

## HEIGHTS HOTEL WILDLIFE BREAKS

### Friday January 5th – Sunday January 7th 2018



#### Saturday January 6th

**Weather: a cold but mostly bright day with a strong northerly wind**

Portland Bill, 0900

A very cold Portland Bill gave us a really good start to the weekend with guillemots, razorbills and gannets seen out at sea in good numbers. A few fulmars were seen as well but the highlight was the flock of seven purple sandpipers roosting on the side of Pulpit Rock.

Walking along the Westcliffs we enjoyed excellent views of a very smart kestrel as well a stonechat and a number of rock pipits. Two flocks of finches were found near the lighthouse, one of goldfinches and one of linnets.

Portland Castle, 1100

After a stop off at the hotel to warm up with a cup of coffee we moved on to check the north end of Portland Harbour. In spite of the now atrocious weather we had close views of a great northern diver and several red-breasted mergansers.

Rodwell Trail, 1200

Walking along the old railway track linking Weymouth to Portland we hoped to find a firecrest but instead had to be content with a brief view of a bullfinch. Looking out over the central area of Portland Harbour we found one or two distant black-necked grebes along with several closer great crested grebes.

Ferrybridge, 1300

The small flock of brent geese here turned out to be all of the dark-bellied race. Out on the waters of the Fleet was a much larger flock of two hundred Mediterranean gulls. A few dunlins were feeding on the shoreline but most of the waders were roosting on Chesil Beach. These remained out of sight until a buzzard disturbed them and the whole flock of a hundred or so ringed plovers and dunlin flew right past us.

Sandsfoot, 1400

Another section of Portland Harbour was searched for grebes and divers but produced only distant views of a single great northern diver and three black-necked grebes. Another distant grebe may have been a slavianian but the view was too poor to be certain.

Bincleaves, 1500

Our final look at Portland Harbour was over the northern corner which today was the most sheltered section. At first only great crested grebes could be seen but we persevered and eventually located a distant black-throated diver, the rarest bird seen so far on the weekend.

Radipole RSPB Reserve, 1600

In rapidly fading light we made a brief stop at this unique town centre reserve to search the gulls for a very rare Bonaparte's gull from North America. We were out of luck this afternoon but we did add plenty of new birds to the day's list including snipe, shelduck, teal and shoveler. A black-headed gull on the car park was seen to be wearing a colour ring, probably indicating that it is a bird from the continent. More details will be posted here when I hear back from the bird's ringers. Driving back through Weymouth we stopped to watch the impressive starling murmuration over the town centre.

**Sunday January 7th**

**Weather: a brighter day but again a cold northerly-easterly wind**

Maiden Castle, 0930

Huge numbers of golden plovers were seen here, but only in flight. Lapwings were numerous as well but the star bird was the cause of the plovers' restlessness – a very active female merlin. A single corn bunting was seen but would not stay still long enough to be viewed properly through the telescope.

Lytchett Matravers, 1100

One of the highlights of the weekend was our visit to the Church of St Mary the Virgin and the ancient yew tree in the grounds. Our target here was the hawfinches which had been seen recently and it didn't take us long to find a pair that allowed us to get excellent views of them feeding on the ground. Go to <https://youtu.be/fimLKNIWgY> for a short video of this bird.



Arne RSPB Reserve, 1300

Just a lunch stop really but we also added a number of birds to the list including firecrest and tree creeper.

Middlebere Farm, 1400

The National Trust hide on the shore of Middlebere Lake showed us many hundreds of waders including avocets, redshank, curlew and black-tailed godwits. A single spotted redshank was located but at a great distance. Stood with the waders was a very impressive great white egret, accompanied by a much smaller little egret. Several sika deer (see <https://youtu.be/chv7QsdvtUI>) and a red fox provided a change from looking at just birds all the time. With the cold wind blowing into the hide we were just thinking about leaving when a spoonbill glided in and proceeded to feed close by. Eventually the cold did get too much for us but the birds had the last word when a barn owl stopped us in our tracks as we left.

Looking forward to the next time,

Bob

**Birds:**

Great Northern Diver	Portland Harbour
Black-throated Diver	Portland Harbour
Little Grebe	Radipole
Black-necked Grebe	Portland Harbour
Great Crested Grebe	Portland Harbour
Gannet	Portland Bill
Cormorant	Portland Bill
Shag	Portland Bill
Spoonbill	Middlebere
Little Egret	Middlebere, Ferrybridge
Great White Egret	Middlebere
Grey Heron	Radipole
Mute Swan	Radipole
Dark-bellied Brent Goose	Middlebere, Ferrybridge
Shelduck	Middlebere, Radipole
Teal	Middlebere, Radipole
Mallard	Middlebere, Radipole
Shoveler	Radipole
Gadwall	Radipole
Wigeon	Middlebere
Tufted Duck	Radipole
Red-breasted Merganser	Portland Harbour
Kestrel	Portland Bill
Merlin	Maiden Castle
Buzzard	Ferrybridge
Sparrowhawk	Weymouth
Pheasant	Middlebere
Coot	Radipole
Moorhen	Radipole
Curlew	Middlebere
Oystercatcher	Ferrybridge
Avocet	Middlebere
Redshank	Middlebere
Spotted Redshank	Middlebere
Black-tailed Godwit	Middlebere
Dunlin	Ferrybridge, Middlebere
Purple Sandpiper	Portland Bill
Ringed Plover	Ferrybridge
Lapwing	Maiden Castle
Golden Plover	Maiden Castle
Snipe	Radipole
Turnstone	Ferrybridge
Black-headed Gull	Ferrybridge etc
Mediterranean Gull	Ferrybridge
Herring Gull	Ferrybridge etc
Great Black-backed Gull	Ferrybridge etc
Lesser Black-backed Gull	Ferrybridge
Common Gull	Radipole
Razorbill	Portland
Guillemot	Portland
Wood Pigeon	Portland etc
Collared Dove	Dorchester
Feral Pigeon	Radipole
Kingfisher	Middlebere
Skylark	Maiden Castle

Meadow Pipit	Ferrybridge
Rock Pipit	Portland Bill, Ferrybridge
Pied Wagtail	Ferrybridge
Wren	Portland etc
Duncock	Portland etc
Robin	Portland etc
Stonechat	Portland Bill
Blackbird	Portland etc
Song Thrush	Portland, Middlebere
Goldcrest	Middlebere
Firecrest	Arne
Coal Tit	Lytchett Matravers, Arne
Blue Tit	Rodwell Trail
Great Tit	Lytchett Matravers
Nuthatch	Arne (heard)
Treecreeper	Arne
Magpie	Portland etc
Jackdaw	Portland etc
Rook	Maiden Castle
Carrion Crow	Portland etc
Raven	Portland, Maiden Castle
Starling	Weymouth
House Sparrow	Portland etc
Goldfinch	Portland Bill
Siskin	Arne (heard)
Linnet	Portland Bill, Maiden Castle
Chaffinch	Portland etc
Greenfinch	Lytchett Matravers
Bullfinch	Rodwell Trail
Hawfinch	Lytchett Matravers
Corn Bunting	Maiden Castle