

Bird Report 2007

This is a brief summary of some of the highlights of the year.

A total of 162 species were recorded at Durlston Country Park during 2007, 12 fewer than in 2006. Highlights in 2006 included European Storm-petrel, Wryneck, Yellow-browed Warbler, Golden Oriole, Woodchat Shrike, Tree Sparrow, Serin, Twite, Common Rosefinch, Lapland Bunting and Ortolan Bunting.

January

As normal, January was a relatively quiet month. Firecrests in the woods and a Black Redstart at Tilly Whim remained from 2006. Also on land, Song and Mistle Thrushes started to sing from early in the month. The main interest was at sea with a passing Goldeneye on 3rd, a Little Gull on 19th and a Velvet Scoter on 22nd. Also on that day, a Cormorant of the Continental race *sinensis* was recorded. Great Northern Divers were reported on five days.

February

As in January, the main interest was at sea. Black-throated Divers, the scarcest diver seen off Durlston, and in Dorset, passed on 5th and 11th, a further *sinensis* Cormorant was recorded on 14th, and an usually large (for Durlston) flock of over 80 Brent Geese passed on 20th.

March

March is the month in which migration starts to become apparent. Typical early migrants were the first Northern Wheatear on 7th, Sand Martins on 11th and Sandwich Terns offshore on 15th. Two Black-throated Divers also passed on 15th.

April

April saw a flurry of activity with the numbers and diversity of migrants increasing rapidly. Of the local species, nine Common Buzzards were seen on 5th. "First dates" for some of the commoner migrants were as follows: Willow Warbler (2nd), Swallow (5th), Yellow Wagtail (7th), Redstart (7th), Hobby (7th), House Martin (10th), Common and Lesser Whitethroats (15th), Swift (20th) and Cuckoo (24th). Northern Wheatears peaked on 24th with 14 birds present; other passerines of interest included Pied Flycatchers, a rare spring record of a Tree Sparrow on 16th, Nightingale, Turtle Dove and Ring Ouzels. At sea, the first Common Terns passed on 19th, a Balearic Shearwater on 24th, and Arctic and Little Terns on 27th and 30th. Skua passage during the last week included five Arctic, two Great and one Pomarine Skua. Five Little Gulls passed on 23rd with a further bird two days later. Waders were also on the move with Ringed and Grey Plovers, Dunlin, Whimbrel, Common Sandpiper and Turnstone all passing offshore, albeit in small numbers. The last three days of April saw a significant passage of Bar-tailed Godwits along the Dorset coast, reflected at Durlston where over 20 birds were reported on 27th, 20-30 birds on 29th and 30 on 30th.

May

Migration continued into May. Turtle Doves (increasingly rare at Durlston and the rest of the country) were recorded on 2nd, 5th and 19th. Other noteworthy land birds included a Honey Buzzard passing overhead on 3rd, a Wood Warbler on the same day and a Golden Oriole seen briefly as it disappeared into dense vegetation on 20th May. At sea, Arctic (2nd), Great (10th) and four Pomarine (28th) Skuas were recorded. A Storm-petrel was off Durlston Head in the evening of 8th May. Passing waders included Dunlin (4th), Knot (5th) and Sanderling (four days).

June

A Red Kite passed overhead on 2nd and five young Crossbills passed overhead on 13th. Otherwise, the sea was the main interest in a quiet month. Three Storm-petrels passed on 2nd; Balearic Shearwaters on 18th and 21st. The latter date also saw a peak passage of 36 Manx Shearwaters and two Puffins offshore.

July

The mid-summer lull continued into July with Balearic Shearwaters reported on 2nd, 17th and 23rd. July is the peak month for passing Common Scoters; 85 bird-days were recorded.

August

Balearic Shearwaters were recorded on 15th and 18th; an hour's seawatch in a fresh southerly wind on the latter date was dominated by over 240 Gannets heading west, many passing close inshore. On the land, Pied Flycatchers were reported on four days; a Woodchat Shrike was reported just south of the Saxon Field (a favoured area for Shrikes) on 11th. A Wood Warbler was reported on 25th.

September

An Oortolan Bunting was heard on the Downs on 5th and a further bird passed over on 10th. The first Ring Ouzel of the autumn was reported on 13th. Two Wrynecks were seen on 16th by the Gully and near the western boundary. A Pied Flycatcher was reported on 13th. Of the commoner migrants, there was a spectacular "fall" of Willow Warblers on 22nd with over 150 birds present. Passing seabirds included a Great Skua on 5th, the last Balearic Shearwater of the year on 20th and Sooty Shearwaters on 18th and 23rd in a poor year for this species.

October

October is invariably an excellent month and October 2007 was no exception. A particular highlight was the number of birds of prey. A Marsh Harrier passed through on 7th. Noticeable were Merlins (recorded on 22 days), Sparrowhawks (42 bird-days including five birds on 17th) and Peregrine Falcons (three or four birds were recorded on ten occasions between October and mid-November) hunting the migrating passerine flocks. A Shorteared Owl was hunting over the hollows and scrub of Round Down on 31st.

Visible migration (the overhead daylight passage of migrating species such as pigeons, larks, hirundines, wagtails, pipits and finches) is an annual occurrence at Durlston and other Dorset headlands. Passage lasts from September until December, but the main period for finches is from October until mid-November. Counts were undertaken on 34 days between 2nd October and 17th November. Of the seven common finch species, totals were as follows: Goldfinch (15,370), Chaffinch (10,570), Linnet (5,580), Siskin (1,450), Greenfinch (1,420), Lesser Redpoll (1,060) and Brambling (710). Noteworthy passerines passing overhead included Twite (6th and 29th), Lapland Bunting (26th and 29th), Crossbill (27th), Serin (30th), Tree Sparrow (on five days) and Hawfinch (31st). Wood Pigeon migration began around the third week with significant overhead movements reported on 29th (7,850 birds) and 30th (8,900, including over 2,000 in one flock).

A Woodcock was seen on 12th. A juvenile Common Rosefinch was on the western boundary on 13th, and again on the next day with Greenfinches. Yellow-browed Warblers were reported on 9th, 22nd and 25th. At sea, Little Gulls (reported on four days) and Mediterranean Gulls (49 bird-days in this peak month for the species at Durlston) were a feature.

November

Passerine migration continued into November and the accompanying raptors were still in evidence, though not in the numbers of the previous month. A Short-eared Owl flying out to sea on 17th, pursued by crows, was an unusual sight. A Woodcock was present on 2nd and a Yellow-browed Warbler on 5th. Tree Sparrows passed overhead on 2nd and 17th; a movement of 8,000 Wood Pigeons occurred on 13th and the third Lapland Bunting of the autumn passed overhead on 17th. At sea, the peak count of Mediterranean Gulls (12 birds) was recorded on 1st and a Little Auk was seen on 18th. A Purple Sandpiper was recorded on the rocks at Tilly Whim on 26th. An unusual record was of two passing Tufted Ducks on 20th.

December

The year ended as it had begun with the main interest on land being wintering Firecrests and Black Redstarts. At sea, Black-throated Divers passed on 15th and 18th. December was the peak month for Red-throated Divers with seven birds passing on 15th (part of a noticeable movement along the Dorset coast) and six birds two days later. Great Northern Divers were reported on five days. Two Pochards and two Velvet Scoters passing on 19th were both unusual records, as was a Kingfisher reported from Peveril Point at the north end of Durlston Bay on 30th.