

Sutton Coldfield u3a Birdwatching Group

Where we have been and what we have seen in 2023

We have had another enjoyable year of birdwatching visiting a varied number of reserves. Lunch was either a picnic or we made use of the cafes on site. We were only defeated by the weather once when floods and torrential rain caused us to call off our October visit to Ladywalk NR and Broomey Croft NR. We have listed our visits below with highlights.

27th January Journeys into Wild Wales – talk by Nick Martin, Conservation Manager with The Warwickshire Wildlife Trust

Due to some technical difficulties, Nick could not give us our expected talk on “A Celebration of British Birds”. Instead, we were treated to a knowledgeable, humorous and illustrated talk on his journeys into Wales travelling in his van kitted out as office, kitchen, bedroom etc. We were taken to various sites across Wales including Worlds End for Red grouse and wheatear, Holyhead Harbour for Black guillemots, South Stack for Kittiwake, Fulmar and Peregrine falcon, Elan Valley for dippers, spotted flycatchers and redstarts, Gigrin Farm for Red kites, Aberystwyth for purple sandpipers and The Great Orme for choughs. A fantastic talk. We will welcome Nick back in 2024

17th February – Rutland Water

On a windy but dry day 7 of us started off at Eyebrook Reservoir where the birds we saw included Goldeneye, Great crested grebe, Wigeon, Teal, Great white egret and, on our way to Rutland Water, a group of Red-legged partridge. Rutland Water proved to be very windy so we moved to the reserve run by the Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust and Anglian Water. Birds added to our list included Redwing, Reed bunting, Grey heron, Slavonian grebe and Shelduck. With the improvement in the weather, we were able to lunch outside and, in the afternoon, birds added included Curlew, Common snipe, Redshank and Herring Gull. 49 birds seen,

17th March – Belvide Reservoir and Wolsey Nature Reserve

Weather was better than forecast. 17 of us arrived for our visit. The birds seen at Belvide included Buzzard, Goldeneye, Gadwall, Reed bunting, Oystercatcher, Dark bellied Brent goose, Little ringed plover, Chiff chaff, Shoveller, Cattle egret, Wigeon, Grey Heron, Lesser black-backed gull and Pochard. 40 birds seen and one heard – Great spotted woodpecker. After lunch at Wolseley – headquarters of the Staffordshire Wildlife Trust, we added Kingfisher, Goosander, Tree creeper and Nuthatch before rain stopped play.

14th April – Attenborough Nature Reserve, Nottinghamshire

The weather forecast was for a wet day but 7 of us braved the weather. The morning was not too bad, only a few spots of rain. Birds seen included Reed bunting, Sparrowhawk, Treecreeper, Grey heron, Chiffchaff, Wren, Common buzzard, Stock dove, Egyptian goose and also heard Green woodpecker, Garden and Reed warbler. After lunch we planned a short walk because of the weather and added Song thrush, Oystercatcher, and a rare sighting of a Cetti's warbler. Just when we were about to leave, we were told the Sand Martin hide, which is in the middle of a man-made bank, was open so we were able to view the Sand martins checking out their nesting holes. 44 birds seen and 3 heard.

19th May – Brandon Marsh Nature Reserve

12 of us arrived on a sunny day at this reserve which is also the headquarters of the Warwickshire Wildlife Trust. Most of the reserve is old gravel workings. In the morning we saw Swallow, Garden warbler. We also heard and eventually saw a Cuckoo sitting on top of a tree. Other birds included Chiffchaff, Mute swan, Greylag geese, Lapwing, Common tern, Little ringed plover, Gadwall, Grey heron, Shelduck, Sand martin, Jay, Hobby, Dunnock, Kestrel and Nuthatch. Our afternoon meadow and field walk additions included Green woodpecker and Willow warbler but these were heard only.

In addition, we also looked at butterflies which included Orange tip, Red admiral, Brimstone, Holly blue, Small copper and Dingy skipper. Insects included Mayflies, Banded demoiselles and a click beetle. Muntjak deer were also around.

57 birds seen including 4 heard.

2nd June – evening visit to Cannock Chase

13 of us met at White House Common carpark on a sunny but chilly evening. During our walk we saw Wren, Song thrush, Robin and heard a Willow warbler. Our first sighting of Long eared owls occurred when we reached the valley which was very special. Other birds included Cuckoo, Stonechat, Kestrel, Hobby and Woodcock. Although we finished our evening walk in a place known for Nightjars, unfortunately we did not have any sightings although some of us heard the churring sound. We were pleased, however, with the quality of what we saw. 14 birds in total of which 3 were heard.

16th June – coach visit to RSPB Bempton Cliffs

23 of us visited RSPB Bempton Cliffs, a spectacular cliff top reserve, on a very warm and sunny day. On our way into the reserve some of us managed to see a Yellowhammer on a hedge. At the carpark we were surrounded by Swallows, Tree sparrows, Jackdaws and the odd Woodpigeon. Most of us took the cliff top walk where we saw Razorbill, Kittiwake, Guillemot, Gannet, Herring Gull, Common gull and Lesser black-backed gull. Looking towards the fields we saw a Barn owl with its prey and also Skylark, Meadow pipit and Pheasant. We finally found our Puffins, although not many, but pleased lots of people. A Bridled guillemot was pointed out to us on the way back to the visitor centre – these birds have an eye ring and stripe unlike the Common guillemot. After lunch at the centre the afternoon walk added a number of birds including Peregrine falcon, Stonechat, Corn bunting, Yellow wagtail, Linnet and Raven.

38 Birds seen.

Butterflies included Red admiral, Small heath, Brimstone, Speckled wood and Wall brown.

21st July – morning visit to RSPB Middleton Lakes

17 of us met at the car park. The weather was a mixture of cloud and sun except for the last half hour when it rained. In the car park and along the woodland path the birds included Magpie, Crow, Blue tit, Great tit, Little egret, Goldfinch, Greenfinch, Dunnock, Blackcap, Robin and Nuthatch. Onto the wetlands where the birds included Common tern, Black-headed gull, Reed warbler, tufted duck, Black-tailed godwits, Swift, Gadwall, Great white egret, Common buzzard, Egyptian Geese and Great-crested grebe. Most of us managed to see the Bittern in flight being chased by a Lesser black-backed gull.

A total of 42 birds seen.

Butterfly count was low because of the weather but included Gatekeeper, Green-veined white and Peacock.

August – no birdwatching

15th September – Upton Warren Nature Reserve

7 of us met on a pleasant sunny day at the reserve, near Droitwich, which is managed by the Worcestershire Wildlife Trust. The reserve is in two parts – The Moors Pool which is freshwater and The Flashes where the pools are fed by underground brine seepage.

We started off at The Moors and birds included were Canada geese, Woodpigeon, Water rail (heard) Great spotted woodpecker, Cetti's warbler (heard) Lapwing, Mute swan, Cormorant, Gadwall, Curlew, Shoveller, Common teal, Kestrel and Herring gull.

After lunch at the café by the sailing lake (where we saw Grey heron) we moved to The Flashes where birds seen included Pied wagtail, Common buzzard, Linnet, Common sandpiper and Common snipe.

33 birds seen and 2 heard.

October – visit cancelled due to dreadful weather.

17th November – coach visit to Slimbridge Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust

27 of us visited Slimbridge. We were very lucky with the weather as it was partially sunny all of our time there.

We started off at the Estuary Tower dropping into other hides there and back. Birds seen included Jackdaw, Dunlin, Golden plover, Shelduck, Common teal, Whooper swan, Ross's goose, Wigeon, Rook, Tufted Duck, House sparrow, Lesser white-fronted goose and Shoveller. At the Peng Hide we saw the two Bewick swans and their two young who had flown in the previous day having travelled 2,200 miles from Russia. As with other Bewicks, they had arrived in the UK later than usual. Other birds seen here were Pintails, Common and Spotted redshanks and Common snipe. At South Lake birds seen included Cormorant, Little grebe and Black-tailed godwit. We also saw a Ruff and Curlew.

After lunch we moved through the reserve collections to the Zeiss Hide where we added Greater black-backed gull, Stonechat, Reed bunting and Cranes. Finishing off at the Kingfisher Hide, among the birds added on our way to it and at the hide were Greenfinch, Chaffinch, Fieldfare, Redwing, Starling, Common buzzard and Long-tailed tit. Others also saw Collared dove, Kestrel, White-fronted goose, Cetti's warbler and Water rail. On the way back to the coach we went by way of the Otter collection and were fortunate to be there at feeding time.

A very enjoyable day with 66 birds seen.

8th December – morning visit to RSPB Sandwell Valley

9 of us met at the visitor centre on a surprisingly dry morning with cloud and occasional sun. Starting at the visitor centre birds seen included Blue tit, Magpie, Blackbird, Ring-necked parakeet, Great tit, Coal tit, Bullfinch and Jackdaw. Moving to the hide on Forge Mill Lake we saw Common teal, Cormorant, Moorhen, Tufted duck, Gadwall, Goldeneye, Pochard, Lesser black-backed gull, Kestrel and Goosander. From here we walked to and along the River Tame which led back to the visitor centre. Among the birds seen on this walk were Robin, Canada Geese, Lapwing, Common snipe, Common gull, Herring gull, Little egret, Great-spotted woodpecker, Cetti's warbler (heard) and Goldfinch.

A good day to end our birdwatching year with 39 birds seen and one heard.

John Foulds, Peter Ford, John Bates and Wendy Burnett – organisers for SCu3a Birdwatching Group