

Waveney Bird Club

Portland, Summer 2015

Portland Intro:

Between July 30th and Aug. 2nd, a group of WBC regulars took a trip to the Portland Bird Observatory in Dorset, going via a few good sites in the New Forest.

The aim was principally damselflies, dragonflies and butterflies, but it turned out to be pretty good for birds, wildflowers and other insects too. Rather than go through an exhaustive trip report, taking each site in turn and producing endless species list, we thought it would be better to just present some pictures, and invite the participants to submit their 'champagne moment;' what they might remember most about the trip. There were certainly quite a lot of contenders: some were because they were 'life-ticks,' some because they were just unexpected, and others just because of the vibe of the trip, the weather, the company....the beer.....

So, I'm going to start off with my two moments, and both because they were lifers. As is our usual habit when staying on the coast, we were out seawatching most mornings. Mostly this required a short work down to the Bill itself, and the 'new' lighthouse, where the rocks below provided good, flat platforms for scopes. However, it was equally good from the patio at the Bird Observatory itself. A bit of evening seawatching with a fridge full of cold beer is almost like too much luxury.

On the last morning – having seen several Manx shearwaters – we were treated to a real closeup of a Balearic; so close, you could see it clearly without optics. This was a rare moment, particularly as it stayed within range of the scope for quite a while. This was on top of getting a Sooty shearwater from the Observatory the evening before.

The other moment comes from Martin Down, right on the border of Dorset and Hampshire; a beautiful stretch of unimproved grassland, with hardly a glimpse of a man-made artefact anywhere.

It was in this large-frame landscape that we found one of the country's smallest butterflies – the Small Blue. This is a stunning little insect, not just because it's so perfectly 'butterfly-shaped' but on a miniature scale, but that the blue isn't really blue at all. As Helen described it, more a 'smokey lilac'.

Both the butterfly and the Balearic were firsts for me, but there were so many other moments in the trip, that it would be possible to fill the page. But – over to the others.....

Paddy Shaw

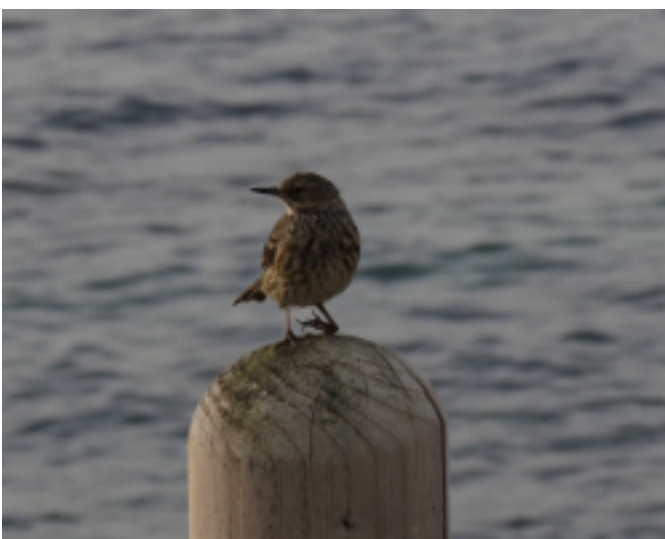
















I've had a memorable four days with the WBC, looking for insects and birds in Dorset and Hampshire. It was full of highlights, and here are just a few of my numerous 'firsts': Marbled White and Small Blue butterflies; Golden-ringed, Emerald and Beautiful Demoiselle odonata; Corn Bunting, Raft Spider, two hoverfly 'firsts' and a Great Green Bushcricket. Not a first, but none the less memorable were the Dark Green Fritillaries flitting through the sun-baked flower-rich grasslands of Morton Down NNR. In addition to the wildlife was the beautiful and varied scenery – New Forest bogs and pools, Portland Bill's dramatic coastline vistas and the amazing Chesil Beach, Morden's extensive heathland and the gently rolling grasslands of Morton Down. Throw into this mix the novelty of staying at the BTO's Portland Bill Old Lighthouse, lunch at a high security prison! (the Jailhouse Rock cafe), the company of a lively group of people full of good humour, and the good fortune to have sunshine all the way. Many thanks to the organisers and experts for such a brilliant four day experience.

Dorothy Cheyne

Well what to say. Highlights for me of our excellent few days in Dorset/Hampshire is firstly our location. The Isle of Portland is such an ace place especially as we were blessed with such brilliant weather. The Observatory too, with its' superb location, an inspired idea to make this our base.

Other highlights has to include bog orchid at Matley Bog. Have long wanted to see this & although not especially grandiose was well worth the wet feet suffered as a result. As I am on a flower theme, the unimproved grassland we encountered throughout, with its' myriad of wild flowers, was a delight to behold. So much I could say, finally though really have to mention birds if only briefly. Has to be the Balearic if only for the fact it was a 'lifer' & hadn't really expected I would have an avian one. Plenty of non-avian though, that's for sure!

Les Cuthbert

Best bit, not really sure, but my endearing memory of the whole area must be the sight of Chesil beach as Jon drove down the steep streets of Portland. It was just breathtaking. On the Saturday after our lunch we went to the beach to look for waders, not many to be seen and eventually some of us decided to walk over the top of the beach.

Paul our guide for the day explained how the beach was formed millions of years ago and the difference between the different shaped pebbles and a few of us scoured the beach picking up, flats, rods and angles. To look out to sea and then the other side watching people hang gliding and enjoying the area made me think how lucky we all were to be here. Wildlife best bit was seeing the Beautiful Demoiselle in the woods while we were trying to find Steve his elusive Golden Ringed Dragonfly. Truly well named handsome male with its iridescent colours of blue and green. (The demoiselle not you Steve –Sorry!) Or Maybe?!

Rebecca Bedwell

It was exciting to see two new butterflies. There was my first ever sighting of Chalkhill Blues at Portland Bill – aren't they accommodating by staying still like they do, unlike the flighty Holly and Commons that I try to identify in my garden – and my first ever sighting of Small Blues at the lovely Martin Down NNR, much more difficult to see but such a super little butterfly.

John Bedwell

Looking back over our fantastic weekend I think my favourite time was the early mornings on the Bill. Up and out in the glorious sunshine by 5.30am the peace and quiet was only broken by bird call. Watching the family of ravens in the quarry as the youngsters squabbled and rooted around the rocks, the male linnet trying to keep two hungry fledglings satisfied and the pipit who sat on the post with the deformed leg looking at me as if to say "I'm alright, I can cope". Then the icing on the cake joining the "lads" for a spot of sea watching and with the help of the lovely John Grant (and I'm reminded with the lovely Keith's scope) being able to watch the Balearic Shearwater as it danced with the gulls around the fishing boat. A truly magical time and all too soon it was over.

Jane Bond

A midsummer lull in bird activity gives birdwatchers a chance to focus on other animal forms and the study of more spectacular insect groups such as the butterflies and dragonflies has become popular. It was therefore delightful to see the uptake for a Waveney Bird Club insect foray to The New Forest and Portland Bill during a long weekend from 30th July to 2nd August. We had negotiated a good deal for accommodation in the old lighthouse at Portland Bird Observatory,

which was an attraction in its own right and really couldn't lose as good weather would give us a good showing of insects and poor weather would encourage us to look for birds? What blistering weekend it turned out to be with wall to wall sunshine and not a hint of rain? Personally, I have always been a keen dragonfly recorder, so was hoping to catch up with the exquisite Golden-ringed Dragonfly, which had somehow eluded me both home and abroad for many years. We stopped at a few well-known New Forest dragonfly sites on our first morning, lunched at Hatchet Ponds and then it was off to Crockford Bridge a traditional site for the Golden-ringed Dragonfly, Southern and Small Red Damselflies and Beautiful Demoiselle. The landscape was amazing, but the site itself didn't look large enough to support an abundance of dragonflies, being basically a bridge carrying a very busy road over a small stream that flowed through willows to an area of heathy bog. We earnestly set about our search and soon located Southern Damselfly and Beautiful Demoiselle along the stream. Some of our party who lingered near the bridge saw a Golden ringed, another was spotted over the heather and then a third further upstream. Alas, I didn't clap eyes on any of them!

The next day we explored the tranquil Dorset heaths and were guided by an old friend and ex-Suffolk birder Daragh Croxson. He took us to some to some amazing insect sites and we were treated to some stunning views of Silver-washed Fritillary and Silver-studded Blue butterflies and several Raft Spiders, which we watched as they hunted over a small boggy pool. Raft Spiders are one of Britain's largest spiders and are a New Forest speciality and is a different species to the East Anglian Great or Fen Raft Spider. In the afternoon, we went to Morden Bog, a vast area of heathland, which makes our Suffolk heaths look like allotment gardens in comparison! A stream ran through an boggy area, a similar habitat to Crockford Bridge, so another chance of Golden-ringed we thought? Jon Warnes and I explored an area upstream when a large blackish dragonfly zoomed past us. "Golden-ringed" Jon shouted. I saw it, but only just and the insect did not return. Well, at least I had now seen one even if they were terrible views! We were carrying two-way radios that allowed us to split up during our search. A call on the radio sent us scurrying up the hill as some the party had located a perched Golden-ringed! We arrived huffing and puffing, but thankfully the insect was still there, a wonderful male with stunning green eyes, striped black and yellow thorax and a

jet black body with alternate broad and narrow yellow rings. This was my champagne moment.

Steve Piotrowski

Paddy has asked us all for our favourite moment from our trip Portland. This is no easy task for me as I have so many fantastic memories of this special place. The ravens, the any beautiful butterflies, golden ringed dragonfly, and many, many damselflies, but for me as an avid birder it has to be the sea watching from behind the lighthouse at the Bill.

That wonderful moment the Balearic shearwater came into sight giving us all fantastic views of it shearing back and forth over the waves.

Keith Watkins

As we round a corner of the cliff path, the sea to our right a glorious blue, a kestrel glares at us from a nearby rock, yellow foot firmly holding down a rat. We stand and look at one another for long moments, time to raise the binoculars and admire its beauty, before it takes off carrying its prey

Helen Gooderham

*Champaign moments on the stone island.....

For generations the island has been quarried for architectural limestone for use in major buildings including St Paul Cathedral. These quarries, now largely abandoned provide a rich habitat for a specialised flora and fauna, particularly on the coast. Walking in the early morning to the The Bill at the southern end of the island to sea watch, the craggy floral rock faces echo to the tranquil and resonant cronk of ravens soaring in the blue skies. These enormous birds dwarfing the accompanying gulls and other corvids.

At the north of the island the quarried stone provides a habitat of a different kind where guests of her majesty reside within the walls of Verne Prison. The inmates provided us with a memorable meal while viewing the panorama of Weymouth bay and the Jurassic Coast.

*Champaign: a little known effervescent wine produced on the south facing terroir of the Suffolk town of Bungay.

Rob Gooderham

Going back to one of the most beautiful areas of Britain after so many years brought back many happy memories for me, and gave me the

chance to meet up again with so many old and lots of new friends. I had a wonderful time.

Eric Patrick