

Scu3a Birdwatching Group

Where we have been and what we have seen in 2024

We have enjoyed another successful birdwatching year. We did have to amend the dates for our talk by Nick Martin from January to March and for our trip to Frampton but we were defeated by the weather only once – our evening visit to Cannock Chase was cancelled. Not bad considering some of the storms that have occurred this year.

In good company our lunch was either by picnic or using the café facilities of the site we were visiting. Where possible, use of buggies available at some sites proved very useful when required.

Here are some of the highlights from our visits which included a couple of new sites. A total of 166 birds seen during the year.

Rutland Water 16th February

There were 15 of us who gathered at Egleton on what turned out to be a mild and partly sunny day. We spent the day at various lagoons and among the birds seen were Jackdaw, Blackbird, Long-tailed tit, Song thrush, Shoveller, Gadwall, Oystercatcher, Red kite, Curlew, Pied Wagtail, Goosander, Little grebe, Grey Heron, Great white egret, Goldeneye and Pochard. Nuthatch and Green woodpecker were also heard. With the aid of telescopes we had distant views of Great Northern divers and a Common scoter. After lunch we did some birdwatching from the visitor centre and walked to lagoon no 5. Birds added to the list included Reed bunting, Stonechat and Starling. A total of 48 birds seen and 3 heard. At the end of the visit, John F discovered that Britain's largest dinosaur, a 10 metre long Ichthyosaurus was found in 2022 in Lagoon No 4.

Ladywalk LNR and Broomey Croft 15th March

14 of us met on a day where we luckily missed most of the promised showers. We started at Ladywalk LNR which is behind Hams Hall and managed by the West Midlands Bird Club. From the carpark we were able to see a Peregrine falcon on the nearby pylon and a singing chiffchaff in a tree.

On our walk round the reserve, which includes following the River Tame, we saw Tawny owl in a gap in a tree -, Reed bunting, Long tailed tit, Cetti's warbler, Magpie, Mallard, Shoveller, Little egret, Mute swan, Wigeon, Tufted duck, Oystercatcher, Common redshank, Great crested grebe, Stock dove, Common snipe, Little grebe, Goosander.

After our picnic lunch we moved to Broomey Croft which is part of Kingsbury Water Park. Here, other birds added included Pied-wagtail, Lesser black-backed gull, Great white egret, Goldeneye and Grey Heron.

We do also look at interesting insects, butterflies and wildflowers on our visits. On this occasion, we saw a strange insect which turned out to be a Saucer bug. Fortunately, it was only photographed as it has a wasp like sting!!

Outside the reserve some of us stopped to see the Cattle egrets which were among the sheep at Lower Farm.

50 birds seen and two heard.

A Celebration of British Birds – a talk by Nick Martin 22nd March

Last year we had a wonderful talk by Nick and this year we were again treated to a knowledgeable and amusing illustrated talk. He thought the talk should be called "My

struggle to see 200 birds in a year - 2022"!! His list included resident, summer and winter visitors. Nick knew it would be difficult, even impossible to do this locally so he visited many different habitats across the UK. The year required a lot of planning. He visited back gardens, canals and locally Brandon Marsh, Blithfield and Middleton Lakes. Further afield, Scotland including the Cairngorms and the Western Isles for White tailed eagle, Golden Eagle, Divers, Skuas, Gannets, Wales including Worlds End, for Black grouse, Red grouse and the Mumbles for Waders and Gulls, Scoma for Guillemots, Puffins, Razorbills. Croome Abbey - National Trust to see and hear a nightingale. He even visited Salisbury Plain to see the Great bustard, dressing up in a special bustard suit in order not to scare them!! His final bird, a Smew he saw on the last day of 2022 at Eyebrook Reservoir in Rutland. A truly entertaining talk.

Shustoke Reservoir and Marsh Lane NR 19th April

12 of us arrived at Shustoke Reservoir braving the weather forecast. A few drops of rain early on but clear for the rest of the day.

Birds recorded in the carpark and around the reservoir included Blackbird, Chiffchaff (h), Crow, Lesser black backed gull, and Blackcap. Around the reservoir hundreds of hirundines were flying which were mainly sand martins but also house martins and swallows were spotted after some searching. Other birds seen included Gadwall, Great crested grebe, Robin, Tufted duck, Coot, Long-tailed tit, Grey heron and Red kite.

8 of us moved onto Marsh Lane after collecting our permits from the fishing hut at Stonebridge golf course. One of our members, Sandra, who was already at Marsh Lane was able to tell us what to look for. So, after our picnic lunch we set off and saw Goldfinch, Oystercatcher, Canada geese, Lapwing, Common tern, Dunlin, Little grebe and after much searching among the many Black headed gulls by Paul, a Mediterranean gull was spotted. When John sorted through his photos later, he discovered a Common snipe in the background behind a lapwing!!

The count for the day was 48 seen and 6 heard. We did look out for butterflies but the count was low Orange tip, Brimstone and an unidentified white.

Branston Country Park and Tucklesholme NR 17th May

11 of us arrived at the carpark. The weather was sunny all day. In the carpark we saw a hobby together with Swifts and House martins flying higher above it. All feeding on insects. Other birds seen on our walk round the lake included Mute swan, Goldfinch, Cetti's warbler, Chiffchaff, Common tern, Great crested grebe, Common buzzard, Dunnock and Blackcap. Orange tip and Speckled wood butterflies, a White ermine moth. Neil and Dominic saw an otter which delighted them.

After lunch at the Hub Café we moved on to Tucklesholme NR which is a relatively new Staffordshire Wildlife Trust Reserve. New birds added included Grey heron, Reed warbler, Willow warbler, Lesser whitethroat, Garden warbler, Common whitethroat and sparrowhawk. On this reserve 9 different warblers were seen which was a very good result. The only one missing was the Grasshopper warbler. During the walk round this reserve, John spotted a Coot and Great crested grebe making their nests side by side. He wondered how long this neighbourliness would last as the nesting season progressed??

Other sightings included lots of Banded demoiselles and a variety of damselflies.

46 different birds seen and 4 heard.

June evening visit to Cannock Chase cancelled due to bad weather

Frampton RSPB Lincolnshire 28th June

29 travelled by coach to RSPB Frampton. The weather was cloudy, windy but fortunately dry all day. A Red Kite was seen from the coach just before we entered the reserve. During our morning walk birds seen included Little egret, Spoonbills, lots of Avocets, Little ringed plover, Black-tailed godwits, Skylark, Swift, Common redshank, Common buzzard, Sedge warbler, Gadwall, Shelduck and Meadow pipit. At least two Marsh harriers were seen over the salt marsh. As we gathered at the visitor centre for lunch, the centre staff pointed out a Spotted redshank in summer plumage and a Green sandpiper.

During our afternoon walk we managed to locate the Whooper swan who was injured and had remained on the reserve unable to fly off to complete its migration. We also revisited the Spoonbills in the hope that they would lift their heads for us. Unfortunately, not. Other birds seen by members included Common Sandpiper, Greenshank, Dunlin and Kingfisher. A Water rail was heard.

A total number of 56 seen and one heard. Another enjoyable day.

Middleton Lakes RSPB 19th July

19 of us started the day at Middleton Lakes car park. The weather was hot and sunny which did not help our birdwatching as the birds seemed to be very quiet hiding from the sun! The heat also affected the birdwatchers too!! Despite all this, birds seen included Goldfinch, Mallard, Blue tit, Little egret, Moorhen, Grey heron, Common whitethroat, Reed warbler, Stock dove, Lesser black-backed gull, Mute swan, Common tern, Common teal, Blackcap and Hobby. The weather was good for butterflies and these included Gatekeeper, Ringlet, Brimstone and Green veined white.

After lunch at the Courtyard Café, three of us walked round the meadow near the carpark where we added Common buzzard, Magpie and Sedge warbler to the list plus Damselflies, Demoiselles and a Brown hawk dragonfly plus a water boatman swimming on its back.

A total number of 28 birds seen, 4 heard plus 7 different butterflies

No birdwatching visit in August

Belvide and Gailey Reservoirs 20th September

9 of us met at Belvide Reservoir which is a West Midland Bird Club Reserve. The weather was cloudy but dry. At the dam end of the reservoir, we found people looking through their scopes as a very distant juvenile Lesser scaup. A few of us managed to view this too. Other birds included Grey heron, Siskin (heard) Moorhen, Great crested grebe, Common sandpiper, Gadwall, Teal, Raven, Herring gull and Ringed plover. Further round the reservoir we saw Little egret, Cormorant, Great white egret, Reed bunting, Jay and a Hobby. We also had a distant view of a Black-necked grebe and two Little grebes.

After lunch at Dobbie's café some of us moved to Gailey Reservoir, another West Midlands Bird Club reserve. Grey wagtail Kingfisher and Chiffchaff were added to the list.

A total of 44 birds seen and one heard. We were very pleased the rain kept away.

Brandon Marsh NR 18th October

8 of us started the day at Brandon Marsh NR which is the headquarters of the Warwickshire Wildlife Trust. The weather was a bit misty to start with but finished off with sunshine.

Birds seen on the various walks included Goldfinch, Robin, Moorhen, Shoveller, Gadwall, Grey heron, Shelduck, Little Grebe, Herring gull, Jackdaw, Kestrel, Bullfinch, Jay and Great-spotted woodpecker.

After lunch at the reserve café we visited the pools on the southern part of the reserve and added Wigeon, Water rail, Kingfisher, Great white egret and Dunnock. We also saw a Swan goose which is a presumed escape as it was a long way from Mongolia!

A total of 41 birds seen.

Slimbridge WWT 22nd November

22 of us visited Slimbridge by coach. Slimbridge is the headquarters of the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust. The weather was good even though it was cold and we did have some sunshine and a little wind. We were very fortunate as the days either side were not good and the reserve was closed on the Sunday for part of the day due to Storm Bert!!

On the way to the Estuary Tower, among the birds we saw included Common teal, Moorhen, House sparrow and Jackdaw. From the tower we saw Shelduck, Barnacle geese, Egyptian geese, Golden plover, Starling, Dunlin, Ross's goose, Pintail, Common redshank and Black-tailed godwit.

From other hides, birds seen included Herring gull, Kestrel, Lesser black-backed gull, Common cranes in flight, Grey heron, Bewick's swans, Pochard, Feral pigeon, juvenile Spoonbill, Great black-backed gull.

After lunch at the restaurant, we visited more hides at the south end of the reserve. Before we reached the Kingfisher Hide, Paul came out of a hide to tell us that 3 cranes were close by which were good to see. From Kingfisher hide we saw Redwing, Fieldfare, Ruff, Chaffinch, Song thrush, Great tit and Blackbird.

On the way back we stopped off at Zeiss Hide and had a distant view towards the estuary, of a Peregrine falcon. A Kingfisher and Common buzzard were seen by a few members outside the main group also 5 Cattle egrets were seen by some from the coach outside the reserve.

A total of 57 different birds seen. We were very grateful to John B and Paul's telescopes which helped find and identify many distant birds.

Sandwell Valley RSPB 13th December

11 of us gathered for the last birdwatching visit of 2024. A cloudy day with a little drizzle. Mince pies all round to begin and a Mistle thrush in the car park. We walked clockwise round the reserve as the hide was not yet open. From the visitor centre we saw Ring-necked parakeets, Bluetit, Chaffinch, Blackbird, Robin and Wren. We walked along the path by the River Tame and, on the reserve, birds seen included Cormorant, Lapwing, Common teal, Mute swan, Tufted duck and Less Black-backed gull. Paul also found Siskin, Less redpoll and Bullfinch and later a flock of linnets. Wigeon, Gadwall, Pochard, Shoveller and Redwings were added. From the hide we saw Grey wagtail, Pied wagtail, Goosander and, with pleasure, a rare Caspian gull. We were very pleased with this sighting.

From the visitor centre café we added Goldfinch and Dunnock. Sandra and Linda on their buggies also saw Little egret and heard Water rail and Cetti's warbler.

A total of 39 birds seen and 2 heard and with the addition of the Caspian gull, a good end to our 2024 birding year.

Scu3a Birdwatching Group Organisers— John Foulds, Peter Ford, John Bates, Wendy Burnett