



ORIOLE BIRDING



TOUR REPORT HAMPSHIRE & DORSET 31ST JULY – 4TH AUGUST 2016

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SUNDAY 31ST JULY – *Light NW winds, 22C*

After a 1700 arrival at our Lyndhurst guest house, we wandered up into the town for a hearty meal and mull over the plan for our few days hunting bugs and birds around the New Forest heaths and woodlands and the chalk downland of the adjacent county of Dorset. With a nice evening on the cards, we decided to strike while the iron was hot and try for **European Nightjar** at a heathland site about fifteen minutes drive away, where we had enjoyed very good views of the birds on our recent July tour to the region. We weren't lucky tonight though, and didn't even hear any birds calling despite the lovely evening. We did, however, have a female **Nightjar** fly low across the road in the headlights just a short way up the road as we headed back to base, for the lucky ones in the front of the bus!

MONDAY 1ST AUGUST – *Overcast turning to moderate rain later*

Not a great day for bugging today with cool, cloudy and later wet weather hampering our chances severely. However we managed a nice selection of wildlife, not least some excellent birds, and actually did very well out of an unpromising day. We started at Acres Down, and took a walk down through the woodland which was bustling with roving mixed flocks of fledgling birds, which was great to see. Willow Warblers were particularly prominent with several lemon-washed juveniles flitting amongst the Silver Birches, and a single female Blackcap, Common Chiffchaff and several **Spotted Flycatchers** were also noted. A very obliging **Marsh Tit** was seen at close range and best of all, a male **Firecrest** feeding two fledged youngsters. He was busily gathering food among Oak leaves, with the two attendant juveniles persistently begging for his services – their bright plumage, wing bars and whitish supercilium reminding several of us of an autumn Yellow-browed Warbler! Single Bullfinch, European Nuthatch, Green Woodpecker, Goldcrest and a couple of flyover **Common Crossbills** rounded off a very productive walk.

After coffee, we headed out onto the heath to try for odonata at one of our favourite spots, Upper Crockford Stream. A pair of **Small Red Damselfly** down at the stream were photogenic, but in truth were the insect highlight as it quite soon began to drizzle with rain – a single Common Darter and two **Beautiful Demoiselles** being the other odonata noted. While searching for these, we chanced on a juvenile **Dartford Warbler** foraging among the gorse and with patience, had some excellent views of it, perched right out on the top of the bushes. Gatekeeper and Meadow Brown were the only two species of butterfly brave enough to be out and about, and we ourselves had to admit defeat and head back to the van for lunch, which we took at nearby Hatchet Pond.

The forecast for the afternoon was for the rain to get steadily worse and so we had already decided we would head around to Titchfield Haven to spend the afternoon making use of the shelter of the hides. From Meon Shore Hide, we enjoyed point blank views of bickering **Black-tailed Godwits** of the Icelandic race, along with several Pied Avocets, Common Redshank, two Common Sandpipers, four Dunlin and a single **Green Sandpiper** which dropped in right in front of the hide. A couple of European Reed Warblers were foraging in the rushes and an assortment of wildfowl included Common Teal, Gadwall and Northern Shoveler. Common Terns were also very much in evidence, hassling the local gulls and even the ducks despite their young long having since fledged! Further round the reserve, we had some nice views of Sedge Warblers feeding along the edge of the wet reeds, and the Green Sandpiper from the other lagoon had now joined a second bird and both were feeding nicely in the open here. Our final birds of the afternoon were three Ruddy Turnstones along the

shoreline as we headed back to the car park for a well earned coffee before heading back to base.



Green Sandpiper, 1st August Titchfield Haven

TUESDAY 2ND AUGUST – *Mainly overcast with rain, 19C*

A challenging day to say the least! We set off in pretty heavy rain, and headed west towards Ringwood and on to the wildlife trust reserve at Blashford Lakes. The rain had stopped by the time we arrived, and around the car park several birds were flitting around including Bullfinch, Blackcap and Green Woodpecker. From the hide, we managed to add a few new species of waterbirds to the list, notably Great Crested & Little Grebes, Common Pochard and Egyptian Goose, plus Sand Martin, Common Sandpiper, Common Tern and Tufted Duck. It was predictably rather quiet though, and we had now essentially used up all our wet weather options, and so had to head back into the forest and at least try and see some of our other targets. This took us first to Acres Down, where we walked up to the raptor watchpoint to try our luck. Heavy grey cloud and a cool south-westerly wind, meant there would be little chance of any of the forest raptors being out and about. We noted one Common Buzzard, though two of the group saw **Common Redstart** and there were a few Common Stonechats about. Back by the parking area, we could hear a squeaking call reminiscent of a Wryneck – a **Eurasian Hobby**, and so we headed along the track a short way to the clearing to see if we might catch a glimpse of it. Sure enough, we found an adult perched in the treetops at the far side, and it took to the air to begin snatching morsels on the wing. A juvenile then appeared – the source of the call – and was fed in mid-air by the doting parent before both returned to nearby trees. Here we had some excellent scope views of them – a great sight indeed.

After lunch, we headed down to Matley Bog where we hoped we might get a break in the weather and the chance to look for odonata as well as birds. A couple of Gatekeeper were the

forerunner for a glimmer of brighter weather, and as the temperature picked up instantly by a couple of degrees, so did the insect activity. A female **Silver-studded Blue** was seen, quickly followed by a **Grayling** doing its 'master of disguise' on the dark heath soil. We actually went on to see ten or more of these exquisite butterflies, each keen to hit the deck as soon as possible to blend perfectly with its surroundings and turn its closed wings sail-like towards the available sun. Once onto the heath, we began to explore the water-filled craters left by second world war bomb training, now adopted by several species of dragonfly. With the warmth continuing, we soon found **Emerald Damselfly** and the species was fairly common here – though we only saw males! Better still was a smashing **Black Darter**, which posed nicely for us and allowed all the salient features to be seen, not to mention the small size. A Common Darter nearby was an excellent comparison, and looked decidedly large adjacent to its rarer cousin. We went on to see seven or more **Black Darters**, including one which we found entrapped in a spiders web and released – maybe not politically correct but we felt obliged to assist the poor thing as we'd travelled there especially to see it! The darter was most grateful, and posed on Adrians hand for warmth and pictures before flying off. A Green Woodpecker, clutch of Mistle Thrush and a brief Tree Pipit were the main birds noted, while a tit flock by the car park hosted at least half a dozen Willow Warblers.



Black Darter, Matley 2nd August

Next up was a return visit to Upper Crockford Stream, which we hoped would shine in the now warm if overcast conditions. However, in the fifteen minutes it took us to drive there, heavy cloud and fresh winds had returned, with spots of rain in the air again. Therefore we were not successful in finding our target of Southern Damselfly, and had to make do with another Bullfinch and a **Spotted Flycatcher** feeding a speckled fledgling. Finally, we ended the day with a quick amble around Shatterford car park on Beaulieu Heath, but again it was very cool and overcast and so we failed to find anything new. Our base was only a few minutes from here though, and we wrapped up a very difficult day there around 1745.

WEDNESDAY 3RD AUGUST – *Sunny spells in fresh SW winds, 20C*

Our long day out west today saw us make the journey of just over an hour to Weymouth, where we arrived in very fresh winds coming off the sea, but an already bright start with some sunshine. We started with a quick look at The Fleet, to see what birds were around on the falling tide. No fewer than 160 **Mediterranean Gulls** were resting here, of various age groups, including some super fresh juvenile birds. It was quite a sight to see so many together in perfect light too! Three Sandwich Terns dropped in to join them, and waders were represented by just two Dunlin, and five Common Ringed Plovers. A distinctive call overhead alerted us to the arrival of a flock of **Little Terns** from the harbour, and we saw 23 in total, again including some nice juveniles. A good start to the day, but with the sunny spells lengthening it was definitely time to go in search of our main target – the Lulworth Skipper!



Mediterranean Gull and Small Blue, Portland 3rd August

Broadcroft Quarry was our main ‘bugging’ spot for the morning, a super spot with plenty of flora and a great deal of butterflies to boot. Common species included many Gatekeeper, Meadow Brown, a couple of Ringlet, Peacock, Red Admiral, Common Blue and our first Wall Brown of the trip, while it wasn’t long before the first excitable shout went up as Adrian found a **Lulworth Skipper**! We all dashed to his position, by which time it had flitted off on the wind and couldn’t be relocated, but it had been replaced instead by a **Small Blue**! We all enjoyed photographing this lovely little bug, and in fact we went on to see several more around the wider environs of the site. **Marbled White** and **Brown Argus** were the next species to be added, and three or four lovely **Chalkhill Blues** were confiding out on the more open grassland areas. Try as we might though, we couldn’t find another Lulworth, and had to make do with a ‘false alarm’ Small Skipper instead. It had been a very enjoyable hour or so though, and we decided to move down to the Bill in order to try again for our main quarry species.



Gatekeeper & Chalkhill Blue, Portland 3rd August

After lunch we set off towards the Pulpit Inn and checked the windswept grasslands carefully for **Lulworth Skipper**, and soon found one near to the pub along the sheltered edge of the bushes – sadly though, despite finding another one shortly after, only three of the group ever managed to connect before they took to the windswept air and were totally lost to view. Common Blue and Small Skipper were other species noted here, before time ran out on us and we had to head northwards to our final destination of the day.

Alner's Gorse reserve, managed by Butterfly Conservation, is a superb site and it did not disappoint us this afternoon. A cracking **Southern Hawker** was 'hanging up to dry' on the Oaks along the path down into the reserve, where two **Speckled Wood** were also noted. Once among the clumps of Bramble and Blackthorn, we soon found several **Purple Hairstreaks**, and then our first **Silver-washed Fritillary** floated into view and began nectaring alongside a Peacock right under our noses. As impressive as this was, it did not prepare us for the quite stunning female we then saw, of the form '*valezina*'. The '**Greenish**' **Silver-washed Fritillary** as it is known, was actually washed with violet and electric blue and appeared wholly dark when on the wing – an amazingly beautiful specimen. We then met a chap who had seen our main target species – the **Brown Hairstreak** – and he kindly directed us to the bush where he had seen it. Amazingly it was still there, crawling around over the blossoms, and we spent a fantastic quarter hour watching it at close range. Another **Purple Hairstreak**, a female **Brimstone** laying eggs, **Small Skipper** and **Green-veined White** were also seen before we returned to the car park for afternoon tea and cake, a **Holly Blue** being our final species of the day. The long trip back to base saw us home at 1830, after a long and enjoyable day in the field.

THURSDAY 4TH AUGUST - *Sunny spells in fresh SW winds, 20C*

We left the guest house this morning in convoy in order to head north to our final bugging destination of the trip, Stockbridge Down. We were greeted with cloudy conditions but it soon developed into some sunny spells as we began to work the rank grassland at the base of the chalk downland slope. There were many butterflies here, with scores of Meadow Brown and Gatekeeper, Common Blue and **Chalkhill Blue** being seen. One or two very worn Small Skippers were still surviving, and we found several fresher **Essex Skippers** with their distinct black-tipped antennae. A beautiful fresh **Brown Argus** was also noted, and a Small Copper, before we began to make our way up onto the shorter grass slopes where we hoped to find the localised **Silver-spotted Skipper**. We spread out across the down to search for it, and it was around half an hour before Adrian blew his whistle to assemble everyone as he had found a newly emerged specimen, 'fresh off the press' and extremely obliging. In fact it didn't move for half an hour, occasionally opening its wings just half way towards the sun in typical skipper fashion, and slowing everyone to get extreme close up views using the Papillio binoculars. A super little insect to end our trip, and we managed to add a Small Tortoiseshell to the list to, edging us ever closer to the thirty species mark. After a coffee we moved to the eastern car park, and spent some time watching the Buddleia there which was in the sun. Red Admiral, Brimstone, Large White, Small White, Peacock and a single Painted Lady were seen, the latter another new species for the trip. A **Silver-washed Fritillary** also put in an appearance. Along the footpath towards the line of Elms, we saw both Southern and **Migrant Hawkers**, but despite our best efforts we did not find a White-letter Hairstreak under the now heavy cloud. We had wrestled with the weather all week and mainly lost, but still come away with a very respectable total and some very nice key targets. All in all, a very enjoyable few days.



Brown Argus & Silver-spotted Skipper, 4th August Stockbridge Down

SYSTEMATIC LIST

BIRDS

1. Great Crested Grebe
2. Little Grebe
3. Grey Heron
4. Little Egret
5. Mute Swan
6. Canada Goose
7. Greylag Goose
8. Egyptian Goose
9. Mallard
10. Gadwall
11. Northern Shoveler
12. Common Teal
13. Tufted Duck
14. Common Pochard
15. Common Buzzard
16. Eurasian Sparrowhawk
17. Common Kestrel
18. Eurasian Hobby
19. Peregrine
20. European Oystercatcher
21. Northern Lapwing
22. Pied Avocet
23. Dunlin
24. Common Ringed Plover
25. Common Sandpiper
26. Green Sandpiper
27. Black-tailed Godwit
28. Common Redshank
29. Ruddy Turnstone
30. Black-headed Gull
31. Common Gull
32. Mediterranean Gull
33. Herring Gull
34. Lesser Black-backed Gull
35. Great Black-backed Gull
36. Common Tern
37. Little Tern
38. Sandwich Tern
39. Woodpigeon
40. Stock Dove
41. Collared Dove
42. European Nightjar
43. Common Swift
44. Great-spotted Woodpecker
45. Green Woodpecker
46. Skylark
47. Meadow Pipit
48. Tree Pipit
49. Pied Wagtail
50. Barn Swallow
51. House Martin
52. Sand Martin
53. Winter Wren
54. European Robin
55. Stonechat

56. Common Redstart
57. Common Blackbird
58. Song Thrush
59. Mistle Thrush
60. Dartford Warbler
61. Sedge Warbler
62. European Reed Warbler
63. Blackcap
64. Willow Warbler
65. Common Chiffchaff
66. Common Whitethroat
67. Firecrest
68. Goldcrest
69. Spotted Flycatcher
70. Coal Tit
71. Blue Tit
72. Great Tit
73. Marsh Tit
74. Long-tailed Tit
75. European Nuthatch
76. Common Treecreeper [H]
77. Eurasian Jay
78. Black-billed Magpie
79. Rook
80. Carrion Crow
81. Western Jackdaw
82. Common Raven
83. Common Starling
84. House Sparrow
85. Chaffinch
86. Greenfinch
87. Goldfinch
88. Linnet
89. Eurasian Siskin [H]
90. Bullfinch
91. Common Crossbill
92. Yellowhammer

ODONATA

1. Small Red Damselfly
2. Emerald Damselfly
3. Beautiful Demoiselle
4. Southern Hawker
5. Migrant Hawker
6. Brown Hawker
7. Keeled Skimmer
8. Common Darter
9. Black Darter

BUTTERFLIES

1. Small Skipper
2. Essex Skipper
3. Silver-spotted Skipper
4. Lulworth Skipper
5. Brimstone
6. Large White
7. Small White
8. Green-veined White
9. Marbled White

10. Silver-washed Fritillary
11. Grayling
12. Red Admiral
13. Small Tortoiseshell
14. Silver-studded Blue
15. Holly Blue
16. Chalkhill Blue
17. Small Blue
18. Common Blue
19. Brown Argus
20. Small Copper
21. Speckled Wood
22. Ringlet
23. Meadow Brown
24. Wall Brown
25. Gatekeeper
26. Painted Lady
27. Peacock
28. Purple Hairstreak
29. Brown Hairstreak