



ORIOLE BIRDING



TOUR REPORT NEW FOREST 9TH – 13TH JULY 2018

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MONDAY 9TH JULY – Warm day in light winds, 25C

Our arrival to Lyndhurst in the heart of the New Forest around 1700 was slightly delayed due to the dreaded M25, but once we were assembled in the guest house garden with a cup of tea and slice of cake, and Siskins singing around us, it was soon forgotten! We didn't have time for much birding in the agenda today, but after an excellent dinner in nearby Emery Down, we opted to take to the heath in search of **European Nightjar**, often quite easy to find not far from our accommodation. It was a stunning warm, still evening as we arrived at a faithful Nightjar territory, and almost right away we saw a female floating low over the gorse in the half light. She was closely followed by the male, with white-spotted tail fanned and tilted like a ships rudder to impress his mate. We watched the pair for several minutes, though interestingly heard virtually no calling at all. Eventually they gave a few croaks and a bit of wing-clapping, before the female headed off purposefully to feed elsewhere. The male returned, churring briefly as darkness fell on our first evening in the New Forest – a great way to kick off the trip!

TUESDAY 10TH JULY - Warm sunny day with little cloud, moderate winds, 25C

The remarkable summer weather continues into its fourth week as we basked in beautiful sunshine all day, and with no sign of a change on the immediate horizon, we had the rare luxury on one of our bug trips of not having to panic too much about fitting everything in around the weather! We started at Upper Crockford Stream, one of our favourite all round wildlife watching sites in the New Forest, and we were right into the good stuff from the off with a **Southern Damselfly** among the heather. We had the chance to study this species closely throughout our walk along the stream here, with several, mainly males, observed among the Bog Myrtle and heather. The metallic dancing forms of many **Beautiful Demoiselles** delighted us too, and at every turn we were seeing **Keeled Skimmers** and the ever impressive **Golden-ringed Dragonfly**. Further up the stream, in the more open area, we had great views of a Broad-bodied Chaser and our first Emperor, while Common Darters were newly emerged and drying their silvery wings in the sunshine. It really was hard to know where to look next as we moved from one great view to another! Butterflies were fairly thin on the ground here, but we saw plenty of Gatekeeper and Large Skipper, and once we crossed the stream and headed up onto the more open heath, we soon added **Silver-studded Blue** and **Dark Green Fritillary**. The latter were typically fast moving males, out hunting for females hidden among the heather, and as such they did not settle for a moment. With so much going on at ground level, it was hard to remember to keep looking up, though frequent checking of the sky above revealed a superb female Marsh Harrier, Common Buzzard, Kestrel and a pair of **Ravens**. One of the Ravens hung around, circling above the heath where it was mobbed relentlessly by the comparatively tiny Kestrel. Walking a bit further on, we soon found a family of Stonechats and knew this would be a good chance to seek out a Dartford Warbler. After following the chats along for a while, a male **Dartford Warbler** eventually popped up right on top of the gorse ahead of us, swinging its tail from side to side as it looked around before diving back into cover. Later we found a juvenile bird, preening in the sun and allowing a longer view, and we also heard a few snatches of song from the male. Heading back across the heath, we had superb close up views of an early **Grayling** butterfly, displaying its brilliantly cryptic underwing pattern as it sat motionless on a bare patch of earth among the heather. We actually ended up seeing several, including one which was very newly emerged and appeared to be still hardening its wings for a maiden flight. Over the distant forest, a **Goshawk** appeared and circled around a few times for us before stooping down into the trees out of sight, not a bad way to round off a pretty awesome morning.

Coffee stop was nearby Hatchet Pond, another favourite site for odonata. Just walking along the shore of the pond, we saw many Common Blue Damselflies and enjoyed our first views of Black-tailed Skimmers to compare with the Keeled seen earlier on in the day. It was the 'red-eyed' damselflies that provided the most interest here though – we had the rather unique opportunity, being in the narrow flight period overlap zone, to watch both Red-eyed and **Small Red-eyed Damselflies** side by side, comparing their structure, eye colour and pattern of blue on the abdomen. A really instructive lesson! A super male Broad-bodied Chaser was also seen, while the Bramble and gorse at the edge of the pond

hosted several **Small Red Damselfly**, which posed beautifully for photographs. Large Red Damselfly was seen too, giving another good comparison opportunity. Round the far side of the pond, we tried unsuccessfully for Downy Emerald, which appeared to be over, and had to make do instead with lots of Four-spotted Chasers, Emperor and another good view of **Small Red-eyed Damselfly**. It had been a great day for odonata, with 17 species seen by lunchtime! We now opted for a bit of a chill out in the hottest part of the day, visiting Bealieu Road Station Shatterford car park where we could stand under the shade of the pines and spend a bit of time scanning for forest raptors. Two speckled juvenile **Redstarts** were a nice bonus right by the car park, along with a family party of Mistle Thrush. The heat haze meant we didn't see too much on the raptor front other than Common Buzzards and Kestrel, but a pair of **Ravens** did drift through and we had another, more prolonged view of a distant **Goshawk** which everyone had a chance to see through the scope.



Grayling – this master of disguise is on the wing a little early this year

Denny Wood would provide some shade and a chance to look for woodland butterflies, and we were not disappointed. We had to make an impromptu stop just beyond the campsite, as a clump of flowering Bramble was alive with **Silver-washed Fritillaries**! We counted at least ten, but they were coming and going all the time and it could easily have been more. On the same clump were a similar number of Brimstone, Gatekeeper, Small Skipper, Meadow Brown and Large White – a real butterfly fest! Parking for a short walk through the wood, we had nice views of **Spotted Flycatcher** and added both **Marsh Tit** and **Treecreeper**, plus several more sightings of **Silver-washed Fritillary**. A **Southern Hawker** was a highlight, patrolling a small patch of shady forest floor and frequently buzzing right around our feet. Upon catching a larger prey morsel, it would dart up into the oaks and hang up in the sunshine to munch its prize – a truly impressive beast! Finally a **Purple Hairstreak** was seen, typically high up in the canopy of an oak, but it didn't perform well and most people just saw a little silver triangle dancing off through the branches! The end of the day was spent at Matley Bog, but since we had already seen all the possible odonata, we opted not to venture too far out onto the heath here. Instead we stuck to the woodland fringe, noting a few Willow Warblers, and then

checked an area where we frequently find **Woodlark** at this time of year. Right on cue, two well fledged Woodlark exploded from the bracken, dropping back into a small open patch where we might have a chance to see them. One was in the open, motionless, but unfortunately no one could quite get onto it before they both flew again – at least giving people a chance to note their compact and short tailed silhouette in flight. It had been a really nice mixed day with some great highlights – what a difference the weather makes to a trip like this!



Brimstone – a common butterfly in the forest this year

WEDNESDAY 11TH JULY – *Sunny spells and very warm in light winds, 27C*

Today we would mainly concentrate on bugs as we opted to use the great weather to hit our remaining three key sites for New Forest specialities, starting with the very localised **White-legged Damselfly** at Ober Water near Rhinefield Ornamental Drive. This was only a ten minute drive from our accommodation, and we were soon wandering down across the heath noting our first **Keeled Skimmers** of the day, and picking up a variety of birds along the woodland fringe. This included a pair of **Hawfinch**, which alerted us to their presence with the sharp flight call, but dived quickly into the trees out of sight. Reaching Ober Water, there seemed to be a strange dearth of damselfly activity actually on the stream itself, and we thought perhaps they were still among the surrounding vegetation waiting for the day to fully heat up. Exploring the banks of bracken and sedge adjacent to

the stream, we eventually found a single male **White-legged Damselfly** – a great view of a really photogenic individual which sat out for us long enough for everyone to get a picture! This was a great result, as this species can be tough to find. Emperor and **Beautiful Demoiselle** were also plentiful here, and there were **Keeled Skimmers** everywhere around the ‘enchanted pool’ which was looking a lot drier than normal this year. Azure Damselfly was also added here, a species which we had seen surprisingly few of so far. Heading back up along the edge of the wood, we found a family of **Redstarts** with three scaly youngsters sticking to the shade, and quivering their half grown tails. Stonechats were also out in force, and a **Spotted Flycatcher** showed really well, sallying out in front of us close enough to hear the snap of its bill closing around an unsuspecting insect. Amazingly what was presumably the same two **Hawfinches** came in on the exact same trajectory as earlier, dropping into the same trees – this time at least half the group saw them! The highlight of the morning though was a fantastic lacteal phase female **White-legged Damselfly**, hiding among the grass and heather well away from the attentions of the males on the breeding stream. Back at the van it was coffee time, before plotting our next move.

Latchmore Brook is a pleasant spot for a bit of bugging, being quite out of the way along a dead end track [so out of the way in fact, that it always takes some finding even though we know where it is!]. It was the hottest part of the day here, and we had another key target to find – the ever difficult **Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly**. It was really dry here, with most of the stream and its adjoining flushes being totally parched and bare. This did mean that the wet bits we did find were buzzing with odonata – **Keeled Skimmer**, **Golden-ringed Dragonfly** and **Small Red Damselfly** in particular. Initially there was no sign of the main attraction, but eventually we found a boggy flush with a slow moving trickle of water through it – perfect habitat! Thankfully the **Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly** thought so too and we had our best ever showing of the species on one of our trips, seeing at least five males and getting prolonged, close up views. **Brown Hawker** and **Holly Blue** were other insect highlights here, before we returned to the car park for lunch in the sunshine.

Our route north-west to Martin Down took us over the Hampshire Avon at Ibsley, a beautiful spot where the water was alive with a blue haze of Common Blue Damselies. We had stopped though to tick off **Banded Demoiselle**, having seen scores of Beautiful at other sites in the forest. There were dozens of them here, so it wasn’t difficult, and in fact we got somewhat sidetracked by some of the other wildlife on offer – Little Egret, Reed Bunting, Grey Wagtail, Red Kite and Common Kingfisher. All were trumped though by an impressive 12lb Barbel, loitering among the weed below the bridge – what a giant fish! Continuing on, we reached Martin Down car park in time for afternoon tea and cake, and our first Ringlet and **Marbled White** butterflies. A **Turtle Dove** was purring, and we enjoyed lovely scope views before it took off and displayed right overhead. Wandering down onto the down, we found lots of Small Skipper feeding on flowering Marjoram, and among them we could pick out a couple of **Essex Skipper** with their black-tipped antennae. Small Copper, Peacock, Red Admiral, Small Tortoiseshell and Brimstone were also seen, while the **Scarce Forrester Moth** was another interesting sighting. Botanically this site is amazing, being a vast swathe of unimproved chalk grassland – Pyramidal Orchid and Knapweed Broomrape were just two species we enjoyed but there were many, many more. Another **Turtle Dove** purred from an open perch, and at least four **Corn Buntings** were noted, including one in song. We searched hard for any early Small Blue but couldn’t find any, having to make do instead with great views of many **Dark Green Fritillaries**, mainly females searching for violets for egg laying. A super afternoon and another great day of all round wildlife.

THURSDAY 12TH JULY – *Another warm sunny day in light winds, more cloud around, 25C*

A birding day today since we had hit all our bug targets for the forest over the previous two action packed days in the field. It was another warm one, and we had to take that into consideration when working out an itinerary for the days proceedings. We started at the excellent Acres Down, with a walk down through the forest along the various tracks that criss-cross the area, hoping to find plenty of small birds in mixed feeding flocks. It is normally a really birdy area, but the first section of the walk at least was really quiet. We added Nuthatch, and saw Great-spotted Woodpecker,

Treecreeper and Goldcrest, but it was otherwise pretty quiet. Eventually a singing **Firecrest** stopped us in our tracks, and we spent some time looking carefully for movement among the conifers to see if we could get a sighting. We couldn't find the crest, but another movement caught our eye further back among the cones of a larch – it was a **Common Crossbill**! We'd only just been talking about what a poor year it had been nationally for this species, and this was in fact our first on tour in 2018. A male then dropped into view, and we watched the pair together for a while before they flew off calling. Heading further on, we found a pair of **Firecrests** with the male again in song, and eventually got some decent views of the two of them foraging low down in a conifer overhanging the track. Wandering back up to the car park, we picked up Southern Hawker and a selection of ten or so species of common butterflies including Brimstone and Holly Blue.

Next we climbed up onto Acres Down proper and walked along the woodland edge to the watchpoint overlooking the forest. This stunning location is always a lovely spot to spend some time scanning for raptors, and early signs were promising with a **Peregrine** powering over as we arrived. After that though, we saw very little in the form of raptors, with just the odd Buzzard noted. Thankfully, small birds kept us entertained, and a pair of **Woodlark** were flying to and fro over us the whole time, feeding young somewhere down in the valley below. They would often give a soft call as they passed over with a bill full of food. Eventually we worked out where they were going and by standing quietly, could watch them on the ground, though we never saw the concealed youngsters. Other species noted included at least six more **Crossbills** flying over in small groups, a **Tree Pipit**, two young **Redstarts** and finally a cracking **Hobby** just as we were about to pack up and head back for lunch. Not quite what we were hoping for overall but still a nice selection of birds.



Continental Black-tailed Godwit, a juvenile of the race *limosa*. Always a rare sighting in the UK!

Our afternoon would see a total change of scenery as we headed east to Titchfield Haven overlooking the Solent on the coast east of Southampton. This excellent reserve always produces a nice spread of

waterbirds, and we were soon adding our first Common Terns and Shelducks along the coast road by Meon Shore. The hide overlooking South Scrape was bustling with life, as the Black-headed Gulls and Common Terns were all fledging. Avocets also had young, and we saw Common Snipe, Redshank and about fifty smart Icelandic **Black-tailed Godwits** too. All on its own, a gorgeous fresh juvenile *limosa* **Continental Black-tailed Godwit** was found, the second time in two years we have seen them at this site which may well be an important stop off for this rare taxa. This subspecies fledges much earlier than *islandica*, and the juvenile plumage is much greyer and plainer, with whitish fringes to plain grey-brown coverts. Its bulky, large size was also apparent and the bill was incredibly deep based, even though this individual was not especially long-billed [though the bill was certainly still growing anyway]. This made up for the fact that two Roseate Terns seen on the scrape earlier were nowhere to be seen! We visited two further hides, adding Gadwall, Teal and Shoveler to the list, a distant Marsh Harrier, and some common odonata. Back at the shore, we picked up a Sparrowhawk which went through the scrape sending everything skyward, including a Dunlin which we had obviously missed! Two Sandwich Terns flew high over calling and a lovely adult pair of **Mediterranean Gulls** were resting on the shore – we had also seen them or another pair earlier on the scrape, and a juvenile flying east over the reserve. After tea and cake by the beach, it was time to head back to Lyndhurst after another long day in the field.

FRIDAY 13TH JULY – *Sunny spells and light winds, 23C*

Today we left the guest house in convoy and headed up to Bentley Woods on the Hants/Wilts border for a spot of butterfly action to round off the tour. The conditions weren't the best, with plenty of cloud and eventually light rain setting in, but we made the best of it! **Purple Hairstreak** seems to be having a fantastic year this year, and we saw more than we have ever encountered at this site before – they were literally flitting around the canopy of every oak tree in the forest and numbers were hard to estimate. As usual, all the views were pretty 'distant' as the creatures were always remaining among the lofty branches, and often crawling frustratingly under or behind a leaf on settling! **Silver-washed Fritillary** was also going strong here, with several nice sightings, and we also had some lovely close ups of Ringlet, Brimstone and Holly Blue. Perhaps the biggest surprise was a **White Admiral**, which we thought was already over given the hot weather and the fact we had failed to find any in the New Forest this year. The one we saw was actually in pretty good nick though! The dragonfly ponds here have been opened up and are now much improved, and we spent some time here watching Azure, Large Red and Blue-tailed Damselfly, and large numbers of **Southern Hawker**. Clearly this was another species having a good year, with many adults buzzing around the ponds and uncountable numbers of their exuviae on the waterside rushes and reeds. Common Darter and Broad-bodied Chaser were also noted here. And what of our main target, the regal **Purple Emperor** butterfly? Well we actually managed a couple of quick sightings of them flying at treetop level, but the only satisfactory one came in the car park itself. Here we had one flying around the big oak above the parking area, where it made four or five circuits without settling. That was unfortunately our lot, and not seen by all of the group either. Not quite the ending we hoped for, but with black clouds rolling in, we knew it spelled the end of the session! After a picnic lunch, we all went our separate ways to do battle with the Friday afternoon traffic.



Holly Blue – the second generation is now on the wing in small numbers

SYSTEMATIC LIST

Birds

1. Great Cormorant
2. Grey Heron
3. Little Egret
4. Mute Swan
5. Canada Goose
6. Common Shelduck
7. Mallard
8. Common Teal
9. Gadwall
10. Northern Shoveler
11. Common Pheasant
12. Common Kestrel
13. Eurasian Hobby
14. Marsh Harrier
15. Common Buzzard
16. Northern Goshawk
17. Red Kite
18. Peregrine
19. Common Moorhen
20. Common Coot
21. Pied Avocet
22. European Oystercatcher

23. Northern Lapwing
24. Common Redshank
25. Black-tailed Godwit
26. Dunlin
27. Common Snipe
28. Black-headed Gull
29. Herring Gull
30. Lesser Black-backed Gull
31. Mediterranean Gull
32. Sandwich Tern
33. Common Tern
34. Woodpigeon
35. Collared Dove
36. Stock Dove
37. Turtle Dove
38. European Nightjar
39. Common Swift
40. Common Kingfisher [H]
41. Great-spotted Woodpecker
42. Green Woodpecker [H]
43. Skylark
44. Woodlark
45. Tree Pipit
46. Meadow Pipit
47. Pied Wagtail
48. Grey Wagtail
49. Barn Swallow
50. House Martin
51. Wren
52. European Robin
53. Common Redstart
54. Common Stonechat
55. Dunnock
56. Common Blackbird
57. Song Thrush
58. Mistle Thrush
59. Cetti's Warbler [H]
60. Blackcap
61. Common Chiffchaff
62. Willow Warbler
63. Common Whitethroat
64. Goldcrest
65. Firecrest
66. Spotted Flycatcher
67. Blue Tit
68. Great Tit
69. Coal Tit
70. Long-tailed Tit
71. Marsh Tit
72. Common Treecreeper
73. European Nuthatch
74. Rook
75. Carrion Crow
76. Common Raven
77. Western Jackdaw

78. Common Magpie
79. Eurasian Jay
80. Common Starling
81. House Sparrow
82. Chaffinch
83. Goldfinch
84. Common Linnet
85. Greenfinch
86. Bullfinch
87. Hawfinch
88. Common Crossbill
89. Eurasian Siskin
90. Reed Bunting
91. Yellowhammer
92. Corn Bunting

Butterflies

1. Small Skipper
2. Large Skipper
3. Essex Skipper
4. Large White
5. Small White
6. Green-veined White
7. Brimstone
8. Marbled White
9. Purple Hairstreak
10. Silver-studded Blue
11. Common Blue
12. Holly Blue
13. Red Admiral
14. Peacock
15. White Admiral
16. Purple Emperor
17. Small Tortoiseshell
18. Comma
19. Speckled Wood
20. Grayling
21. Meadow Brown
22. Ringlet
23. Silver-washed Fritillary
24. Dark Green Fritillary
25. Gatekeeper
26. Small Heath
27. Small Copper

Odonata

1. Beautiful Demoiselle
2. Banded Demoiselle
3. Emerald Damselfly
4. White-legged Damselfly
5. Common Blue Damselfly
6. Azure Damselfly

7. Blue-tailed Damselfly
8. Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly
9. Southern Damselfly
10. Large Red Damselfly
11. Small Red Damselfly
12. Red-eyed Damselfly
13. Small Red-eyed Damselfly
14. Emperor
15. Broad-bodied Chaser
16. Four-spotted Chaser
17. Black-tailed Skimmer
18. Keeled Skimmer
19. Common Darter
20. Southern Hawker
21. Brown Hawker
22. Golden-ringed Dragonfly