

# Bird Report 2008

Below is a short selection of some of the highlights of the year.

## January

Some wonderful early mornings were accompanied by 100's of **Gannets** diving off the head towards the end of January, while the 23<sup>rd</sup> saw 2000+ **Razorbills**. The **Guillemots** have regularly been back on the cliffs but unfortunately a number of oiled seabirds have been picked up from the local beaches – these get taken by the RSPCA to Taunton.

A number of **Balearic Shearwaters** (seen just a few hundred yards of the cliffs on the 7<sup>th</sup> February) and again on 14<sup>th</sup> along with 1000 **Razorbills**, 400 **Kittiwakes** and 1 **Mediterranean Gull**. The 23<sup>rd</sup> Jan saw unusually high numbers of Divers - 40 **Red-throated**, 1 **Black-throated** and 5 **Great Northern Divers**, as well as 180 **Kittiwakes**, 300 **Black-headed** and 1 **Little Gull**. On a number of occasions 5 **Ravens** have been soaring above the meadows. The **Black Redstart** has been in residence at Tilly Whim all winter, brightening those wet and dull mornings.

## February

As spring draws closer, birdsong is becoming more noticeable, with **Greenfinches**, **Blue**, **Coal** and **Great Tits**, **Dunnock**, **Song** and **Mistle Thrush**, **Yellowhammer**, **Chiffchaff** and **Chaffinch** all adding their own threads to an increasingly rich symphony.

Along the cliffs, **Rock Pipits** are making their amazing 'parachuting' song-flights, with **Ravens** seen displaying on many mornings in February. Good views of **Stonechats** and **Dartford Warblers** on the Downs. **Firecrests** and **Black Redstart** have been seen on most mornings during February.

Highlights of February included 2 **Snipe** exploding out of the grassland in the meadows, disturbed by our Hereford **Cattle** on the 14<sup>th</sup>, a chilly morning on the 17<sup>th</sup> saw 8 **Lapwing** and a **Golden Plover**, evidence of cold conditions inland, with a **Reed Bunting** also seen.

## March

Participants on a guided walk on the 1st of March were lucky enough to see a total of 31 species, including 2 **Woodcock**, with a **Little Owl** seen earlier that morning.

The first **Wheatear** of the year was reported from Belle Vue on the 5<sup>th</sup> March – keep your eyes peeled for the first one at Durlston!

Many species of bird have already started nest building – **Shags** have already finished theirs, while **Long-Tailed Tits** are hard at work at the moment.

Best 'twitch' of the month was a **Glaucous Gull**, seen close to the cliffs by local birder Warren Claydon on the morning of the 8<sup>th</sup> March. This huge, white-winged Gull is a real rarity at Durlston, with less than 20 records in over 30 years of sea-watching.

## April / May

As always, April provided some memorable bird watching as migrants arrived from the south. **Redstarts**, **Grasshopper Warblers** and **Pied Flycatchers** were particularly noticeable. **Pomarine Skuas** and **Black Terns** added excitement to early morning sea-watches while a possible **Cory's Shearwater** was noted on 4<sup>th</sup> May.

The most surprising sighting was a superb summer-plumage **Water Pipit** on 2<sup>nd</sup> May – only the 2<sup>nd</sup> Park record. Other scarce species included **Honey Buzzard**, **Serin**, **Osprey**, **Short-eared Owl** and **Quail**.

## May

Among the breeding birds, **Common** and **Lesser Whitethroats** are particularly numerous while **Linnet** and **Skylark** numbers seem to be up on recent years. A **Dartford Warbler** is holding territory on the downs

Other seabird news – 2 pairs of **Razorbill** can be seen via the camera, Some good seawatching, with **Scoter**, **Great Skua**, 20+ **Manx Shearwaters** and 4 **Storm Petrels** all spotted on 26<sup>th</sup> May.

Some unusual sightings – a **Marsh Warbler** reported from Saxon Field on 27<sup>th</sup> May and on both 29<sup>th</sup> & 30<sup>th</sup> a female **Golden Oriole** seen, while a **Nightjar** was discovered on 21<sup>st</sup> May

## June

7 **Puffins** were seen on the last two evening boat trips, while the very wet Wednesday afternoon trip provided fantastic views of 50 or more **Gannets** really close to the boat.

Other highlights this month have included a **Cuckoo** in the Wildlife Area (06/06), with **Grey Heron** and **Little Egret** on the same day, a juvenile **Peregrine Falcon** seen for the first time on the 25<sup>th</sup>, with it's sibling seen a couple of days later. **Stoats** have been seen hunting on many days.

The month ended with a couple of unusual sightings on the 30<sup>th</sup>, with 3 **Crossbills**

## July

The 2 juvenile **Peregrines** and a young **Kestrel** are regularly heard around the coast and gully.

A steady trickle of **Swifts**, **Swallow** and both **House** and **Sand Martins** have been seen. Other migrants are **Red-legged Partridge** (12 & 14/7), **Hobby** (10/7), **Wheatear** (18/7), **Grasshopper Warbler**, **Willow Warbler**, **Sedge Warbler**, **Pied Flycatcher** (30/7), **Tree Pipit** (31/7) and **Redstart** – all becoming more numerous as we reach August. A **Cuckoo** flew over the Wildlife Area on 30/7 and **Turtle Doves** have been seen in the Gully on several days.

An unusual number of **Crossbills** passed over from the 4<sup>th</sup>, while on 25<sup>th</sup> July, 23 were counted.

Species passing at sea include **Balearic Shearwater**, **Manx Shearwater** (38 on 7/7), 3 **Tern** species, 3 **Storm Petrel** (9/7), and on the 11<sup>th</sup> July 160 **Gannets**, on the 21/7 a **Yellow-legged Gull**, and on the 31/7 a **Cory's Shearwater**.

## August

As August proceeded and September arrived the main wildlife focus has been on bird migration. This year the highlights have included a large number of **Crossbills**, probably leaving their summer breeding grounds early due to a reduced number of pine cones. Overhead activity has also involved **Yellow**, **Grey** and **Pied Wagtails**, plus **Tree Pipits**.

On land an influx of small birds over the 26 -31<sup>st</sup> August enlivened proceedings with **Hobby**, **Siskin**, **Redstarts**, **Pied** and **Spotted Flycatchers**, **Whinchat** and 9 species of **Warbler** – **Garden**, **Willow**, **Chiffchaff**, **Lesser** and **Common Whitethroat**, **Dartford**, **Sedge**, **Reed** and **Blackcap**. 2 (or possibly 3) **Wrynecks** were seen on 30<sup>th</sup> & 31<sup>st</sup> August.

At sea **Balearic Shearwaters** have passed – this is the rarest seabird to pass through UK waters on migration. **Bonxie** and **Arctic Skuas**, **Common** and **Arctic Terns**, plus **Dunlin**, **Ringed Plover**, **Grey Plover**, **Greenshank** and for the first time ever, both **Green** and **Wood Sandpiper** have been seen in the same year at Durlston.

Another highlight was on 30<sup>th</sup> Sept when **Swallows** and **House Martins** were passing over at a rate of 3000 per hour.

Visible migration taking place as large numbers of **Linnets**, **Goldfinches**, **Redpoll**, **Siskin** and **Chaffinches** passing over plus a few **Hawfinches**. **Grey** and **Pied Wagtails**, accompany **Meadow** and **Tree Pipits** as well as the continental **Coal Tits**, **Goldcrest**, **Firecrest** and **Great Spotted Woodpeckers**.

## October

Birds of prey galore, with a superb **Goshawk** on Sat 4<sup>th</sup> Oct, (a fairly unusual sight at Durlston). Magnificent views of a **Hobby** as it flew above the garden of The Lookout cafe on both 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Oct. A number of sightings of our smallest bird of prey, the **Merlin**, plus **Buzzards** and on a **Honey Buzzard**. **Sparrowhawk**, **Kestrel** and **Peregrines** also seen.

October has been **the** month for birdwatching if you are counting the sheer numbers of birds seen – 1800 Swallows & **House Martins**, 1000 **Linnets**, 1000 **Goldfinches**, 330 **Chaffinches** and 294 **Siskin**, 52 **Redpoll**, 7 **Crossbills**, 23 **Brambling**, 2 **Reed Buntings**, 120 **Pied Wagtails** and 100+ **Starlings** – these are the maximum numbers counted during the early rounds.

It has also seen the best sightings of **Short-eared Owls** for a number of years with 1-3 being watched quartering the meadows from mid-October, culminating in the sad story of the Short-eared Owl that was mobbed by **Crows** on 6<sup>th</sup> Nov, then eaten by a **Peregrine Falcon**, which despite the attentions of a **Kestrel** held onto her supper, (the beautiful wings are on show in the Centre).

Other birds of prey have included **Little Owl**, **Tawny Owl**, **Hen Harrier**, **Merlins**, **Buzzard**, **Sparrowhawks** and **Hobbies**.

Unusual sightings have included **Yellow –browed Warbler** (17<sup>th</sup> Oct), **Snow Bunting** (23<sup>rd</sup> Oct), **Lapland Bunting**, (14<sup>th</sup> Oct), **Ortolan Bunting** (8<sup>th</sup> Oct), **Ring Ouzels** (12<sup>th</sup> Oct, 7, 8, 9<sup>th</sup> Nov), plus **Garden Warbler**, **Woodlarks** and **Hawfinches**. A first for Durlston was the **Olive Backed Pipit** which flew over on 13<sup>th</sup> Oct.

The last **Wheatear** and **Willow Warbler** disappeared on 18<sup>th</sup> Oct, and the first **Fieldfare** arrived 21<sup>st</sup> Oct.

**Black Redstarts** have been around most days since 19<sup>th</sup> Oct.

At sea, **Leach's Petrel** (20<sup>th</sup> Oct), **Brent Geese**, **Wigeon**, **Scoter**, **Balearic Shearwater**, **Mediterranean Gulls**, **Great Skua**, **Great Northern Divers**, and **Red-throated** and **Black-throated Divers**.

## December

An interesting month with a wide range of temperatures reflected by the unusually diverse selection of birds recorded in the period.

Visible migration continued during the first half of the month with **Goldfinches**, **Linnets**, **Siskins**, **Bramblings** and **Redpolls** particularly noticeable. The colder weather produced **Golden Plovers** and **Lapwings** while **Woodcock** and **Snipe** were also seen on several days.

Along the cliffs, the local **Guillemots**, **Razorbills** and **Fulmars** were seen most days along with **Peregrines**, **Rock Pipits** and at least one **Black Redstart**. Further offshore the daily log included: lots of **Gannets**, good numbers of passing **Red-throated Divers** supplemented by the odd **Great Northern** and **Black-throated Diver**, an unseasonal **Great Skua** on 22/12, several **Velvet Scoter**, **Red-breasted Mergansers** and **Eider**. **Mediterranean Gulls** continued to show well along with their commoner cousins.

**Short-eared Owls** remained on the Park much later than usual, delighting visitors throughout the month, with the occasional **Little Owl** report and the regular 'hooting' **Tawny Owl** in Castle Woods brought the owl count up to 3 species on several dates. **Ravens** put on some spectacular displays of aerial acrobatics raising hopes of possible breeding. Sporadic **Merlin** and **Buzzard** sightings added to the variety of raptors.

Firecrests were recorded on an almost daily basis usually accompanied by **Goldcrests**, **Blackcaps** and **Chiffchaffs**, while **Dartford Warblers** were often seen or heard in the gully area.

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**Credits:** Many thanks to Jol Mitchell for his hard work in compiling the Report. Thanks also to our generous and talented photographic contributors!