	Lodmoor
Goldcrest	Lodmoor
Bearded Tit	Radipole
Long-tailed Tit	Portland, Lodmoor
Coal Tit	Cattistock
Blue Tit	Portland etc
Great Tit	Portland etc
Nuthatch	Cattistock (heard)
Magpie	Portland etc
Jackdaw	Portland etc
Rook	Cattistock, Abbotsbury
Carrion Crow	Portland etc
Raven	Portland Bill, Ferrybridge
Starling	Lodmoor etc
House Sparrow	Portland etc
Goldfinch	Portland etc
Linnet	Maiden Castle
Chaffinch	Portland etc
Greenfinch	Portland, Cattistock
Bullfinch	Cattistock
Hawfinch	Cattistock
Corn Bunting	Maiden Castle

Mammals:

Grey Squirrel	Portland
Rabbit	Maiden Castle
Brown Rat	Radipole