

HEIGHTS HOTEL WILDLIFE BREAKS September 15th – September 17th 2017

Saturday September 16th

Weather: a sunny morning with a light northerly breeze, wet in the afternoon



Portland Bill, 0900

Our weekend got off to a great start with a surprisingly good sea-watch in beautifully clear and bright conditions, not normally the weather you want to bring the seabirds close. The highlight by a long way was the summer-plumaged great northern diver that flew eastwards at virtually point-blank range. Much further out a number of gannets could be seen fishing and a small group of common scoter passed to the west. Below us on the rocks a couple of turnstones were feeding amongst the rock pipits but we were really surprised to see several butterflies here including red admiral, small white and a very bright male common blue.

Walking along the Eastcliffs towards the Bird Observatory we found a number of smart wheatears and several kestrels, including one unusually noisy individual. Next stop was the Observatory Quarry where we were expecting a long wait before we saw the wryneck. Amazingly the bird popped up as soon as we got there and gave us all excellent views.

We then went on to the Bird Observatory where the warden, Martin Cade, let us check through his moth trap. A long list of species were seen including Beautiful Gothic and Canary-shouldered Thorn. As we left a peregrine appeared overhead chasing a very worried-looking flock of pigeons.



left:
*canary-shouldered
thorn and setaceous
hebrew character*

right:
beautiful gothic



Verne Ditch, 1130

The first of two little owl sites just produced a few stock doves and lots of jackdaws.

Kingbarrow Quarry, 1200

Another quick stop to look for little owls and again we drew a blank.

Ferrybridge, 1330

The highlight here were the two little stints that we found amongst the dunlins and ringed plovers. Further out on the mudflats a bar-tailed godwit was feeding near a small group of Mediterranean gulls.

Lodmoor RSPB Reserve, 1430

In spite of the rain we saw a very impressive range of birds here starting with a great white egret pretty much opposite our parking spot. After sorting out five species of duck we moved on to the waders. Black-tailed godwits were the most numerous along with several lapwing, dunlins and ringed plovers. All the time Cetti's warblers were singing in the bushes alongside the path and swallows were flying close overhead. Amongst the gulls were a couple of young yellow-legged gulls.

The eastern side of the reserve had even more waders including common sandpiper and redshank. After several attempts we finally found our main target – a tiny least sandpiper from North America. This star bird (the first for Dorset) had a supporting cast of yellow and white wagtails, all of which were picked out very brightly against a background of red samphire plants. A kingfisher was seen several times here, mostly in flight but once sat on the side of a bramble bush overlooking a channel.

Sunday September 17th

Weather: a calm and mostly sunny day

Arne RSPB Reserve, 1000

A whole day was spent at this superb reserve with the morning spent around Shipstall Point. Looking out across Poole Harbour we could hear the distinctive call of sandwich terns as a flock of at least twenty birds flew in and landed in front of us. Nearby we experienced one of the highlights of the weekend when we witnessed a rare sight – a raft spider preying on a common darter dragonfly. Two other dragonflies were seen here, an outstandingly bright southern hawker and a very delicate common emerald damselfly. Reaching the double-decker hide we had excellent views of redshank and curlew with a huge flock of oystercatchers roosting in the distance. The walk back took a bit longer than anticipated as we encountered first a red-veined darter and shortly afterwards an enormous swarm of bees nesting in a hole in an oak tree. (see video at <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=7mrafhwstXQ>)



*left:
male
red-veined
darter*

*right:
honey bees*



After lunch we walked out onto Coombe Heath and soon found a fine male Dartford warbler, as usual in the company of stonechats. The screen on the eastern shore of Middlebere Lake showed us very little apart from a buzzard and large numbers of little egrets out in the far reaches of the harbour. From the next hide however we could see the western end of the tidal creek where a flock of eleven spoonbills were feeding. Surprisingly few waders were here today but we did see a few curlew and dunlin as well as the only greenshank of the weekend. On our return walk we stopped at a spot that gave us a superb view over Middlebere Lake and Hartland Moor with the ruins of Corfe Castle in the distance. After a fruitless half hour waiting for the osprey to reappear we decided that we had seen enough for one weekend and returned to the hotel and a well-earned cream tea.

Looking forward to the next time,

Bob.

Birds:

Great Northern Diver	Portland Bill
Great Crested Grebe	Lodmoor
Gannet	Portland Bill
Cormorant	Portland Bill
Shag	Portland Bill
Spoonbill	Arne
Little Egret	Lodmoor
Great White Egret	Lodmoor
Grey Heron	Lodmoor
Mute Swan	Lodmoor
Canada Goose	Lodmoor
Grey Lag	Lodmoor
Shelduck	Lodmoor
Teal	Lodmoor
Mallard	Lodmoor
Shoveler	Lodmoor
Pochard	Lodmoor
Tufted Duck	Lodmoor
Common Scoter	Portland Bill
Kestrel	Portland Bill
Peregrine	Portland Bill
Sparrowhawk	Weymouth
Buzzard	Arne
Coot	Lodmoor
Moorhen (heard)	Lodmoor
Curlew	Arne
Oystercatcher	Portland Bill
Avocet	Arne
Redshank	Lodmoor
Greenshank	Arne
Common Sandpiper	Lodmoor
Bar-tailed Godwit	Ferrybridge
Black-tailed Godwit	Lodmoor
Dunlin	Ferrybridge
Little Stint	Ferrybridge
Least Sandpiper	Lodmoor
Ringed Plover	Ferrybridge

Lapwing	Lodmoor
Turnstone	Portland Bill
Black-headed Gull	Lodmoor
Mediterranean Gull	Ferrybridge
Yellow-legged Gull	Lodmoor
Herring Gull	Portland Bill
Great Black-backed Gull	Portland Bill
Lesser Black-backed Gull	Lodmoor
Common Gull	Ferrybridge
Sandwich Tern	Arne
Wood Pigeon	Portland Bill
Stock Dove	Portland
Collared Dove	Portland
Feral Pigeon	Portland
Kingfisher	Lodmoor
Green Woodpecker (heard)	Arne
Great Spotted Woodpecker	Arne
Wryneck	Portland Bill
Skylark	Portland Bill
Nuthatch	Arne
Sand Martin	Lodmoor
Swallow	Portland Bill
House Martin	Lodmoor
Meadow Pipit	Portland Bill
Rock Pipit	Portland Bill
Yellow Wagtail	Lodmoor
White Wagtail	Lodmoor
Pied Wagtail	Ferrybridge
Wren	Arne
Duncock	Portland Bill
Robin	Portland Bill
Stonechat	Arne
Wheatear	Portland Bill
Song Thrush	Arne
Blackbird	Portland Bill
Cetti's Warbler (heard)	Lodmoor
Dartford Warbler	Arne
Willow Warbler	Arne
Chiffchaff	Arne
Goldcrest	Arne
Spotted Flycatcher	Arne
Long-tailed Tit	Arne
Coal Tit	Arne
Blue Tit	Arne
Great Tit	Arne
Raven	Ferrybridge
Magpie	Portland Bill
Jackdaw	Portland Bill
Rook	Ferrybridge
Carrion Crow	Portland Bill
Starling	Lodmoor
House Sparrow	Portland Bill

Goldfinch
Chaffinch
Linnet

Arne
Arne
Portland Bill

Mammals:

Grey Squirrel
Rabbit
Sika Deer

Reptiles:

Common Lizard

Insects:

Red Admiral
Comma
Peacock
Small Heath
Speckled Wood
Small White
Large White
Common Blue

Beautiful Gothic
Angle Shades
Cetaceous Hebrew Character
Common Wainscot
L-album Wainscot
Canary-shouldered Thorn
White-point
Large Yellow Underwing

Common Emerald Damselfly
Red-veined Darter
Common Darter
Southern Hawker
Migrant Hawker

Field Grasshopper

Spiders:

Raft Spider
Garden Cross Spider

Notable Plants:

Bristly Ox-tongue
Dorset Heath
Common Heather
Cross-leaved Heath
Bell Heather

Fungi:

Earthball

Birch Bracket