

BIRDWATCHING *Group*

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

NEWSLETTER APRIL 2023

TONIGHT'S MEETING (4th May)

Welcome to our final indoor meeting of the 2022-23 season, rather later than usual in May due to the timing of Easter last month.

Tonight we welcome Tanya and Edmund Hoare who will give us a talk entitled "Our Not So Common Swifts"

Tanya and Edmund are especially keen to share their enthusiasm for swifts as they have a colony of 34 pairs breeding in their cottage in Cumbria. Since installing cameras in their nest sites and studying them for over 20 years they have become experts on the life style of these now red-listed mysterious birds. They are active in both the national and international Swift Networks which are great forums for keeping up to date with all the latest research and activities. Showing video clips from the nests, they are passionate about raising awareness of swifts, the threats they face and what we can do to help.

Please join me in welcoming Tanya and Edmund for what I am sure will be a very interesting and educational evening.

COACH TRIPS

Our final coach trip of the season is this coming weekend on Sunday 7th May to Hodbarrow and Walney Island reserves, departing from the Guild at 7:30am.

Located on the site of a former iron mine overlooking the Duddon Estuary in Cumbria, Hodbarrow reserve comprises a freshwater lagoon within the seawall with rich flower and insect communities living on the limestone slag. Grassland and scrub stretches inland to provide a haven for insects and breeding songbirds. Hodbarrow lagoon is the largest stretch of coastal open water in northwest England. Little, common and sandwich terns nest on the artificial shingle island in front of the hide while redshanks,

ringed plovers, oystercatchers and great crested grebes breed around the lagoon. Whitethroats, lesser whitethroats, sedge warblers and willow warblers sing from the gorse scrub around the reserve. Wheatears bob around on the rocks by the sea wall. Several pathways take you through the different habitats of the reserve and along the sea wall. This is a RSPB reserve but entry is free. There are no facilities on-site.

South Walney reserve forms the southern tip of a shingle island lying at the end of the Furness Peninsula and is run by Cumbria Wildlife Trust. Every spring, large numbers of lesser black-backed and herring gulls return and begin to set up nest territories. Other breeding birds include eider duck, greater black-backed gull, shelduck, oystercatcher, ringed plover, mallard, moorhen and coot. Three way-marked trails take you around the reserve via several hides.

There is an admission charge of £3 for non-members of the Trust. There are toilets available on-site.

Please book your place at the desk. Places are still available. We need another 4 or 5 members to ensure enough numbers.

To read the trip report from our last visit in May 2015 click on the link:

<http://www.wgbwcopy.wikidot.com/hodbarrow-south-walney>

To see the photogallery from South Walney click on the link:

<http://www.wgbwcopy.wikidot.com/field-trip-to-south-walney-reserve>

SUMMER CAR TRIPS

The Committee proposes to run 2 local car trips over the summer.

Goyt Valley, Wednesday 17th May

The woodland around Errwood reservoir and the upper Goyt Valley attracts numbers of summer migrants such as pied flycatcher, redstart, common sandpiper, tree pipit, and cuckoo. The uplands at Danebower hold ring ouzel, wheatear, meadow pipit, dipper, red grouse, short-eared owl and hobby. All have been seen on our trips here in recent years.

Meet at "The Street" car park at Errwood reservoir dam (map ref SK 013 757) at 8am.

Burton Mere Wetlands (Dee Estuary), Saturday 17th June

Burton Mere Wetlands straddle the border between England and Wales. Many years of hard work have restored reedbeds, fenland and farmland. There are 3 main hides and several viewpoints as well as 3 nature trails. Ducks, waders and other water birds can be expected here. Summer visitors include the aerobatic hobby, marsh harrier and warblers. Ducklings are well on their way and are actively feeding. Western Cattle Egrets, Bittern, and Bearded Tits have bred here in recent years. Non-breeding regular visitors include black-tailed godwits and spotted redshanks.

RSPB members should remember to bring their card; otherwise there is a £6 entrance fee.

Meet at the reserve main car park at 9:30am (the reserve opens at 9am if you wish to arrive earlier). Burton Mere Wetlands is off the A540 (Chester High Road) and just 10

minutes from the M56. Look out for the brown signposts on the A540. The post code for sat-navs is CH64 5SF.

We may move to the nearby Denhall Lane later in the afternoon.

COACH TRIP TO POTTERIC CARR - 12th MARCH 2023

As we made our way along the M62, the bulk of the snow that had caused so much travel chaos two days earlier had largely melted, although the scene on the tops still looked very bleak. We arrived at Potteric Carr run by the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust at about 9.20am and the weather was mild enough for us to shed a few layers.

The reserve has grown in size considerably since our first group visit many years ago and now covers 200 hectares consisting of woodland trails, ponds and extensive reedbeds. We were greeted by one of the wardens who issued us with maps and gave us a run down of the reserve including a challenge to find three of the more difficult species that had all been seen in recent days; Bittern, Bearded Tit and Lesser Spotted Woodpecker. Our final score was to be one hit, one miss and one disallowed hit. The latter illustrated the danger of completing the trip tick list on a moving coach when one member who had seen a Greater Spotted Woodpecker recorded his tick just as the coach was buffeted by a strong cross wind, and hey presto we had the Lesser Spotted!



Long-tailed Tit

We set off from the visitor centre after recording Great and Blue tits on the feeders, a Little Grebe on the water and a female Pheasant lurking near the decking. Moving along the woodland trail we soon added Goldfinch and then a close view of Goldcrest flitting around the trees, which was to be one of three sightings during the day. The woodland seemed fairly quiet but many of the group saw a nice group of Siskins together with a Lesser Redpoll, and a little further down the track Bullfinches.



Teal

The Willow Marsh hide was my first stop and it looked out on a small reedbed. After 20 minutes or so little had moved, where were all the birds? A solitary Reed Bunting on a small tree in the middle of the reeds was all we could find. Undeterred, we moved on towards the Piper Marsh Hide as a Buzzard called and came into view overhead.

We had good views of Shoveler, Teal, Mallard, Coot, Gadwall and a pair of Mute swans and Greylags. We picked up a single Lapwing and 4 Snipe which were incredibly well camouflaged with their heads tucked down in the stubble they were easy to miss.

We moved on through the woodland stopping to search for a singing Song Thrush right above our heads, incredibly we were unable to locate it in the leafless canopy before it flew. Later in the day we were stopped again by the same song but this time we were rewarded with a close view as it sang from the middle of a Bramble at eye level just 3 feet off the path.

On to the main scrapes and reedbeds. We stopped at the large Roger Mitchel Hide adding Little Egret on the way. As we entered the hide we were greeted with an all too familiar story from another birder, "the Bittern was showing well 30 minutes ago".

It was lunchtime and most of the group were now in the hide, viewing the Egrets, Cormorants, Grey Heron, Great Crested Grebes, Tufted Duck and Shelduck whilst eating their sandwiches. Another thirty minutes had elapsed before Jenny called out Bittern! Fortunately the bird was very obliging as it flew slowly along one side of the hide before turning to fly in front of the hide into a headwind and good sunlight before dropping back down into the reeds. Most of the group were there to see it along with Dave and Peter who were both able to get some great photographs.

After the excitement members continued out around the reserve. I moved on to the Tofield hide where some 30 minutes later we were treated to another brief view of the Bittern as a group of Konik ponies moved over to where the bird had landed and flushed it.



Greylag Goose



Lapwing



Bittern

On the walk back along the woodland trail we viewed Great Crested Grebes, Little Grebe, Pochards and good numbers of Shovelers. The woodland was still proving quiet, but as we approached a group of photographers on the path who had put seed out, we observed a constant flow of Great, Blue and Coal Tits before we were rewarded with our first and only sighting of Willow Tit of the day.



Coal Tit

All in all it had been an excellent day's birding, the final bird of the day was a Redwing feeding on the grassy area behind the visitor centre bringing the group total to 60. Surprisingly no one had seen a Kingfisher which we had always seen here in the past, although Michael managed to spot one from the coach as we crossed the river Don.

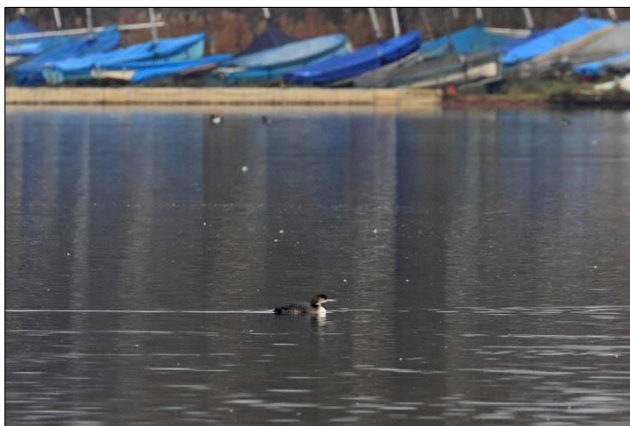
Photos by Peter B and Dave S

STEVE M

UNUSUAL WINTER VISITORS TO THE LOCAL AREA

Great Northern Diver at Redes Mere

In late November last year Birdguides reported that a great northern diver had been seen on Redes Mere. The report was repeated on the following couple of days so I thought it was worth checking out.



When I arrived at the Redes Mere car park there was already a group of half a dozen birders present. I wandered over to enquire about the diver and was told "it's just gone out of sight into the bay on the left but don't worry, it will be out again soon." Ten minutes later it reappeared, swimming to the right with the sailing club in the background. Although distant, it was discernable with the naked eye, being larger than any of the ducks on the water. I had my scope with me and managed to get a good view.



The report described the bird as a juvenile. It was a drab greyish colour but not too dissimilar to the adult winter plumage. The faint outline of the black and white checked pattern that makes the adult in full breeding plumage such a stunning sight was visible on its back. I managed to get a few photos but it was very dark in the area and it always remained rather distant.

Unfortunately there is not a happy ending to this story. You may recall that the country suffered a severe deep freeze with sub-zero temperatures in mid December. Towards the end of that period Birdguides reported that the juvenile great northern diver had been found dead at Redes Mere. I would imagine that, being juvenile, it did not have the experience necessary to survive in such adverse conditions. Such a pity.

Drake Smew at Lapwing Hall Pool

In recent years Smew have been frequent winter visitors to Lapwing Hall Pool at Chelford, but only females ("redheads"). So when a drake Smew was reported there with 2 females at the beginning of January this year that was a rare event. It has been many years since I last saw a drake Smew anywhere in the country, so worth a look.

The parking area at the end of Lapwing Lane is usually a quiet place with generally 2 or 3 cars there, mostly belonging to local dog walkers. Today it was packed solid with hardly a space available. After managing to squeeze the car in I spoke to a couple of birders who were enjoying a cup of coffee at the back of their car. It turned out that they had come all the way from Chester to view the bird (successfully). I'm sure that many of the others present had travelled an equally long distance.



I headed down the muddy track and along the fence to overlook the pool. I could see a little white speck out in the middle which turned out to be the drake Smew when viewed through the scope. It remained well out in the middle, just out of range for a good photo.



I also could see 1 female Smew, loosely associated with the drake but not particularly closely. This one actually swam across the pool straight towards me coming closer to the bank below, allowing me to get much better photos of it than of the drake. Its red head was particularly prominent. I never did see the second female but then I didn't spend much time looking.

The birds stayed throughout January and February, occasionally moving to the nearby Acre Nook Pool for short periods. I returned to Lapwing Hall Pool in mid February with a friend who hadn't seen the Smews. The area was much quieter now. We quickly found the two females but initially there was no sign of the drake. After about an hour of waiting we suddenly noticed it out in the middle of the pool. It had probably been hiding in one of the inaccessible areas. It stayed as far away as it had done the first time but we still got good views in the scope.

The Smews remained until late March before disappearing, probably to begin their migration to the breeding area northern Europe.

ROBERT D

WEEKEND AWAY 2024

Our weekend away in March 2024 will be to Minsmere. We will be staying at our usual hotel, the Furzedown Hotel (in Great Yarmouth) from 01 – 03 March. I will be taking bookings at the September and October meetings.

BARBARA P

WINTER GARDEN BIRD SURVEY 2022 – 2023

Please will those of you who have participated in the survey kindly send me your completed forms. Email your electronic results, or post/hand to me at the next meeting. Thank you to the members who have already submitted their sightings.

BARBARA P

NEXT SEASON

Our first indoor meeting next season will be on Thursday 7th September at 7:30pm. Our speaker is David Winnard who will talk about “Discovering the Birds of North Wales”.

The first coach trip will be on Sunday 22nd October to Spurn.

Happy summer birding.

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.

Bittern at
Minsmere

