



Arne Heath

Photographs from The Isle of Purbeck

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Anyone interested in wildlife will be familiar with Purbeck's lowland heathland either first hand or from the comfort of a sofa. It's fusion of gorse and heather provides a suitable habitat for Dartford Warblers and Nightjars which are of course best heard and seen in real life, but their essence can still be appreciated from the results captured by a camera. The same can be said for the butterflies, moths and dragonflies that frequent the heath. My father was a keen birdwatcher. I remember his tiny grey notebooks listing the different species which he religiously ticked-off throughout the year. He spent much of his retirement with several birdwatching friends peering through his binoculars and writing about his day's experiences mostly in Purbeck. Identifying the different species of waders feeding on the shores and mud flats of Poole harbour's estuary.

It's channels and inlets overlooked by forestry and old oak woodlands, ideal cover for the different raptors to rear their young, preying on the six species of reptiles that breed among the sand dunes. While in amongst the surrounding scrub and undergrowth a variety of resident and migrant birds' stuff their beaks full of insects for their hungry chicks.

Along Purbeck's eroded coastline of sandy beaches, chalk stacks and limestone cliffs the clocks are turned back 150 million years to the late Jurassic-Cretaceous boundary. Between the compressed chert beds of the Portland formations ledges provide suitable breeding sites for half a dozen or so seabirds including Razorbills, Guillemots, Fulmars, Kittiwakes and an ever-decreasing number of Puffins which like so much of our wildlife have sadly declined in numbers over the years.

There is as much to take in when walking along the chalk ridge between Corfe Castle and Swanage. Poole harbour and Brownsea Island in the distance as well as the hints of industrial activity spanning centuries of hard labour extracting stone, clay and more recently the lucrative flow of oil. The remnants of the disused quarries and mines have created some precious havens for wildlife as do the sheltered valleys leading down to the cliffs from the southern plateau which provide plenty of cover for migrating birds to rest and replenish before continuing their long journeys and there are the ancient grassland meadows, in which wildflowers, butterflies and other tiny creatures temporarily coexist.



Silver-studded Blue (*Plebejus ardens*) male.

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Silver-studded Blue (*Plebejus ardens*) female.

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Grayling (*Hipparchia semele*).

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Grayling (*Hipparchia semele*) underwing

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Broad-bodied Chaser (*Libellula depressa*) Immature male.

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Four-spotted Chaser (*Libellula quadrimaculata*) female.

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Keeled Skimmer (*Orthetrum coerulescens*) female.

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Black-tailed Skimmer (*Orthetrum cancellatum*) female.

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Keeled Skimmer (*Orthetrum coerulescens*) female.

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Keeled Skimmer (*Orthetrum coerulescens*) female.

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Golden dung fly (*Scathofago stercoraria*).

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Noon Fly (*Mesembrina meridiana*).

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Shore fly with prey.

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Full grown Peacock larvae with their branched spines for protection.

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The Beautiful Demoiselle (*Agrion virgo*) male.

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The Beautiful Demoiselle (*Agrion virgo*) female.

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Speckled Wood (*Pararge aegeria*) underwing.

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Meadow Brown (*Maniola jurtina*) underwing.

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Young Sika deer.

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Juvenile Grass snake (*Natrix natrix*).

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Slow worm (*Arduis fragilis*).

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The “zipper” or “zigzag” in the Wasp spider’s web (*Argiope bruennichi*) is known as the stabilimentum. Possibly used by different spiders for different purposes but most likely to make their web more visible to birds so they don’t damage the web by flying into it. Another possibility is that the stabilimentum transmits UV light which insects are drawn to.

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Silver Y (*Autographa gamma*).

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Dung beetle and dog poo.

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