

BIRDWATCHING *Group*

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

NEWSLETTER JANUARY 2023

TONIGHT'S MEETING (12th January)

A Happy New Year to all our members. We hope that 2023 will be a good birding year for everyone.

Tonight we welcome the return of Mike Lane FRPS with a talk entitled "A Digital Lane Returns Again".

Mike is a full time wildlife photographer specialising in birds and mammals. His interest in wildlife began when he obtained his first dog as a teenager, which led to long walks in the countryside. Soon fascinated by the birds and mammals he encountered, it became clear to him that he would have to work with wildlife and he started his working life as a zookeeper. This would still remain his career if a fellow keeper had not come to work one day with a Practica TL camera and 400mm lens. One look through the viewfinder and Mike was hooked and a career change to the computer industry took place to fund his new addiction.

Mike's four passions in life are wildlife, photography, travel and computers, which combine well into one interest. He is a Fellow of the Royal Photographic Society. Mike last visited us in January 2019.

I am sure that we will all enjoy this evening's talk and photographs.

COACH TRIPS

The next coach trip is on Sunday 22nd January 2023 to Fairburn Ings reserve in Yorkshire, departing from the Guild at 8am.

Nestled between Leeds, York and Wakefield, Fairburn Ings is an exciting site for family activities and serious wildlife watching. Over the last 60 years it has transitioned from coal face to wild place; an ex-industrial site rich in heritage and an important site for breeding and wintering wildfowl.

Fairburn Ings reserve boasts over 9km of trails and 5 signposted trails that take you through a variety of habitats allowing stunning views of birds. In recent years the reserve has become home to some of the UK's rarest birds, including bittern, bearded

tit, Cetti's warbler and spoonbill. In winter Fairburn hosts an array of swans, ducks and geese on the main lake. There are three hides and a viewing platform. Facilities include a café with toilets and a shop. Despite being a RSPB reserve entrance is free.

Book your seat at the desk. Note that we now request that you pay the full cost for trips (currently £27) when booking.

Our coach trip for February is the weekend away to Somerset Levels.

COACH TRIP TO NORTH WALES AND CONWY NOVEMBER 20th 2022

A drizzly damp morning 7C as we boarded the coach at 8am. First stop Rhos on Sea. En route Wood Pigeon, Crows, Magpies, Gulls were spotted from the coach and a Buzzard perched on a branch sunning itself in the early morning sun. The trees still have many leaves ready to fall, Autumn shades glowed in the sun.

Rhos on Sea

30 members disembarked to have a look around the harbour. Here the big and noisy Herring Gulls were flying and feeding on the gravel, in the distance a Cormorant sunning himself. A short walk up the road Sparrows were spotted splashing around in the house gutters and Starlings on the roof. On the breakers Oystercatchers and Redshank were busy resting or grubbing for food. Black-tailed Godwit and Curlew were also spotted. On the beach 2 Stock Doves pecked for food. Sharp eyes noted Ringed Plover and Dunlin. An encouraging start to the day. Back on the coach for the short journey to Conwy.



Goosander (female)

Conwy RSPB reserve

On the east side of the Conwy estuary this reserve covers 47 hectares, a variety of habitats including grassland, scrubland, reedbeds, salt marsh and mudflats. It was created from material dug out from the construction of the A55 road tunnel, and opened to the public in 1995. The café was closed due to refurbishment but we managed to have a cup of tea in the visitor centre. 2 Moorhens were the only water birds on the lake.

Following the trail and stopping at the first hide I had to pop back to retrieve my notebook I had left behind at the visitor centre. Onwards then to the bird feeders to catch up with the group. A Robin perched on a branch watched on as the group peered to see life on the feeders, Goldfinch appeared and on the ground, Magpie, Blackbird and Dunnock picked up the fallen seeds. No other birds feeding, so we moved on.

Tal-y-fan hide, built in 1997 was far more productive. 2 Mute Swans were sailing on the water and a Pied Wagtail hurried chasing insects along the bank. A female Goosander with her striking ginger head was thrilling to see along with Shovelers with their outsized shovel-like bill. Little Grebes dived and disappeared, popping up much further away on the water. Mallard, Teal, Tufted Ducks, Gadwall, Coots all put in an appearance for us.

By now the sun had put his hat on, clear skies above, but looking thundery over the hills. We followed the footpath, peered over the bridge, just a singing Robin, on to the next hide.

Carneddau Hide. A couple of very special sightings here, Long-tailed Duck in Winter plumage and Common Scoter seen through Roberts 'scope, some of us vertically challenged unable to view them as Robert is over 6 feet tall so has his 'scope his height. Many Lapwing rested on a distant sandbank. A Goosander, otherwise known as Mergus Merganser, the largest of the sawbill family was noted here but I missed it. Gadwall, Pochard, Little Grebe, Teal, Moorhen, Herring Gulls, Tufted Duck all were added to the growing list. A Little Egret flew over. Time for lunch.



Common Scoter



Long-tailed Duck (female)

Refreshed we set off along the path towards the estuary, we stopped to admire the ponies, light rain began to fall, the dark clouds over the mountains looked ominous. The tide was out and the rain became quite heavy for a short period, then cleared. Many Redshank were busy probing at the mud, with Curlews also in good numbers too. More Shelduck, Oystercatchers one of Europe's largest and common waders, Little Egret all probing in the mud for lunch. High up in the sky a Sparrow hawk had an

aerial battle with a Crow. The sky was clearer now and the sun came out again. Conwy Castle in the distance looked magnificent. We arrived at the Foal Fras screen and had a superb view of the Long-tailed Duck, essentially a marine species found on lakes and similar waters in the tundra only during the breeding season, it winters at sea. Little Grebe and Tufted Ducks were also here.

Strolling along the path we spotted a huge flock of Gulls on the estuary mudflat, a few Little Egrets, a Grey Heron, then a call went up - Great White Egret, showing his dazzling white plumage and long yellow bill.

We stopped off at Benarth hide. Teal dabbling, Shovelers, Gadwall, with Lapwing resting on the sandbank occasionally changing places with each other. Back onto the footpath we looked across again at the flock of Gulls we had seen earlier, the Great White Egret took flight, showing off his wonderful long yellow bill, the sun highlighting his wing span. An awesome sight. Further on 2 Meadow Pipits were flitting along the coastal vegetation. Time now to return to the coach.



Red-breasted Merganser (male)

Rhyl seaside town. Lies at the mouth of the river Clwyd.

First stop the Marine Lake, Cormorant sat at the far side and gulls flying overhead. Up the embankment steps to the estuary. A biting cold wind, but many Starlings were flying in to roost at the Foryd bridge, opened in 1932, locally called the Blue Bridge.

The tide was rising quickly, Little Egret, Oystercatchers, Black-tailed Godwit, and Dunlin were spotted, a Cormorant flew over, a resting Great Black-backed gull had his head under his wing. Some of us decided it was time to move to keep warm, so onto the Pont y Ddraig Harbour Bridge, a stunning pedestrian bridge opened in 2013 with great views. Back to the coach to leave at 4.30pm.

A wonderful rewarding day of birdwatching, a total field trip of 64.

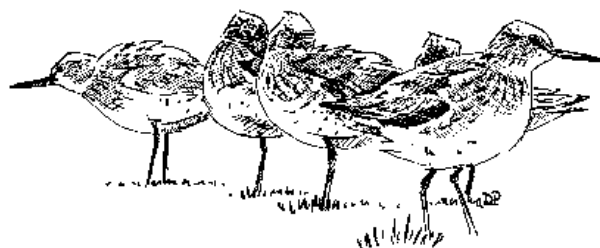
Other sightings: Red Throated Diver, Great Crested Grebe, Shag, Canada Goose, Wigeon, Kestrel, Golden Plover, Turnstone, Common Gull, Feral Pigeon, Collard Dove, Rock Pipit, Wren, Goldcrest, Jackdaw, Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Siskin, Bullfinch. Water Rail was heard.

A Postscript

The Guild has sent some guidelines to all clubs and groups. We are to have a “contact for the day” for our coach trips. The committee have agreed to share the role. Many thanks to Steve who was the contact for all the field trips last year, but also to acknowledge Brian our past Chairman who did this for over 30 years!

Photos by Robert D

JENNY I



LYME PARK

Well renowned for its herd of red deer, the National Trust's Lyme Park site is often overlooked as a birding hotspot. Within a relatively small area there are a wide range of habitats, each attracting slightly different species, especially during the change of season. There are woods, reed beds, moorland, a deer park, reservoirs/lakes and a formal garden at the back of Lyme Hall with a small feeding station.

The lake situated next to the main car park often attracts Canada geese, grey heron, mallard, coot, moorhen, tufted duck, little grebe and black headed gulls. Rarities like goosander and goldeneye may also be seen. Noisy jackdaws and common crows also frequent this area of the park and grey wagtails can be seen skimming over the lake surface looking for insects.

The wooded areas are frequented by many birds. Examples include Hase Bank Wood down towards the West Lodge, Knightslow Wood on the way up to Bowstones, Lantern Wood and Crow Wood. In these areas you will regularly see blackcap, wren, common redstart, four varieties of tit, dunnock, spotted flycatcher, treecreeper, blackbirds, thrush, nuthatch, goldfinch, bullfinch, robin, pied wagtail, jay and goldcrest. The feeders at the top of the Lyme Hall gardens often attract chaffinch, great tit, coal tit, blue tit, greenfinch, nuthatch and great spotted woodpecker. In the gardens themselves you will quite often see fieldfare, redwing and thrush.

In Spring when you walk uphill to the Bowstones or on the paths adjacent to the deer park you are greeted by the unmistakable sound of skylarks, either hovering overhead like mini drones or hunkering down on the ground attempting to distract predators from their nesting sites. Kestrels and buzzards are regularly seen perching or hunting overhead in these areas of the park. During my many walks around the park I have additionally seen stonechat, brambling, reed bunting, swallows and house martins. I would estimate that in total I have seen around 50 species across the different habits and gardens of the park, and often manage to gain some decent photos too.



Common Stonechat



Long-tailed Tit



Redwing



Eurasian Nuthatch

PETER B

WEBSITE NEWS

In the November newsletter we mentioned that we were experiencing problems with the Group website which meant that we were unable to do updates. Sadly the problems have not yet been resolved, but thanks to a bit of ingenuity and lateral thinking by our webmaster we have found an alternate way to do a limited amount of updating. We have managed to keep the newsletter archive fully up to date and managed to add a new feature article on the “Your Pages” section.

If you would like to read an article on Birding on a Cruise to the Azores then please visit Peter’s Page at <http://wgbwcopy.wikidot.com/peter-s-page>

QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

Happy New Year to everyone and thank you to all who replied to the questionnaire sent out following the Guild’s new financial arrangements requiring us to add £2.75 pp for all field trips to cover bank charges and Guild administrative costs. There were 27 respondents and the results are as follows:

Coach trips

- 25 of those responding agreed to continue participating at an increased price of £30 – 40. There was one ‘no’ and one ‘possible’ depending on the trip. Comments included being more selective in choosing trips at the £40 mark.
- 25 members agreed to the payment being refundable in the event of an individual cancelling. 2 members did not agree to this change.

Weekend Away

- The preferred option was pay by a single in full amount in October with 14 for and 1 against.
- Payment by deposit in October and the balance in December thus incurring two payments of £2.75 was less favoured with 9 for and 2 against.

New arrangements.

In the light of this feedback the new arrangements will be that from **March** all coach trips will be at a fixed price of £30 payable in full.

Should an individual cancel, the payment would not be refundable.

In the event of the Committee cancelling a full repayment would be made.

In respect of the weekend away the full payment for the weekend will be required as a single payment in October.

The field trips are an integral part of the WGBG and is possibly the only group in the area who run such a programme of regular trips and long may they continue. The key to keeping the cost of the trips down is to ensure a good numbers participating in each trip. That means 25 to 30 participants per trip or more if possible.

It is hoped that with the stringent Covid restrictions now easing there is a greater confidence in renewing group activities.

If you have friends, relatives or know of people interested in birding and would benefit from the trips encourage them to do so, they would be made very welcome and would help to ensure the continuing programme.

To my knowledge we have never yet had to cancel a field trip through lack of numbers and our aim is not to do so especially having just got through a difficult period and our total membership is beginning to build back up.

It sounds obvious but without sufficient support the trips cannot run. It is vital that as many members of the Group as possible support the coach trips otherwise we may lose them.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Our AGM is usually held at the start of our final indoor meeting of the season in April. However this year our final indoor meeting has been moved to the beginning of May due to Easter in April. Since we appreciate that many members may be planning holidays from May onwards we have decided to bring the AGM forward to the March meeting.

Therefore this year our AGM will be held on Thursday 16th March, starting at 7:15pm.

The AGM is your opportunity to express any comments (or complaints) on the way that the Group is run and to make suggestions.

The Committee are always keen to attract new members onto the Committee. We need new members to bring fresh ideas to the running of the Group. Being a Committee member is not a difficult task; we only meet for a couple of hours in the evening about 3 times a year. We have vacancies on the Committee.

Send nominations, with proposer and seconder, to the email address at the end of the newsletter, preferably in advance of the meeting. Similarly, any motions for discussion at the AGM should be sent to the same email address.

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 S 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.

NEXT MONTH'S MEETING

The February indoor meeting will take place on Thursday 9th February at 7:30pm, when our speaker will be Brian Anderson with a talk entitled “Feathers and Wings”.

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.