

Dorset - South Coast Migration Special

Naturetrek Tour Report

30th September – 3rd October 2025



Reed Bunting



Red Squirrel



Little Egret



Hobby

Tour report by Tom Brereton
Photos by Alan Smith



Naturetrek

Mingledown Barn

Wolf's Lane

Chawton

Alton

Hampshire

GU34 3HJ

UK

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

E: info@naturetrek.co.uk

W: www.naturetrek.co.uk

Tour participants: Tom Brereton and Paula Bates with 12 Naturetrek clients

Day 1

Tuesday 30th September

Warm and mostly sunny with a light north-westerly wind

The tour started at Portland Heights Hotel at 3.00pm, where we checked into our rooms and had a briefing about the holiday from the leaders. We then headed out to do some birding at nearby Ferrybridge. From the Dorset Wildlife Trust Wild Chesil Centre, we scanned the western end of the Chesil Fleet through telescopes. There was plenty of coastal bird activity, with a selection of waders feeding on exposed mud. Among them were Black-tailed Godwit, Knot, Dunlin, Ringed Plover and Turnstone. Other coastal birds included Mediterranean Gull, Little Egret and Great Crested Grebe. On the saltmarsh edge, Linnets, Skylarks and Rock Pipits were feeding, giving excellent views, while in the distance were two Wheatears on the shingle bank.

From here, we went to Barleycrates Lane on Portland to search for a Wryneck that had been showing well on and off here of late. There was no sign of it, the best sighting being a Stonechat. It was a beautiful sunset over Lyme Bay seen from the hotel, where a distant Balearic Shearwater and several Gannets were seen. In the evening, we completed our nightly routine for the holiday, with a daily checklist of sightings, followed by dinner. We had a delicious three-course meal in the restaurant, which affords a spectacular, panoramic view out across The Fleet and Weymouth.

Day 2

Wednesday 1st October

Warm and mostly cloudy with a light south-easterly wind

Before breakfast, a number of the group undertook a visible migration watch outside the hotel. In the pre-dawn gloom, it was apparent that there a steady southbound migration, chiefly of *alba* (Pied/White) Wagtails (50+) and Meadow Pipits (150+), plus smaller numbers of finches, including five Siskins and a Crossbill. A noteworthy count of fourteen Ravens was made.

After breakfast, we drove to Poole. We parked at Baiter, then walked along the edge of the harbour to the quay, spotting Little Egret, Turnstone and Little Grebe. We took the ferry to Brownsea Island for the day. The ferry journey from Poole Quay was really interesting, affording superb views of the varied scenery within Poole Harbour and, on the bird front, Mediterranean Gull, Sandwich Tern and Shag.

We arrived on Brownsea mid-morning, and split into two groups. Tom took half the group birdwatching around Brownsea Lagoon, and Paula took the rest on a tour of the wooded parts of the island.

Brownsea Lagoon proved to be excellent, with masses of water birds present. There were six species of duck, including good numbers of Gadwall. Waders were much in evidence, with an impressive thirteen species recorded, including Ruff, Sanderling, Greenshank, five Bar-tailed Godwits, Oystercatcher, Redshank, Black-tailed Godwit and Avocet.

The standout sighting was the flock of Spoonbills, with an incredible ninety-two counted. Such a count would have been unthinkable just twenty years ago, highlighting how much our avifauna is changing due to climate warming and other factors. Other birds present included several Grey Herons and Little Egrets feeding in the shallows, calling Wate Rail, a roosting flock of Cormorants, and two sightings of Kingfisher. In the willow scrub along the trail to the hides, good views were obtained of two Firecrests, while House Martins and Swallows were seen hawking overhead.



Kingfisher



Kestrel

The woodland walk was similarly eventful. The group got superb close views of Red Squirrel (at one of its only stations in southern England). Fungi were much in evidence, with twelve species recorded including Common Mycena, Parasol, Spindle Shank, Artist's Conk, Charcoal Burner, Ochre Brittlegill, Mica Cap and Deeproot Mushroom. A Clouded Yellow butterfly was also seen.

After a sandwich lunch and a visit to the café for hot drinks, the groups swapped over, so that everyone had both experiences. Similar sightings were made in the afternoon.

While waiting for the ferry back, a Harbour (Common) Seal was spotted close to the jetty, along with Shags and Cormorants. On the return ferry journey, we took a different route closer to Sandbanks, where an informative commentary from the crew was given. After that we headed back to Portland, for the checklist, pre-dinner drinks and another three-course meal.

Day 3

Thursday 2nd October

Mostly cloudy light to moderate southerly winds

Once again, several of the group were out before sunrise and walked to King Barrow Quarry to watch the 'morning flight' of birds on migration; it included 50+ Meadow Pipits, seven Greenfinches, Redpolls and a Crossbill.

The focus for the morning was birding the Isle of Portland. We parked at Southwell and did a circular walk down to Portland Bill, via Portland Bird Observatory (PBO) and the West Cliffs. Birding was slow at first, other than a probable Garden Warbler, though in a thick hedgerow within the Crown Estate Fields Complex managed by PBO, Tom spotted a Wryneck. The bird flew and perched up very briefly on top of the hedge. Adjacent winter bird food plots and stubble fields were alive with Linnets, while several Skylarks were also present.

At Portland Bird Observatory, we met up with the long-standing warden Martin Cade, who gave us a fascinating talk through some of the birds seen and caught that morning, including two beauties: Common Redstart and Goldcrest. What a treat it was to see these birds as such close range in the hand; one lucky group member released the Redstart. Martin also showed us several of the many moths caught the previous night, including White-point, White-speck, Delicate, L-album Wainscot, Black Rustic and Beautiful Gothic, rounding off a superb visit.

After thanking Martin with a case of his favourite beer, we descended to Portland Bill. We did some seawatching from the obelisk, grabbing a coffee en route from the Lobster Pot café. There were plenty of auks passing through, along with Gannets, Kittiwakes, Fulmars and Common Scoters, though the undoubted highlight was a Puffin which dropped in briefly near to a Grey Seal. The most exciting encounter was watching majestic Atlantic Bluefin Tuna feeding in the Portland Race, leaping and splashing as they chased smaller fish.

After this we visited the Observatory Quarry, where we got excellent views of one of the resident Little Owls, on one of the ledges of the cliff face. This species has declined rapidly in Dorset in recent years, but Portland remains a stronghold. We then walked up the coast on the eastern side of the island, where several Rock Pipits showed well and Golden Samphire, a Portland specialist was seen. We stopped at a bare patch of maritime grassland, to get on our hands and knees and look at the rare and tiny Bastard-toadflax, a member of the Sandalwood family. Of further note, some Autumn Lady's-tresses Orchids were nearby, though they had gone over. Insects seen on our morning on Portland included Speckled Wood and Red Admiral butterflies, Ivy Bee, and the hoverflies Common Drone-fly and Marmalade Hoverfly.

We had a sandwich lunch at Southwell, then drove to nearby Radipole Lake RSPB Reserve, Weymouth, seeing a flock of Dark-bellied Brent Geese which had dropped in at Ferrybridge along the way. At Radipole, we walked the network of paths through reedbed habitat and stopped at several water bodies. The standout feature of interest was numerous sightings of Hobbies hunting dragonflies, with at least four individuals present. Other birds seen included Reed Bunting and Peregrine Falcon, rounding off an excellent full day in the field.

Day 4

Friday 3rd October

Early morning fog, then windy with heavy showers

An early morning birdwatch from the hotel was curtailed due to dense fog! With poor weather forecast all day, we decided to stay local. Our first stop was Lodmoor RSPB Reserve, a large area of freshwater pools and reedbeds on the edge of Weymouth. We made a circular walk around the reserve. We started by walking south along Beachdown Way, where we could hear Cetti's Warblers and Bearded Reedlings. From the various viewing points along the southern side of the reserve, we had excellent views of several wildfowl species, including Gadwall, Shoveler and Wigeon, while Marsh Harriers and a Hobby were seen hunting over the reedbeds. The following waders were present: Black-tailed Godwit, Lapwing, Redshank, Common Sandpiper and Common Snipe. Other noteworthy sightings included four Great Egrets and two Kingfishers.

Along the western trail, we looked for the Curlew Sandpipers which had been present of late, but could only see two Dunlins. It proved to be a really good area to work through gull identification, with various ages of Common, Black-headed, Mediterranean, Herring, Lesser Black-backed and Great Black-backed Gulls all present at close

range and viewable through the telescope. With increasing rain, we continued the walk at a greater pace, and returned to the vehicles to dry out.

At lunchtime, we returned to Ferrybridge, where there was opportunity to get coffee and cake, or eat sandwiches while scanning The Fleet for waders and gulls; the first Sanderlings of the holiday were seen. The highlight was a Yellow-legged Gull which dropped in briefly.

After lunch, with continued bad weather, we braced ourselves for a seawatch at nearby Chesil Cove. Our only Arctic Skua of the holiday was lingering here, although it was quite difficult to pick up at times in the choppy seas. Gannets were numerous, while Kittiwakes and Shags were also seen.

All too soon, it was time to head back to the hotel in the late afternoon, to collect our bags and say our farewells. We had certainly packed in a great deal on this short break: we had seen a wealth of habitats, birds and other species.

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Species lists

Birds (H = Heard only)

I=introduced		September-October 2025			
Common name	Scientific name	30	1	2	3
Brent Goose	<i>Branta bernicla</i>			20	
Canada Goose - I	<i>Branta canadensis</i>				✓
Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>		✓	✓	✓
Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>		✓	✓	✓
Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>		✓	✓	✓
Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>		✓	✓	✓
Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>		✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Mareca penelope</i>		✓	✓	✓
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>		✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>		✓	✓	✓
Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>			✓	✓
Common Scoter	<i>Melanitta nigra</i>				✓
Common Pheasant - I	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>			✓	
Feral Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>			1	
Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>		H	H	H
Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>		✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>		✓	✓	
Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>			✓	
Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	1			✓
Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	✓	✓		
Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>			✓	
Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	✓	✓		
Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>				6
Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>			6	10
Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>			5	
Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	✓	✓		
Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>		✓	✓	4
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>		H		1
Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>			✓	
Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>			✓	
Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>	✓	✓		
Red Knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i>	✓	✓		
Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>				2
Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	✓	✓		
Sandwich Tern	<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>	✓	10		
Black-legged Kittiwake	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>				✓
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>		✓	✓	✓
Mediterranean Gull	<i>Ichthyaetus melanocephalus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓

I=introduced		September-October 2025			
Common name	Scientific name	30	1	2	3
Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>	✓		✓	✓
European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>				
Arctic Skua	<i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>				1
Atlantic Puffin	<i>Fratercula arctica</i>			1	
Razorbill	<i>Alca torda</i>			✓	
Common Guillemot	<i>Uria aalge</i>			✓	
Northern Fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>			✓	
Balearic Shearwater	<i>Puffinus mauretanicus</i>	✓			
Northern Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>			✓	✓
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
European Shag	<i>Gulosus aristotelis</i>		✓	✓	
Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>		92		
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	✓	✓		✓
Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>			✓	4
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>		✓	✓	✓
Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>				2
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		✓	✓	✓
Little Owl - I	<i>Athene noctua</i>			1	
Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	2	H	2	
Eurasian Wryneck	<i>Jynx torquilla</i>			1	
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>		✓		
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>			4	1
Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>			✓	
Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>		✓		
Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Carriion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		14	✓	
Coal Tit	<i>Periparus ater</i>		✓		
Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		✓	✓	✓
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		✓	✓	✓
Bearded Reedling	<i>Panurus biarmicus</i>				H
Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	✓		✓	✓
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>		✓		
Western House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>		✓		
Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>			H	✓
Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	✓	✓	✓	
Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>		✓		
Garden Warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>			?	

I=introduced		September-October 2025			
Common name	Scientific name	30	1	2	3
Common Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>		2		
Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>		✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>		✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>		✓		
Eurasian Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>		✓		
Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>		✓		
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>		✓	✓	✓
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>			✓	
European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	2			
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>		✓	✓	✓
Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>		✓	✓	✓
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>		50+	50+	✓
Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>		150	✓	✓
European Rock Pipit	<i>Anthus petrosus</i>	4		✓	✓
Eurasian Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		✓	✓	
European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>			7	✓
Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>	✓	✓	✓	
Redpoll	<i>Acanthis flammea</i>			✓	
Red Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>		✓	✓	
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		✓		✓
Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>		5	✓	
Common Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>			✓	3

Mammals

		September-October 2025			
Common name	Scientific name	30	1	2	3
European Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>		✓	✓	
Eurasian Red Squirrel	<i>Sciurus vulgaris</i>		✓		
Grey Seal	<i>Halichoerus grypus</i>			✓	
Harbour (Common) Seal	<i>Phoca vitulina</i>		✓		
European Badger	<i>Meles meles</i>		✓		

Fishes

		September-October 2025			
Common name	Scientific name	30	1	2	3
Atlantic Bluefin Tuna	<i>Thunnus thynnus</i>			✓	

Butterflies

		September-October 2025			
Common name	Scientific name	30	1	2	3
Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias croceus</i>		✓		
Large White	<i>Pieris brassicae</i>	✓			
Small White	<i>Pieris rapae</i>	✓	✓	✓	
Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>		✓	✓	
Speckled Wood	<i>Pararge aegeria</i>		✓	✓	

Moths

		September-October 2025			
Common name	Scientific name	30	1	2	3
Silver Y	<i>Autographa gamma</i>		✓		
Angle Shades	<i>Phlogophora meticulosa</i>		✓		
Beautiful Gothic	<i>Leucochlaena oditis</i>		✓		
Black Rustic	<i>Aporophyla nigra</i>		✓		
Delicate	<i>Mythimna vitellina</i>		✓		
White-speck	<i>Mythimna unipuncta</i>		✓		
White-point	<i>Mythimna albipuncta</i>		✓		
L-album Wainscot	<i>Mythimna l-album</i>		✓		
Large Yellow Underwing	<i>Noctua pronuba</i>		✓		

Dragonflies

		September-October 2025			
Common name	Scientific name	30	1	2	3
Migrant Hawker	<i>Aeshna mixta</i>	✓	✓		
Southern Hawker	<i>Aeshna cyanea</i>	✓	✓		
Common Darter	<i>Sympetrum striolatum</i>	✓	✓		

Hoverflies

		September-October 2025			
Common name	Scientific name	30	1	2	3
Marmalade Hoverfly	<i>Episyrphus balteatus</i>			✓	
Common Drone Fly	<i>Eristalis tenax</i>			✓	

Bees

		September-October 2025			
Common name	Scientific name	30	1	2	3
Ivy Bee	<i>Colletes hederae</i>			✓	
Buff-tailed Bumblebee	<i>Bombus terrestris</i>			✓	

Fungi

Common name	Scientific name	September-October 2025			
		30	1	2	3
Honey Fungus	<i>Armillaria mellea</i>		✓		
Mica Cap	<i>Coprinellus micaceus</i>		✓		
Artist's Conk	<i>Ganoderma applanatum</i>		✓		
Spindle Shank	<i>Gymnoporus fusipes</i>		✓		
Deeproot Mushroom	<i>Hmenopellis radicata</i>		✓		
Sulphur Tuft	<i>Hypholoma fasciculare</i>		✓		
Parasol	<i>Macrolepiota procera</i>		✓		
Common Mycena	<i>Mycena galericulata</i>		✓		
Charcoal Burner	<i>Russula cyanoxantha</i>		✓		
Orchre Brittlegill	<i>Russula ochroleuca</i>		✓		
Turkey Tail	<i>Trametes versicolor</i>		✓		