

Portland Heights Birdwatching Breaks

Friday January 6th – Sunday January 8th 2017



a short-eared owl from last year - see video at <https://youtu.be/UuEL94xeW5w>

Saturday January 7th

Weather: damp and overcast with light rain in the afternoon, wind light south-westerly

Portland Bill, 0900

We started the weekend with a short-eared owl hunting over the fields above the Bird Observatory. Just as the owl disappeared a peregrine shot into view and stooped dramatically over the same hillside. Moving on to the Eastcliffs we spent some time watching a fishing flock of many hundreds of gannets and kittiwakes, with guillemots and razorbills in attendance. The highlight here was the great skua that, although distant, gave us excellent views through the telescopes as it harried the gannets.

Portland Harbour, 1100

Our first look at the harbour was from Portland Castle where we could see several red-breasted mergansers along with a first-year drake eider. Across the other side of the car park a black redstart was feeding around the abandoned buildings of the Naval Air Station.

Next we examined the central area of the harbour from the International Sailing Academy. The sea here was very quiet but in the distance we could see a long line of twelve goosanders, which gradually came closer.

Ferrybridge, 1200

The mud-flats here held a few brent geese and Mediterranean gulls with another goosander out on the waters of the Fleet. Waders were disappointing with just a

couple of oystercatchers and a single turnstone, but the flock of ten skylarks that flew past while we were eating our lunch was more impressive.

Sandsfoot Castle, 1300

Our third examination of Portland Harbour turned up a flock of fourteen black-necked grebes and a distant great northern diver.

Radipole RSPB Reserve, 1400

On a dark drizzly afternoon birds were very difficult to find but we did manage a very brief view of a water rail from the visitor centre and a good range of wildfowl including shoveler, gadwall and shelduck. Several bearded tits were heard out in the reedbeds but could not be found. The marsh harriers were behaving in a very similar fashion with male and female calls heard very clearly but no glimpses at all of the huge birds of prey that were making them.

Portland Bill, 1600

We returned to the Bill as the day darkened to look for owls and were very pleased indeed to see a barn owl sat on a post near the road as we drove past.



rose-coloured starling photo by Liz Taylor

Sunday January 8th

Weather: increasingly bright and sunny through the day, calm

Abbotsbury, 0930

Parking problems meant that we could not spend as long as we would like here but we still managed to see the two target species – long-tailed duck and scaup. A great spotted woodpecker also appeared on the scene as we were searching the wildfowl flocks.

Nottingham, 1030

Little egrets and goldcrests were all that we could find here, with no sign of the cattle egrets that we saw here last month (<http://www.natureportfolio.co.uk/birdbreaks/2016/Dec09/report.pdf>)

Dorchester, 1100

A most efficient twitch here with the rose-coloured starling showing itself within seconds of us arriving.

Maiden Castle, 1130

This site just gets better and better with a woodcock coming out of nowhere and huge numbers of corn buntings and golden plovers. The hoped-for hen harrier never appeared but we did see a couple of buzzards and several ravens.

Radipole RSPB Reserve, 1300

With the weather rapidly improving we enjoyed lunch on the patio of the visitor centre in almost spring-like conditions. Walking round the reserve for the second time this weekend the bearded tits and Cetti's warblers gave us the briefest of views but one of the resident marsh harriers was far more obliging. As we got back to the car park the bearded tits relented and allowed us to have a really good look at them at last.

Portland Bill, 1500

Our second visit to our favourite spot gave us the chance to search for the purple sandpipers in far better weather. It took a while but we eventually found five of them. Flushed with success we moved on to the Observatory Quarry to check if the little owl was back. He was and gave us excellent views perched on the rocks a short distance in front of us. But the best sighting of all was on the drive back when a short-eared owl flew in front of the bus and landed on the grassy slopes near the Westcliffs. We had time to park, leave the bus and watch the bird at fairly close quarters before it took off and treated us to a memorable flying display,

What a way to end the weekend!

Bob



Birds:

Red-throated Diver	Portland Bill
Great Northern Diver	Portland Harbour
Great Crested Grebe	Abbotsbury
Black-necked Grebe	Portland Harbour
Little Grebe	Abbotsbury
Cormorant	Portland, Radipole, Abbotsbury
Shag	Portland
Gannet	Portland Bill
Little Egret	Nottingham
Grey Heron	Radipole
Mute Swan	Radipole, Abbotsbury
Canada Goose	Abbotsbury
Dark-bellied Brent Goose	Portland Bill, Ferrybridge
Shelduck	Radipole, Abbotsbury
Teal	Radipole, Abbotsbury
Mallard	Radipole, Abbotsbury
Shoveler	Radipole
Tufted Duck	Radipole, Abbotsbury
Scaup	Abbotsbury
Pochard	Radipole, Abbotsbury
Eider	Portland Harbour
Red-breasted Merganser	Portland Harbour
Goosander	Portland Harbour
Hooded Merganser	Radipole
Long-tailed Duck	Abbotsbury

Kestrel	various sites
Peregrine	Portland Bill
Marsh Harrier	Radipole
Sparrowhawk	Abbotsbury
Buzzard	various sites
Pheasant	Abbotsbury
Water Rail	Radipole
Coot	Radipole, Abbotsbury
Moorhen	Radipole
Oystercatcher	Ferrybridge
Redshank	Abbotsbury (heard)
Purple Sandpiper	Portland Bill
Woodcock	Maiden Castle
Golden Plover	Maiden Castle
Lapwing	Maiden Castle
Turnstone	Ferrybridge
Great Skua	Portland Bill
Common Gull	various sites
Black-headed Gull	various sites
Mediterranean Gull	Radipole, Ferrybridge
Herring Gull	various sites
Great Black-backed Gull	various sites
Kittiwake	Portland Bill
Razorbill	Portland Harbour
Guillemot	Portland Bill
Wood Pigeon	various sites
Collared Dove	various sites
Feral Pigeon	various sites
Little Owl	Portland Bill
Barn Owl	Portland Bill
Short-eared Owl	Portland Bill
Kingfisher	Radipole
Great Spotted Woodpecker	Abbotsbury
Skylark	Maiden Castle, Ferrybridge
Meadow Pipit	Portland
Rock Pipit	Portland Bill
Pied Wagtail	various sites
Grey Wagtail	Portland Harbour
Wren	various sites
Dunnock	various sites
Robin	various sites
Black Redstart	Portland Castle
Stonechat	Portland, Radipole
Song Thrush	Abbotsbury
Redwing	Abbotsbury
Fieldfare	Abbotsbury
Blackbird	various sites
Cetti's Warbler	Radipole
Chiffchaff	Radipole (heard)
Goldcrest	Radipole, Nottingham
Bearded Tit	Radipole
Long-tailed Tit	Radipole, Nottingham

Blue Tit	various sites
Great Tit	various sites
Magpie	various sites
Raven	Portland, Maiden Castle
Jackdaw	various sites
Rook	Nottingham
Carrion Crow	various sites
Starling	various sites
Rose-coloured Starling	Dorchester
House Sparrow	various sites
Goldfinch	various sites
Chaffinch	Radipole
Greenfinch	Nottingham
Linnet	Portland Bill
Corn Bunting	Maiden Castle
Reed Bunting	Radipole

Mammals:

Rabbit	Portland
Brown Rat	Radipole