



Visit our website at http://wgbwcopy.wikidot.com/wgbg

NEWSLETTER NOVEMBER 2022

TONIGHT'S MEETING (3rd November)

Tonight we welcome the return of Keith Offord with a talk entitled "Skydancers".

Keith is a professional ornithologist, having established an interest in birds at an early age, pursuing this wherever he was living. He has a particular interest in raptors and graduated from Liverpool University with a degree in zoology, which involved research into the hunting and feeding behaviour of Hen Harriers. He has been actively involved in the monitoring of breeding raptors in Wales for 45 years and is coordinator of the NE Wales Raptor Study Group.

His photography has taken him all over the world and has received substantial acknowledgement. Each year he travels all over the UK giving lectures to photographic, wildlife and general societies. In addition, he has published many articles and features for wildlife and birding magazines plus accounts on the Hen Harrier and Merlin in the recently published *Birds in Wales.* Keith last visited in November last year.

Please join me in welcoming Keith for what I am sure will be a very entertaining evening.

COACH TRIPS

The next coach trip is on Sunday 20th November to North Wales and Conway, departing from the Guild at 8am.

We should expect to see a variety of wildfowl, waders and raptors at various stops along the coast and at the reserve. RSPB members should bring their cards. There is a £6 entry fee to Conway reserve for non-members. There are toilet and café facilities at Conway reserve (note that due to redevelopment work, the Coffee Shop is currently closed. However, they are still serving a range of hot and cold drinks, sandwiches, and tasty treats from a mobile catering unit (outdoor seating and takeaway only)).

Book your seat at the desk.





Our December outing is a morning car trip to Marbury Country Park followed by Christmas lunch. See details below.

CHRISTMAS LUNCH

This year's Christmas lunch will be held on Saturday 10th December at the Spinner & Bergamot pub/restaurant in Comberbach at 12:30pm after a morning of birding at Marbury Country Park from 9:30am until 12noon.

A 2 course meal costs £23.95 and a 3 course meal costs £27.95.

The Christmas menu is available on the pub website at http://www.spinnerandbergamot.co.uk/. Copies will be available at tonight's meeting.

Please make your meal selections at tonight's meeting or contact Dave Swann on 07983 392685.

The balance for the meal can be paid at the pub on the day (cash or card, no cheques).

Final instructions and directions to follow in the December newsletter.

WEEKEND AWAY

Reminder – the balance for the trip is due by 1st December. It would help me greatly if some members would pay the balance due at the November meeting as our December meeting is always extremely busy. Thanking you in advance.

Cheques payable to The Guild for Lifelong Learning.

BARBARA



Great Egret seen on our car trip to Burton Mere Reserve, June 2022

COACH TRIP TO RSPB SALTHOLME ON 16th OCTOBER 2022

Oh, it was so good that our Sunday trips were resuming again after the summer break; the venue for the first foray of the season was Saltholme. This RSPB reserve near Stockton-on-Tees is surrounded by heavy industry, including a chemical works and chimneys flaring off unwanted gases.

We boarded the coach early and left on time with our regular driver Mustafa at the helm. As we reached the summit of the M62, the sun rose over the hills and it was as if an unknown hand had poured liquid gold over the tops. It was breathtakingly beautiful. We stopped at Wetherby services for our usual break where birding began in earnest once we had been watered and with coffees in hand our first three birds of the day were seen, Red Kite, a couple of Pied Wagtails and several Black-headed Gulls.



Lesser Yellowlegs

Arriving at Saltholme at 10.30, we were met by a ranger who explained the reserve layout and where the recent sightings were, the most important being a Lesser Yellowlegs which was still around. The majority of the group headed straight for the Phil Stead hide where we were all able to enjoy excellent views of this American wader feeding in the short wetland grass close to the water. With the Lesser Yellowlegs (*Tringa flavipes*) were Redshank (*Tringa totanus*) and Spotted Redshank (*Tringa erythropus*) – all buddies together!



On the mud banks outside the visitor centre were 5 Stock Doves and 2 Mute Swans with cygnets and on the feeders, Tree Sparrows, Goldfinch and Chaffinch. In a small tree to one side of the feeders were 2 Greenfinch and a Brambling – my first of the autumn.

The main group then split up and my party headed for the Saltholme Pool hide, going via the walled garden which was sheltered and warm in the morning sunshine. Two pristine Red Admirals were feeding on the purple Michaelmas daisies and against the backdrop of a vivid blue sky formed a stunning picture.

Walking along the Dragonfly path we were amazed at the

Goldfinches & Greenfinches numbers of geese and waders feeding in the fields. Every so often there was a disturbance and literally hundreds of Lapwing, Golden Plover and Starlings took flight, wheeling around before settling down again in almost the same spot. The geese were not so numerous, being in tens rather than hundreds. There were plenty of Canada Geese, Pink Footed Geese, Barnacle Geese and an occasional Greylag. There was one lone Whooper Swan feeding amongst them with a Kestrel hovering nearby.

On Saltholme Pool were a dozen or so Blacktailed Godwits, plenty of Teal, Mallard, Shoveler, Wigeon and a few Gadwall. A small flock of Dunlin flew in briefly and I believe there was a pair of Little Grebe ducking and diving. Our group of five had by now increased in numbers and we decided to have lunch whilst enjoying the activities on the water; thus another pleasant hour passed. Finally and reluctantly we moved on to Paddy's hide which was somewhat disappointing as there were no new additions to the list.



Pink-footed Goose

At this point our small group split again; Jenny and I

headed for the Wildlife Watchpoint whilst the others took the Wildflower walk to Haverton Holes pool where Curlew and Heron were seen. Earlier in the day a couple of



Whooper Swan

our new members visited here first and were rewarded with superb views of the Bittern. It was standing in the reeds at the water's edge for some considerable time, then took off and flew around the pool towards them before landing in the reeds nearby. What a sighting!!!

Two members decided to walk down to Dorman's hide overlooking East Saltholme pool. I don't think any other members have visited this hide as it is away from the main reserve and a good twenty minutes brisk walk. It was well worth the effort for them as they saw 2 Spotted Redshank and 7

Pintail on the water and from Huntman's Drive, Curlew, Snipe, Meadow Pipit, Skylarks and a Great Black-backed Gull. A fellow birder offered them a lift back to the coach which they gratefully accepted.

Meanwhile from the Wildlife Watchpoint Jenny and I observed a Marsh Harrier circling around looking for food. There were several Moorhens running around in the reed stubble but alas no Water Rail. By now it was approaching 3 o'clock, the sky had clouded over and the wind was picking up. And the café was due to close in half an hour! We may have been the first in for tea and cake, but were certainly not the only ones as more and more members drifted in for a hot drink.



Our final visit of the day was back to Phil Stead hide and the Yellowlegs. This time he was

Hedgehog

much closer to the hide and everyone had absolutely fabulous views of him as well as the 2 Ruff and 2 Common Redshank foraging with him. As we made our way slowly back to the coach a hedgehog was spotted grunting around in the undergrowth. What a day!!!

We arrived back in Wilmslow at 7.30 pm after a comfortable drive home thanks to Mustafa. Our group total was 68 and the bird of the day undoubtedly the Lesser Yellowlegs. A UK first for everyone.



Photos by Robert D & Barbara P

BARBARA P

EUROPEAN BEE-EATERS IN NORFOLK

If you watched Springwatch earlier this year you may have seen the item which covered the appearance of a colony of European Bee-eaters in Norfolk. Eight Bee-eaters set up home in a disused sand quarry near Trimmingham, just south-east of Cromer. The RSPB quickly stepped in to monitor the site. They did a deal with the farmer whose field was adjacent to the quarry to use that as a car park, set up a vantage point at the edge of the quarry, set up a tent and mobile toilets, and charged £5 admission.

It just so happened that shortly afterwards I was down in Suffolk for a birding holiday during the last week of June. So as well as enjoying Suffolk's delights of Bittern, Common Crane, Hobby, Dartford Warbler, Nightjar, Stone Curlew and a rare Caspian Tern, it seemed that a trip north to see the Bee-eaters would be well worth it.

The sat-nav certainly helped to navigate the narrow county lanes approaching the site, but there was no mistaking when we had arrived. There were at least 50-60 cars in the field and a big crowd of 100 of



more at the edge of the field further down. The field was right up to the edge of the quarry; the RSPB had erected a barrier to keep visitors safely away from the edge.



It wasn't a particularly big quarry, only about 150m across, and the sides were steep and mostly overgrown with bushes and vegetation. There were some power lines running along the left hand edge. These proved to be quite a boon since the Beeeaters favoured perching on the wires and the bushes on the left side of the quarry. There were some sandy patches on the right side of the quarry and it was here that the Bee-eaters had excavated two nesting burrows.

The Bee-eaters usually stayed at a range of 50-100m away, which was just slightly too far away for photographers with anything but the longest of lenses to get really good photos (and there were a lot of very long lenses on display) but I managed some reasonable shots with my little lens. However, we had nice views through the scope. The local bees could sleep easy in their hives since the favourite prey of the Bee-eaters seemed to be dragonflies. When they had caught some prey, they liked to perch on the wires while eating it, giving the best photo opportunities.

The RSPB set up webcams on the nest burrows so that viewers could follow the progress of the Bee-eaters over the summer, and posted many video clips of the best action on YouTube. There is one video where a Kestrel landed at one of the nest holes and peered in. Fortunately the chicks that were there at the time had the good sense to stay away from the entrance otherwise the Kestrel would surely have taken them. There are two fledging videos – 2 chicks fledged from the upper burrow while 3 chicks fledged from the lower.

This is not the first time that European Beeeaters have bred in the UK (England) – there have been 6 reports since 2001. Mostly these were just single pairs so this time it is different with a small colony of 2 breeding pairs plus additional non-breeders. In the past the birds



have not returned the following year so we shall have to wait until next year to find out if a permanent colony can be established.

The birds departed in early September on their migration to South Africa for the winter.



ROBERT D

REDWINGS IN THE GARDEN



One of 4 Redwings in my garden last week.

JENNY I

WHATSAPP GROUP

The Committee has launched a WhatsApp Group called "The Cheshire Birders" – all members are invited to join. We hope that members can use the app to informally share birding information with each other – sightings, news, photos etc.

The focus will be primarily on birding, but I am sure that we could tolerate the occasional post on other interesting wildlife. Photos of sunning yourself on the beach at Benidorm would most definitely be deleted.

If you would like to join the group then see Dave Swann at the meeting tonight or text a message to him on 07983 392685. Of course you will need the WhatsApp app installed on your mobile device.

WEBSITE UPDATE

We have been experiencing problems with the website since the start of the new season, namely that we are unable to update the website and add new information. The problem seems to lie with Wikidot, but emails to try to fix the problems have gone unanswered.

Until we can have a working website again we will keep you informed about any important news via the newsletter or dedicated mailshots. Make sure you are on the circulation list to keep in touch.

NEXT MONTH'S MEETING

The December indoor meeting will take place on Thursday 1st December, NOT the 8th December as stated in the membership card.

We will begin with a short slideshow on Jamaica by your Newsletter Editor followed by our Christmas buffet. There will be a nominal charge of £3 per head if you attend the buffet. Since we no longer have access to the kitchen please bring your own plate and cup (preferably reusable plastic).

Hope to see you all then.

NEWSLETTER CONTRIBUTIONS

Still required – your articles for the newsletter. Tell us all about that birding holiday of a lifetime or that unusual visitor to your garden bird table. Send any interesting photos you have taken on our coach trips.

Deadline is the Friday before the meeting.