



ORIOLE BIRDING



TOUR REPORT - NEW FOREST 7TH – 11TH JULY 2020

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TUESDAY 7TH JULY – *Overcast with moderate breeze, 19C*

Our first foray away from ‘home’ since the Coronavirus lockdown saw us head down to the New Forest on our annual trip, with just two clients. Our usual guest house was as welcoming as ever, and impressively organised with Covid-secure measures to protect their guests. We had a hassle free journey down from Norfolk and arrived well before 5pm, in time for a cup of tea and slice of cake in the garden! We wandered up into Lyndhurst town for dinner in one of the local pubs, which was eerily quiet. Then an early night, ready for action tomorrow!

WEDNESDAY 8TH JULY – *Overcast with light rain, warming up to sunny spells, 19C*

With a fresh SW wind blowing and relatively cool and overcast conditions forecast for the first half of the day at least, we had already decided that we would head to Portland this morning, as a large concentration of Balearic Shearwaters had been lingering off The Bill the previous couple of days and we felt there was a good chance to obtain decent views. This decision was cemented though when photographs emerged of what appeared to be a **Yelkouan Shearwater** with them, and the bird mega alerted as we were heading west towards Weymouth! Arriving at The Bill car park, we could already see the feeding frenzy of gulls, Gannets and shearwaters, just offshore, and a small assembly of birders. We were soon watching the throng of seabirds, and what a fantastic sight!



Yelkouan Shearwater (far right) with four Balearic Shearwaters, Portland Bill 8th July. The dusky undertail, smaller build and dark axillary bar are just visible.

Gannets plunging into the water, hundreds of gulls jostling for position and around the edges, about 60 **Balearic Shearwaters** and several **Manx Shearwaters** too, allowing side by side comparisons both on the water and in flight. The plunge diving, pot-bellied Balearics were really instructive, ranging from birds as dark as a Sooty Shearwater, to much paler birds with dark limited to the axillaries and undertail coverts. We couldn't initially see the purported Yelkouan though – a heavily moulting Manx seemed to be piquing interest for a number of people, but the bird had a white undertail and

no foot projection. Eventually we got onto an interesting bird which was clearly smaller than the Balearics, with pale underbody and underwings, yet a dark bar across the axillaries and dark undertail. It too was moulting, with a small gap in its primaries, and crucially we could see its feet projecting beyond the tail. Keeping on any individual bird was really hard given the number of seabirds and amount of movement going on, and we soon lost it. Moving down to the point, we managed to shelter from the wind behind the rocks with a few other birders, and one of them spotted the **Yelkouan Shearwater** again – better views this time, as it fed in a distinctive manner, flying a short distance then plunging into the water, only to surface again quickly and repeat the process over and over. It had a peculiar habit of raising and lowering its head, particularly just before diving, and the full suite of characteristics could now be well observed. Eventually, we had the bird sat on the water with six Balearics, and it was clearly smaller and sligher with a long slim bill, yet similarly coloured overall to them and also quite dusky on the neck sides, lacking the distinct definition between dark and white shown by the Manx. We left having enjoyed surprisingly good views of this UK mega, along with several **Guillemot**, **Razorbill**, a **Kittiwake**, **Rock Pipit** and the general spectacle of so many seabirds.



Lulworth Skipper, male, Portland 8th July 2020

After a coffee, and with a bit of sunshine poking through, we headed up to the grassland area around the Pulpit Inn to have a search for the localised **Lulworth Skipper**. Despite the strong wind, there were many little skippers on the wing – all Small Skippers to begin with. But in one or two sheltered corners, we began to find several **Lulworth Skippers** too – mostly dark, olive-tinged males but also a nice female with diagnostic semi-circle of golden spots on the upperwing. A **Marbled White** was also seen, plus many Ringlet, Meadow Brown and Gatekeeper. Lodmoor was our next

stop, and a relatively quick stop to see if we could add some more waterbirds to the list. Large numbers of Common Terns were breeding here, alongside good numbers of **Mediterranean Gulls** and a few resting Sandwich Terns. It was otherwise rather quiet though, and with the afternoon already wearing on, we wanted to head on to Martin Down.



Marbled White, Portland 8th July 2020

Just into Hampshire, the gorgeous location of Martin Down didn't disappoint despite the overcast conditions and spots of rain. Several **Dark Green Fritillaries** were seen, although all were skittish and reluctant to settle. A stunning pair of basking **Adders** was perhaps the highlight, but we also saw more **Marbled Whites**, singing Skylarks and **Corn Buntings**, **Red Kite**, hundreds of feeding Swifts, and a **Small Copper**. A nice way to end a varied and exciting first day 'back in the saddle'!

THURSDAY 9TH JULY – Overcast with light drizzle and cool SW wind, 16C

A challenging day today with weather too cool for successful bugging, though we did manage to eke out a good selection of wildlife over the course of the day! Our first location as Upper Crockford Stream, normally an excellent site for 'cleaning up' on the typical New Forest odonata. To begin with there was nothing flying at all in the cool wind, but eventually we found a sheltered corner along the woodland edge and a little micro-climate here had encouraged several **Southern Damselfly** out to bask. A single **Small Red Damselfly** was also found, so we were off to a decent start! We decided to explore the adjacent heath, to give the day more chance to warm up, and to look in particular for **Dartford Warbler**. We soon found a fledged family party, located by the begging calls of the juveniles. There seemed to be two young buried in the gorse, with a female visiting periodically with food. We had some pretty good views of them, as the young in particular were not especially shy.

Nearby a female **Marsh Harrier** breezed over the heath, and two fine Fallow Deer stags wandered past.

Back down at the stream and we returned to the same spot where we had seen the Southern Damselflies, to find several were now on the wing, but keeping close to the Bog Myrtle and reluctant to fly far. There were now half a dozen **Small Red Damselfly** too, a lovely female **Keeled Skimmer** and best of all, a pair of **Beautiful Demoiselle**. With no sun, we had not expected to connect with this metallic stunner, so that was a bonus indeed.

Continuing to our next site at Ober Water, we had an impromptu stop for a **Goshawk** which was circling slowly above forest adjacent to the road, with a Buzzard for comparison. Hopefully, we would get a chance for better views of the species in improved weather tomorrow. Reaching Ober, we wandered down along the woodland edge off Rhinefield Ornamental Drive, to the brook. Unfortunately the weather got the better of us here in our search for White-legged Damselfly, and we didn't see anything at all. Treecreeper, Grey Wagtail and a Stonechat family were noted though, plus nine high flying **Crossbills**. The walk back up was more productive, as we saw a brief **Hobby**, female and juvenile **Common Redstarts**, and a female **Silver-studded Blue Butterfly**.

After lunch, we explored Mill Lawn Brook, a site where we have traditionally seen Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly. The weather again meant it was impossible to find our quarry, as no odonata were on the wing at all in the cool conditions. So we decided to end the day with another look for birds, closer to Lyndhurst at Matley Bog. More Stonechat families were noted (they'd been everywhere today), plus our main target bird – a **Woodlark**. The bird flew over us and landed on an open track through the heather and bracken, and we were able to get some really good views of it on the ground. It suddenly crouched as we were watching it, flattening its body low to the ground. The reason – **Hobby**, flying low towards us and directly over our heads! Two or three male **Silver-studded Blues** were seen on the walk back, which rounded off a very pleasant day in the forest.

After dinner this evening, we took a walk on the local heath to look for **Nightjars**. The wind dropped and it remained overcast but fine, and right on cue around 9.30pm we heard the wonderful 'coo-ick' flight call of a **Nightjar** and saw a male float past us. Some churring followed, and then over the next half an hour, several good views of the same bird were had. Two **Woodcock** were roding over the heath too as darkness fell.

FRIDAY 10TH JULY – *Sunny spells and moderate SW wind, 18C*

A mixed bag today with some really good sightings, mainly of birds, and some frustrating 'dips' -but none more so than the relative lack of odonata of any sort at the sites we have visited. To complete four days in the New Forest, albeit in cool weather, and not see Emperor, Four-spotted or Broad-bodied Chaser, Black-tailed Skimmer or any Darters, seems bizarre! We started again at Mill Lawn, to try again for damselflies, but saw just one **Small Red Damselfly**, despite the sun shining. Quite where everything was, we weren't sure! We had planned to spend most of the day at Acres Down and we wandered up onto the top of the ridge, seeing another fledgling **Common Redstart** along the way, plus Nuthatch, Siskin, Bullfinch and Marsh Tit. A young **Goshawk** circled up in the valley, scolded by crows, and we had some decent scope views of the bird for a minute or so until it drifted down and landed in a spindly conifer. Now we could see the bird really well, as it sat glowering back at us with its white undertail coverts fluffed out like snow and the detail of its tail barring clearly visible. Up at the watchpoint, we spent about ninety minutes scanning in the hope of Honey Buzzard, but didn't see any on this occasion. A pair of **Ravens** showed superbly, tumbling overhead and cronking, and we saw a single fly-by **Common Crossbill** too. The same **Goshawk** appeared again, and we had even closer flight views – clearly a bird of the year, we could now see it had lovely peachy-buff

underparts, and the upperwings were super fresh showing pale tips to the wing coverts, and a clean white tip to the tail feathers. Along the top of the ridge heading back, we had a close fly past from a superb **Golden-ringed Dragonfly**, and saw several more fledged juvenile **Common Redstarts** including one obliging bird which perched very close to us. Willow Warbler and a fine male Bullfinch were also seen.



Small Red Damselfly, Mill Lawn 10th July

After lunch, we took a circular walk through the adjacent woodland, with **Firecrest** particularly in mind as a target. The first section of the walk was really quiet, and despite a bit of sun, we saw no woodland butterflies either – not even a Speckled Wood! Reaching an area with some mixed mature oak and birch, we came across a bit of activity and soon found a male **Firecrest** foraging in the canopy. The bird was ferrying food back and forth to a waiting fledged youngster, which we were able to locate – it sat quietly and patiently and didn't move, while the adult bird buzzed around gathering food and giving us some great views. While we were watching it, we heard the unmistakable mournful monosyllabic call of a **Wood Warbler**, repeatedly from deep inside the forest. We tried to find a way to get at it, and while we did eventually locate a handy path inside, the bird had gone silent and we never located it.

Hatchet Pond was our next stop, in the hope of some improved odonata action. The sun peeped through for about a minute, and this was just enough for a **Downy Emerald** to take to the wing and make one close pass around the pond before disappearing the moment the sun went back in! We waited forty minutes for another break in the cloud, but it didn't come. On the floating weed, hordes of Blue-tailed Damselflies and several Common Blue Damselflies were seen, plus a single **Small Red-eyed Damselfly** to boot. Again though, for a site that should normally be hooching with larger dragonflies, to not even see a Black-tailed Skimmer here was worrying.

Beaulieu Heath was our final call of the day, and we had the warmest part of the day here too. As a result, the heather was alive with **Silver-studded Blues**, of which we must have seen 100+. Again though, two **Keeled Skimmer** were the only dragonflies around the bog pools, and we weren't lucky this time with our search for Black Darter or Emerald Damselfly. It was already gone 6.30pm by the time we returned to the car park, but it was only a five minute drive back to base from here.

SATURDAY 11TH JULY – *Warm and sunny with a light breeze, 20C*

We saved the best day's weather til last on the trip this year, which was just as well since we had a very poor list of butterflies up until this point – we rapidly put that right this morning though! Arriving at Bentley Wood in Wiltshire around 9.30am, we set off down the switchback trail with some trepidation given the sunshine, and numbers of Meadow Brown, Ringlet, Large White, Small White and Red Admiral buzzing around the car park. The edges of the trail were bustling with butterflies, and we soon had fantastic close views of **Silver-washed Fritillaries**, Large Skipper, Comma and Green-veined White too. The skippers were out in big numbers, but so were the freshly emerged Peacocks, liberally scattered over the bramble blossom and all looking clean and fresh. A good start, but it was about to get even better, as we spotted a male **Purple Emperor** on the side of the track ahead. An area of tree thinning had left an exposed area of mud and gravel where forestry vehicles had been working, and the emperor was wandering around here taking minerals and dazzling us with close range views in the sun. It flew a short distance onto the track itself, and we were able to watch it for several minutes – what a beauty!



Purple Emperor, Bentley Wood 11th July

With our main target in the bag, we decided to press on to a more remote part of the wood to search for other things. The dragonfly pools were very good, hosting a female **Southern Hawker**, Large Red Damselfly and hordes of Azure Damselflies too. The margins were also excellent for butterflies, with many browns, Small Skippers, Marbled White and further fantastic views of **Silver-washed Fritillary**. We watched a female laying eggs into the grooves of bark on the trunk of a tree – when the caterpillars hatch, they have a long walk down to the ground to find their larval food plant! **Purple Hairstreak** was another highlight of the morning, and we found several large, active colonies in oak trees along the way. This included some very good close up views through a telescope of resting individuals, as well as the more typical views of them flitting around the canopy. We couldn't find any White-letter Hairstreaks at the elms today, but guessed that they could feasible already be over for the season.



Peacock, Stockbridge Down 11th July

We now had to start making our way towards home, but we decided to make a slight detour for lunch at Stockbridge Down, a site we normally visit on our August tour for the chalk grassland butterflies. The car park buddleia was bustling with yet more Peacocks, Red Admirals and others, and out on the down we saw **Marbled White**, Small Copper, Small Heath and lots of Large and Small Whites. We were hoping for an early **Chalkhill Blue**, and after scouring a large part of the down with no sign, we found a male as we were heading back to the car park. We were treated to excellent close up views, as it basked in the open waiting for the sun to appear from behind a cloud. Once it did, it was off, showing its pale silvery blue upperwing. We then had a second male, settled next to a male Common Blue for comparison of size and colour. A great way to end the trip!



Chalkhill Blue, Stockbridge Down 11th July

SYSTEMATIC LIST

Birds

1. Gannet
2. Manx Shearwater
3. Balearic Shearwater
4. Yelkouan Shearwater
5. Grey Heron
6. Little Egret
7. Mute Swan
8. Common Shelduck
9. Mallard
10. Gadwall
11. Tufted Duck
12. Common Pheasant
13. Common Kestrel
14. Eurasian Hobby
15. Marsh Harrier
16. Common Buzzard
17. Eurasian Sparrowhawk
18. Northern Goshawk
19. Red Kite
20. Common Moorhen

21. Common Coot
22. European Oystercatcher
23. Eurasian Curlew
24. Woodcock
25. Black-headed Gull
26. Herring Gull
27. Lesser Black-backed Gull
28. Great Black-backed Gull
29. Mediterranean Gull
30. Sandwich Tern
31. Common Tern
32. Woodpigeon
33. Collared Dove
34. Stock Dove
35. Common Guillemot
36. Razorbill
37. European Nightjar
38. Common Swift
39. Common Kingfisher (H)
40. Great-spotted Woodpecker
41. Green Woodpecker (H)
42. Skylark
43. Woodlark
44. Meadow Pipit
45. Rock Pipit
46. Pied Wagtail
47. Grey Wagtail
48. Barn Swallow
49. House Martin
50. Wren
51. European Robin
52. Common Redstart
53. Common Stonechat
54. Dunnock
55. Common Blackbird
56. Song Thrush
57. Mistle Thrush
58. Cetti's Warbler (H)
59. Blackcap
60. Common Chiffchaff
61. Willow Warbler
62. Wood Warbler (H)
63. Common Whitethroat
64. Dartford Warbler
65. Goldcrest (H)
66. Firecrest
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. Common Starling
80. House Sparrow
81. Chaffinch
82. Goldfinch
83. Common Linnet
84. Greenfinch
85. Bullfinch
86. Common Crossbill
87. Eurasian Siskin
88. Reed Bunting
89. Yellowhammer
90. Corn Bunting

Butterflies

1. Small Skipper
2. Large Skipper
3. Lulworth 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. Chalkhill Blue
14. Red Admiral
15. Peacock
16. Purple Emperor
17. Comma
18. Speckled Wood
19. Meadow Brown
20. Ringlet
21. Silver-washed Fritillary
22. Dark Green Fritillary
23. Gatekeeper
24. Small Heath
25. Small Copper

Odonata

1. Beautiful Demoiselle
2. Common Blue Damselfly
3. Azure Damselfly
4. Blue-tailed Damselfly
5. Southern Damselfly
6. Large Red Damselfly
7. Small Red Damselfly
8. Small Red-eyed Damselfly
9. Keeled Skimmer
10. Southern Hawker
11. Golden-ringed Dragonfly