

# THE TRAVELLING NATURALIST

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## Dorset's Coasts & Heathlands 8 – 11 May 2017

### TOUR REPORT

Leader: Bob Ford



Grey plover at Lodmoor, video at [https://youtu.be/uMwrCK\\_4o9A](https://youtu.be/uMwrCK_4o9A)

## Monday 8 May 2017

*Weather: a beautifully calm and warm evening*

### Portland Bill, 1800

Our trip got off to a remarkable start with Dorset's first ever spectacled warbler that had only minutes before been found on the Westcliffs at Portland Bill. Always very active this colourful little whitethroat-like bird gave us some clear but very brief views as it fed amongst the bramble bushes on the Admiralty Slopes. Stonechats and meadow pipits were also present with fulmars and gannets just offshore.

## Tuesday 9 May 2017

*Weather: a very cold morning with a strong north-east wind, much warmer and sunnier in the afternoon*

### Portland Bill, 0600

Our early morning sea-watch was made in bitterly cold conditions but out at sea there were plenty of seabirds with guillemots, razorbills and gannets all present in good numbers. Less expected were the two shelducks that flew past at great distance and the flock of nine whimbrel closer in. The shoreline rocks produced a superbly-coloured turnstone and eight of the nine whimbrel seen earlier.



Whimbrel

### Portland Bill, 0900

After breakfast we returned to the Bill and went straight to the seabird colony on the Westcliffs. Excellent views of guillemot and razorbill were had here but probably the best sighting was the pair of whimbrel feeding in the thrift on the cliff-top.

Walking across the Admiralty Slopes towards the Bird Observatory we found some good plant species including yellow-wort and early purple orchid. A very large oak egg caterpillar lumbered across the path in front of us (video at <https://youtu.be/fsndbUnSJmk>). The first reptile for the day was a slow-worm found under a sheet of plywood and a little yellow moth was identified by the Observatory warden Martin Cade as a yellow belle.



### **High Angle Battery, 1100**

With the morning warming up nicely we hoped that an adder might be tempted out to bask in the sun on one of its rare appearances. In the end we saw two adders, a large male and an absolutely huge female, but in spite of visiting their "home on the range" several times we only managed brief views as they slipped away. Lots more slow-worms were seen however and even though it was mostly cloudy we found four or five very smart wall brown butterflies. The botanical highlight was a tiny early gentian growing in the short turf of the ancient quarry.

### **Ferrybridge, 1330**

The highlight here (apart from the chocolate muffins) was the flock of thirty or so little terns out on the Fleet. A few sandwich terns were seen as well along with a number of waders including a very smart bar-tailed godwit and a rather odd-looking grey plover. Possibly a first for a Travelling Naturalist trip was our attempt at identifying the lichens growing on the rocks where we were eating our lunch, with the bright orange *Caloplaca marina* being our proud result.

### **Radipole RSPB Reserve, 1500**

In what was now a very pleasant calm and warm afternoon we enjoyed walking out to the new "hide" seeing and hearing several Cetti's warblers on the way. When we got there the hide showed us two marsh harriers, a female and a very smart male that persisted in flying past just in front of us. Several egrets were flying around at the far end of the reserve with one showing the yellow bill that marked it out as a cattle egret. Other new birds here included black-tailed godwit and long-tailed tit, with speckled wood added to the butterfly list.



*Marsh harrier*

## Wednesday May 10th

*Weather: still cold early morning but then much warmer and sunnier for the rest of the day*

### Durlston Country Park, 1000

Our morning was spent mostly looking for some of the botanical specialities in beautiful weather on the Purbeck coast. The prime target, early spider orchid, was soon found along with early purple, common spotted and green-winged orchids. Other highlights included the weird adder's-tongue fern and the brilliantly blue chalk milkwort. Apart from plants we found a gorgeous female small copper and several moths including grass rivulet and light feathered rustic. Reaching the coastal path we started to see (and smell!) the breeding seabirds with guillemots, razorbills and fulmars all on the cliffs and sea.



*Grass rivulet*



*Early spider orchid*



*Green-winged orchid*

### Arne RSPB Reserve, 1300

A beautifully warm afternoon here enabling us to enjoy a very pleasant lunch sat outside the shop and cafe. Here we added peregrine to the list and enjoyed watching buzzards circling overhead. Walking out to Shipstall point we looked out across the beautiful scene towards Brownsea, Furzey and Green Islands. One of the least expected sights of the week was seen here when a buck roe deer walked and then swam across Middlebere Channel to the far shore. Sadly the hoped-for Dartford warbler only gave the briefest of views and only to one member of the group. Even so we spent a fabulous afternoon in woods full of majestic trees just coming out into leaf, with herds of sika deer grazing in the meadows. What a superb reserve!

## Thursday May 11th

*Weather: sunny and warm from the outset but occasionally clouding over*

### Ferrybridge, 0900

A pair of grey plovers greeted us as we arrived for our second look at this very productive site. Ringed plovers, a dunlin and a turnstone were also present, all a few metres from the visitor centre. Walking down towards the Fleet we enjoyed close views of little and sandwich terns through the telescopes.

### Winfrith Heath, 1030

A bit disappointing here as the Dartford warblers refused to give us even a glimpse of them in the abundant gorse bushes. We did get excellent views of several yellowhammers though and very much enjoyed the pair of green hairstreaks dashing around just in front of us.

### Lodmoor RSPB Reserve, 1200

This excellent reserve pulled out all the stops this afternoon to give us a superb end to the week. First off was a truly outstanding summer plumaged grey plover that, apart from Monday's spectacled warbler, had to be the bird of the trip. Almost as breathtaking were the common terns that were very busy pairing up and finding nest sites on the islands. As we watched all this a sandwich tern dropped in closely followed by a pair of stunning Mediterranean gulls. In the background a pair of marsh harriers hunted over the

reedbeds and grey heron, shoveler and pochard could be seen along with a flock of twenty or more shelducks. What a way to end the week!



*Drinker moth larva*

## SPECIES LIST

### Birds:

Little grebe	Radipole
Cormorant	Portland, Radipole, Arne
Shag	Portland Bill
Gannet	Portland Bill
Fulmar	Portland Bill, Durlston
Little egret	Lodmoor, Radipole, Arne
Cattle egret	Radipole
Grey heron	Radipole, Lodmoor,
Mute swan	Radipole, Lodmoor
Canada goose	Radipole, Lodmoor
Shelduck	Radipole, Lodmoor, Arne
Teal	Radipole, Lodmoor, Arne
Mallard	Radipole, Lodmoor, Arne
Shoveler	Lodmoor
Tufted duck	Radipole, Lodmoor
Pochard	Lodmoor
Hooded merganser	Radipole
Kestrel	Portland, Arne
Peregrine	Arne
Marsh harrier	Radipole, Lodmoor
Buzzard	Portland, Arne
Pheasant	Portland
Coot	Radipole, Lodmoor
Moorhen	Radipole, Lodmoor
Whimbrel	Arne, Portland
Oystercatcher	Portland, Ferrybridge, Arne
Redshank	Arne (heard)
Bar-tailed godwit	Ferrybridge
Black-tailed godwit	Radipole, Arne
Dunlin	Ferrybridge
Knot	Portland Bill
Ringed plover	Ferrybridge, Lodmoor
Grey plover	Ferrybridge, Lodmoor
Turnstone	Portland Bill, Ferrybridge
Common gull	Portland Bill, Lodmoor
Black-headed gull	Lodmoor, Arne
Mediterranean gull	Lodmoor
Herring gull	various sites
Great Black-backed gull	various sites
Little tern	Ferrybridge
Common tern	Lodmoor
Sandwich tern	Portland Bill, Ferrybridge
Razorbill	Portland Bill, Durlston
Guillemot	Portland Bill, Durlston
Wood pigeon	various sites
Stock dove	Portland
Collared dove	Wyke Regis
Feral pigeon	Radipole
Green woodpecker	Arne, Winfrith (heard)
Great spotted woodpecker	Arne, Winfrith (heard)

Nuthatch	Arne
Skylark	Portland, Ferrybridge
Swift	various sites
Swallow	various sites
House martin	Portland, Radipole
Sand martin	Radipole
Meadow pipit	Portland, Ferrybridge
Rock pipit	Portland Bill
Pied wagtail	various sites
Wren	various sites
Duncock	various sites
Robin	various sites
Stonechat	Portland Bill
Song thrush	Radipole, Arne
Mistle thrush	Arne
Blackbird	various sites
Cetti's warbler	Radipole, Lodmoor
Reed warbler	Radipole, Lodmoor
Sedge warbler	Radipole, Lodmoor
Dartford warbler	Arne
Spectacled warbler	Portland Bill
Whitethroat	Portland, Radipole, Lodmoor
Lesser whitethroat	Radipole, Lodmoor (heard)
Blackcap	Radipole, Arne (heard)
Chiffchaff	various sites
Long-tailed tit	Radipole
Blue tit	various sites
Great tit	various sites
Raven	Portland
Magpie	various sites
Jackdaw	Portland, Arne
Rook	Ferrybridge
Carrion crow	various sites
Starling	various sites
House sparrow	Portland
Goldfinch	various sites
Siskin	Arne
Chaffinch	Portland, Arne
Greenfinch	Portland, Lodmoor
Linnet	various sites
Yellowhammer	Winfrith
Reed bunting	Lodmoor

**Mammals:**

Grey squirrel	Arne
Sika deer	Arne, Winfrith
Roe deer	Arne
Rabbit	Portland

**Reptiles:**

Adder	Portland
Slow-worm	Portland
Common lizard	Portland

**Insects:**

Speckled wood	various sites
Wall	Portland, Durlston
Red admiral	various sites
Peacock	Arne
Green-veined white	various sites
Small white	various sites
Orange-tip	Arne, Lodmoor
Brimstone	Arne
Holly blue	Arne
Green hairstreak	Arne, Winfrith
Small copper	Durlston

Yellow belle	Portland Bill
Brown-tail (larvae)	Portland Bill
Oak eggar (larva)	Portland Bill
Drinker (larva)	Lodmoor
Grass rivulet	Durlston
Light feathered rustic	Durlston

Wood ant	Arne
Hornet	Arne
Soldier beetle <i>Rhagozycha fulva</i>	Durlston
Broad-bodied chaser	Winfrith

**Plants:****Arum Family:**

Lords and ladies	Portland
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**Bedstraw Family:**

Wild madder	Portland
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**Beech Family:**

Holm oak	Durlston
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Pedunculate oak	Arne
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Sweet Chestnut	Arne
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**Birch Family:**

Alder	Radipole
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Aspen	Lodmoor
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Silver birch	Arne
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**Borage Family:**

Comfrey	Radipole
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Common gromwell	Winfrith
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Green alkanet	Arne
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Viper's bugloss	Ferrybridge
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**Buddleia Family:**

Buddleia	Portland
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**Buttercup Family:**

Bulbous buttercup	Portland
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Clematis	Portland
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Marsh marigold	Radipole
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Meadow buttercup	Radipole
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**Cabbage Family:**

Black mustard	Lodmoor
Charlock	Lodmoor
Hairy rockcress	Portland
Hedge mustard	Portland
Hoary cress	Portland
Ladies smock	Radipole
Shepherd's purse	Portland
Wild radish	Ferrybridge

**Carrot Family:**

Alexanders	Portland
Cow parsley	Radipole
Hemlock	Lodmoor
Hemlock water dropwort	Radipole
Rock samphire	Ferrybridge
Wild parsnip	Winfrith

**Daisy Family:**

Bristly ox-tongue	Lodmoor
Daisy	Portland
Dandelion	Portland
Goatsbeard	Portland
Mouse-ear hawkweed	Portland
Musk thistle	Arne
Oxeye daisy	Ferrybridge
Woolly thistle	Durlston
Wormwood	Lodmoor

**Dock Family:**

Broad-leaved dock	Arne
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**Elm Family:**

Wych elm	Durlston
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**Fern Family:**

Adder's tongue	Durlston
Bracken	Durlston
Hart's tongue fern	Portland

**Figwort Family:**

Common figwort	Lodmoor
Broad-leaved eyebright	Portland
Foxglove	Arne
Germander speedwell	Portland
Ivy-leaved toadflax	Portland
Yellow rattle	Portland

**Gentian Family:**

Common centaury	Durlston
Early gentian	Portland
Yellow-wort	Portland

**Geranium Family:**

Common storksbill	Portland
Dovesfoot cranesbill	Portland
Herb Robert	Portland

**Heather Family:**

Ling	Arne
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**Honeysuckle Family:**

Honeysuckle	Portland
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Wayfaring tree	Portland
<b>Iris Family:</b>	
Stinking iris	Arne
Yellow flag iris	Radipole
<b>Ivy Family:</b>	
Ivy	Portland
<b>Lily Family:</b>	
English bluebell	Arne
Spanish bluebell	Portland
Three-cornered leek	Lodmoor
<b>Mallow Family:</b>	
Tree mallow	Portland
<b>Maple Family:</b>	
Norway maple	Arne
Sycamore	Portland
<b>Milkwort Family:</b>	
Chalk milkwort	Durlston
Common milkwort	Portland
<b>Mint Family:</b>	
Ground ivy	Durlston
Marjoram	Durlston
Self-heal	Durlston
Wood sage	Portland
<b>Nettle Family:</b>	
Stinging nettle	Portland
<b>Olive Family:</b>	
Ash	Portland
Wild privet	Portland
<b>Orache Family:</b>	
Sea beet	Ferrybridge
Sea purslane	Ferrybridge
Shrubby seablite	Ferrybridge
<b>Orchid Family:</b>	
Common spotted orchid	Durlston
Early purple orchid	Portland
Early spider orchid	Durlston
Green-winged orchid	Durlston
<b>Pea Family:</b>	
Birdsfoot trefoil	Portland
Bush vetch	Portland
Common vetch	Portland
European gorse	Arne
Horseshoe vetch	Portland
Kidney vetch	Ferrybridge
Lesser trefoil	Durlston
Spotted medick	Lodmoor
Yellow vetchling	Portland
<b>Pine Family:</b>	
Corsican pine	Arne
Scots pine	Arne
<b>Pink Family:</b>	
Greater stitchwort	Arne
Red campion	Winfrith

<b>Plantain Family:</b>	
Hoary plantain	Portland
Ribwort plantain	Portland
<b>Poppy Family:</b>	
Field poppy	Portland
<b>Potato Family:</b>	
Woody nightshade	Portland
<b>Primrose Family:</b>	
Cowslip	Durlston
Scarlet pimpernel	Portland
<b>Rose Family:</b>	
Apple	Portland
Blackthorn	Portland
Bramble	Portland
Burnet rose	Portland
Entire-leaved cotoneaster	Portland
Hawthorn	Portland
Herb bennet	Durlston
Salad burnet	Durlston
Wild pear	Lodmoor
<b>Sea-Lavender Family:</b>	
Thrift	Portland
<b>Sedge Family:</b>	
Pendulous sedge	Arne
<b>Spurge Family:</b>	
Wood spurge	Portland
<b>Teasel Family:</b>	
Teasel	Lodmoor
<b>Valerian Family:</b>	
Red valerian	Portland
<b>Yam Family:</b>	
Black bryony	Portland
<b>Fungi:</b>	
<i>Caloplaca marina</i> (a lichen)	Ferrybridge
Artist's fungus	Arne