

Wildlife on Portland



This publication has been produced by the Heights Hotel Portland, in partnership with Swarovski Optik, assisting with conservation on Portland.



Welcome to issue number 8 of 'Wildlife on Portland'.

Portland is an Explorer's paradise. Joined to the mainland by a causeway, warmed by the gulf stream and boasting its own micro climate, Portland is truly unique in that it is home to an incredible abundance of wildlife. Many organisations are involved in working with landowners managing reserves or monitoring the species which make Portland so special.



Portland's Hidden Gems



Amongst Portland's landscape of disturbed rock and short limestone grassland, lives a butterfly which is genetically distinct from other populations on the mainland. The Silver-studded Blue butterfly, which gets its name from the light blue reflective scales found on the underside of most adults, has undergone a major decline through most of its restricted UK range.

The majority of Silver-studded Blue on the main land are found on heathland sites, however the Silver-studded Blue found on Portland require conditions associated with limestone grassland. There are several colonies of it which can be found across Portland.

The Silver-studded Blue has a fascinating relationship with a specific species of black ant which evolved thousands of years ago. The female Silver-studded Blue is able to detect the scent of the specific black ant species as she flutters across areas of disturbed rock and short turf. She will selectively lay eggs near to the nest of these ants, whilst also searching to ensure that caterpillar food plants, Horseshoe Vetch and Common Birds-foot-trefoil are nearby.

The eggs hatch end of March, early April and are quickly found by the black ants, as the larvae mimic the

pheromones used by the young of the black ants to identify their colonies. The ants carry the larvae into the nest and tend to them with tender bits of plant. The caterpillar remains in the ant nest through both its entire caterpillar and chrysalis stage.



Around mid-June, early July the adult butterfly emerges from its cocoon and crawls out of the ant nest. Still tended by ants, its wet wings are cleaned dry of droplets which are appetising to the ants. Adult Silver-studded Blue can be seen on the wing through to the end of August. Work

has been undertaken at several sites across Portland to secure a future for this rare butterfly. Scraping back patches of topsoil



down to substrates encourages the growth of plants such as Common Birds-foot-Trefoil. These plants are the food plants of the Silver-studded Blue. The exposed substrates within the scrapes create perfect

conditions for Silver-studded Blue to lay its eggs and also for the particular species of black ant which forms an essential part of the butterflies' lifecycle.

Best Spots to see Portland Silver-studded Blue butterfly on the wing are: King Barrow Quarry, Tout Quarry Sculpture Park and Nicodemus Knob. Report supplied by: Leo Henley Lock – Portland Living Landscapes Project Officer. For more information contact Dorset Wildlife Trust. www.dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk





Bob Ford's wildlife report - A year of wildlife!



If you're into wildlife, there is no better place than Portland to indulge your passion where both flora and fauna thrive. Local tour guide and wildlife specialist Bob Ford, tells us about a great year in wildlife.

"The year got off to a good start with three black redstarts just north of Portland Harbour at Newton's Cove on January 3rd. These winter migrants feature quite often on the bird break weekends, but on this occasion we were treated to particularly good views on a lovely sunny afternoon. We always run two bird breaks in January (they are so popular!) so three weeks later we were back out again, this time watching four Purple Sandpipers on the rocks right at the end of Portland Bill. Purple Sandpipers are Arctic-breeding waders that never travel further south than this.

One of the most unexpected birds seen in 2015 was the Hooded Crow (pictured right) that overwintered in the centre of the island.

Personally this was the first I had seen on Portland for over 20 years so don't expect to see one every time you visit! Spring is undoubtedly one of the most exciting times of the year, especially when we see the first Wheatear at Portland Bill. March is also a good month to see Fulmars at their breeding sites on the island's cliffs.



April at Portland Bill is the time to witness seabird migration and on the 12th, we witnessed the amazing spectacle of flocks of Manx Shearwaters rushing past unusually close. May 17th was a tern festival for us with Common, Sandwich and, best of all, no less than twenty Little Terns at Ferrybridge.

Our summer weekends are when we switch to looking at butterflies and flowers but the warm weather this year tempted us out to Winfrith Heath in the evening where we found a record number of Nightjars. The following day we drove north to Martin Down, one of the last places in the area where you can still find Turtle Doves. We saw two including a singing male!



Our July weekend coincided with lots of hot weather so naturally we concentrated on the butterflies which were out in excellent numbers this year. However we were still birdwatching and our visit to Portland Bird Observatory (pictured right) coincided with a Whitethroat being caught for ringing. Most weekends we

stop off here for the rare treat of seeing migrant birds at really close quarters.

We take a break in August (apart from our annual pilgrimage to Rutland Bird Fair of course) but we are soon back out in the field in my favourite month of the year – September. Portland Bill is the place to be during the Autumn migration season and one of the highlights this year was the number of Yellow Wagtails we found feeding in the horse fields near Southwell.

In October the Kingfishers return to Radipole Lake RSPB Reserve. This year we had a fantastic view of one from the North Hide, not long before the Country File team from the BBC were there filming it!



October is also the time when the really rare birds turn up and this year was no exception with the double whammy of both Yellow-Browed Warbler and Great White Egret at Arne RSPB Reserve on the 11th. One of the most popular of our regularly sighted birds is the Little Owl (pictured left). Although they are found all over the island, including Kingbarrow Quarry right

next to the hotel, it is the Portland Bill bird that we see most often. On November 8th we spent some time watching this lovely little character sat in his quarry home.

The final weekend of the year produced what must have been the best views any of us have ever had of a Great Northern Diver. Usually spotted way out to sea through our telescopes this particular bird was happy to stay just off the rocks at Portland Castle. The bird list total for the December weekend was an astonishing one, with hundred species - what a way to end the year!"





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Portland Walks - Want to learn more? Bob Ford operates various walks and talks from the Heights Hotel on Portland. Visit www.dorsetwalks.com or call 01305 750118 or 07980 967473



The Chesil Beach Centre - Your Link to local Nature



Dorset Wildlife Trust's Fine Foundation Chesil Beach Centre, is the perfect place to start your discovery of the coast and local wildlife on Portland. Run by welcoming and knowledgeable staff

and volunteers this family-friendly visitor centre is perfect for discovering all about Chesil Beach and the Fleet Lagoon with an underwater camera, bird watching station, marine touch table and interactive displays. Chesil beach is a natural wonder – a bank of 180 billion pebbles stretching for 18 miles along Dorset's coast, linking Portland to the mainland. Trapped behind the beach is the Fleet – one of the largest saline lagoons in the country and a haven for bird and marine life.

Chesil sits at the heart of the Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site and its incredible wildlife and geomorphology is protected at national, European and international levels. Whatever the season Chesil and Portland have wonderful wildlife just waiting to be discovered.



Spring is a fantastic time to explore the area as species arrive and get ready for a busy nesting and breeding season. At this time of year swathes of Chesil Beach burst into flower, in some places becoming a sea of pink

thrift before being succeeded by a colourful array of wildflowers including Restharrow, birds foot trefoil, sea campion, kidney vetch and yellow horned poppy.



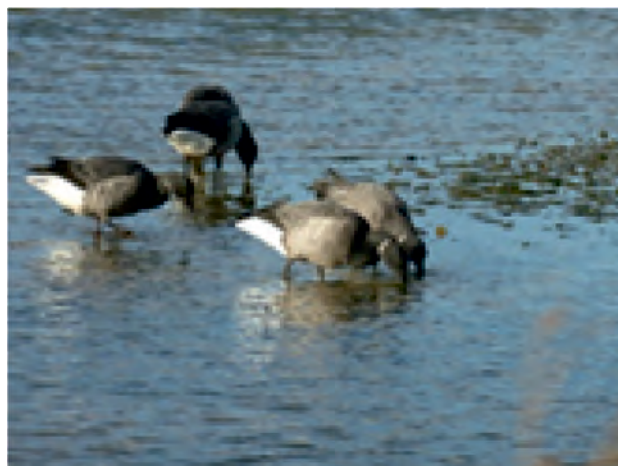
During the spring and summer months another great way to discover the Fleet is to take a trip on Dorset Wildlife Trust's specially designed flat bottom boat the Fleet Explorer. The boat runs regular trips along the Fleet and can offer unique views of the lagoon and its charismatic species, including hares and one of the UK's rarest seabirds, the Little Terns. These tiny birds travel all the way from Africa every year to breed on Chesil beach. This is also a great time to see species such as kestrels, skylarks and common blue butterflies.



As the days shorten and our summer visitors depart we begin to see the return of our autumn and winter residents, including the Brent Goose. These geese travel over 2500 miles from Siberia to feed in

the Fleet Lagoon, with over 2000 individuals arriving every year! Red-breasted mergansers, great northern divers and black-throated divers can be spotted at this time of year at Ferrybridge and in Portland Harbour. Razorbills and guillemots can also be spotted sheltering from storms close into shore.

Whilst winter on the coast can be a stormy and blustery affair, this change in the weather can bring unexpected discoveries to our coastline. Strong winds and waves can deposit species like the Columbus crab, from as far away as the Caribbean. It can also uncover species often hidden from view in the deeper water such as pink sea fans and Deadman's Fingers, which are types of coral. Other species to look out for on the strandline are goose-necked barnacles, cuttlefish bones, whelk egg cases and mermaids' purses; the egg cases of sharks, skates and rays.



The Chesil Beach Centre, on Portland beach road, (DT4 9XE) is open 7 days a week all year, 10am – 5pm (Easter onwards) and 10am – 4pm (November to Easter). The Centre runs events for children, families and nature enthusiasts. Please see our website for further details: dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk/chesil

The Fine Foundation Chesil Beach Centre is owned by Weymouth & Portland Borough Council and leased to Dorset Wildlife Trust who run the Centre on behalf of a partnership including the Chesil Bank and Fleet Nature Reserve and the Jurassic Coast Team, with the continued help of local volunteers. The building of the new centre and boardwalk was made possible by funding from a wide range of organisations, including the Heritage Lottery Fund, The Crown Estate and Court Leet of the Island and Royal Manor of Portland, the Fine Family Foundation, Weymouth & Portland Borough Council, Dorset County Council, the Garfield Weston Foundation, Dorset Wildlife Trust, Chalk and Cheese, the Jurassic Coast Trust & Natural England.



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