

# BIRDWATCHING *Group*

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## **NEWSLETTER NOVEMBER 2023**

### **TONIGHT'S MEETING (2nd November)**

In a late change to the advertised programme our speaker tonight is Jon Morris with a talk entitled "Kingfishers and Some Surprises"

Jon Morris, from North Shropshire, is a seasoned financial techie who repeatedly attempts to forget his proper job by taking detours from the world of payments to soar into the captivating realm of photography. Whilst photography has been a hobby for best part of 20 years, it's only in the last 6 to 7 years that he has truly focused more of his energy upon it and proud to say more recently receiving acknowledgments in the photo world after creating an online photography school for beginners and having been shortlisted 2 years running for Amateur Wildlife Photographer of the Year.

What truly sets his heart aflutter is photography, and wildlife photography, in particular. Among his many subjects, his absolute favourite is none other than the magnificent Kingfisher. There's something utterly magical about the electric beauties of our British rivers. With camera in hand, Jon has found a new way to connect with the natural world, and hopes to take us on a journey as we fly through his continued obsession to capture these gorgeous birds and his desire to witness and document specific elusive, pipe dream moments that not many people have ever seen let alone photograph. Let's find out if he has succeeded.

This is Jon's first visit to the Birdwatching Group.

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

## **COACH TRIPS**

The next coach trip is on Sunday 19th November to Attenborough reserve near Nottingham departing from the Guild at 8am.

Attenborough Nature Reserve is owned and managed by Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust. The reserve is primarily wetlands formed from restored gravel extraction works, although there is a substantial woodland cover as well. All the usual wetland and woodland birds should be seen. Feeders attract many small birds, particularly tree sparrows. There are usually bitterns present but of course very hard to see. There is a Nature Centre with a café, toilets and shop on the reserve. Entry is free. We last visited the reserve in 2018.

Book your seat at the desk.

## **LAPWING HALL LAKE WALK AND CHRISTMAS LUNCH – 16<sup>th</sup> DECEMBER**

Further details regarding our day out.

Can we meet at 9.30am at Lapwing Hall Pool. There are lay-bys for parking at the end of Lapwing Lane. Lapwing lane is the second road on the left about half a mile south of Chelford roundabout on the A535.

If you are unable to attend on the day please let Dave or myself, Julie, know so we can inform the Egerton Arms.

For those who finish the walk early or decide to go straight to the pub, the doors will be open from 11.30am. Tea and coffee will be available £2.50 per cup if required.

The balance outstanding per person or per couple can be paid in cash or card at the end, this will include a service charge and any additional item ie tea coffee or drinks.

For all those yet to commit come and join us, there is still time to book your place just let either of us know and thanks.

We look forward to seeing you all on the day.

Fingers crossed for good weather and great sightings.

**JULIE AND DAVE**

## COACH TRIP TO SPURN – 22nd OCTOBER 2023



Goldcrest

There are bird watching days and good birdwatching days, but you don't often get exceptional days when everything falls into place, the bird sightings, the weather, the location, the company in essence the total experience. Our first of the season's field trip to Spurn was one of the latter. Perhaps I am biased, I love Spurn.

It was a coach of 26 that set off at 7.30am, four having to pull out at the last minute for a variety of reasons. They were missed.

Anyone listening to the weather forecast at the beginning of the week would have been concerned that storm Babet along with its Red weather warning would affect our plans. All fears were allayed, Sunday turned out to be a calm, barmy, clear blue sky and sunshine sort of day. Perfect.

Thanks to Mustapha, our driver, we had a smooth journey arriving about 10.45. Because of the opportunities presented by the variety of habitat at Spurn we decided to split into two loose groups. The first and largest group was dropped off at the Crown and Anchor public house, sitting at the top of a triangular area of very varied habitat



Blackbird (female)

offering excellent birding. The second group, about ten of us continued with the coach down to the visitor centre with the intention of walking along the shingle Spit and some, down to the Point.

The Spit itself is about three miles long, and with a North Easterly wind blowing the sea was being churned up on the East shingle shore making sea watching more challenging than usual. We did with the aid of a scope pick out a single bird that we thought was a Scoter but so far

away and uncertain it was not included as a sighting in the Field List. The Lee side, facing into the Humber estuary was more sheltered and with a high tide at 11.39, was busy with feeding waders, Little Egrets and flotillas of Brent Geese and Shelducks. The guttural calls of the geese mixed with the "Teu" call of Redshanks and the roar of the crashing waves in the background made for a symphony of sound. Writing this I can still hear it. I warned you..... I like Spurn.

A single Swallow flew overhead as we set off along the Spit, towards the breach where the road was washed away during a previous violent storm in December 2013. Across the soft wet sand and a brief stop for three of us to take advantage of a great sketching opportunity. On again past dunes knitted together with Marram Grass and wind pruned vegetation laden with bright red, black and orange berries. Privet, Hawthorn, Rowan, Sea Buckthorn and rose species all providing a rich source of food for weary migrants. Speaking of such we did see a single Redwing and a small flock of Fieldfares but nowhere near the large numbers that had been recorded the previous Wednesday.



Little Egret

At just over halfway along the Spit we detoured off the main path to visit the Chalk Bank hide overlooking the estuary. Approaching the hide first we saw a male Stonechat and then that was followed by a solitary Twite, a Redstart, a Wheatear and then lastly a Black Redstart. In the hide itself we scanned the shoreline itself which produced a variety of waders all busily feeding. Curlews, Redshank, Dunlin and Little Egrets and more Brent Geese.

Lunch was taken at the Point sitting looking into the estuary side shore. A good lunch and rest but not a bird in sight!! It was only when I was leaving that a group of three very busy Turnstones appeared not ten yards away. I don't think they even noticed me, busy as they were overturning stones, tossing up the seaweed and probing the soft sand.



Great Northern Diver

Two of the group took advantage of the Lighthouse being open and came back recounting how impressed they were with the magnificent view from the top and the panoramic view of the whole of the spit. I very much regretted not joining them. However, back to birding, and it was Megan the youngest of our group to spot the Short-eared Owl flying towards the Breach, this was followed by a beautiful Kestrel hovering, head on, perfectly still against the wind.





House Sparrow (female)

Happy and tired we all ended up in the Visitor Centre café. Surprise, surprise. Tea and cake were very welcome. Not so surprisingly we met up with other members of the second group also partaking. To pick out just a few of their sightings, Little Grebe, Greylag and Canada Geese, Snipe, Jack Snipe, Brambling, Hawfinch, Lesser Redpoll, Barn Owl, Reed Bunting, Grey and Pied Wagtail. The total sighting for the day was around eighty birds.

Luck was with us on the way home, at a road accident diversion where the road was blocked by a police car, the Police accident unit made an exception for us and allowed us through whilst all other traffic was rerouted!!

The day ended as it started, well and back to the Guild for 7.50pm.

An excellent day.

*Photos by Peter B and Dave S*

**STUART M**

## THE STONE CURLEW

You are unlikely to see a stone curlew here in Cheshire. To see these birds in the UK you have to head south and east to find them in their preferred habitat of dry heathland and stony pasture. A real stronghold is in the counties of Norfolk, Suffolk, and Cambridgeshire. You can see stone curlews at Minsmere if you know where to look, but unfortunately we won't be seeing any on our weekend away in February since the stone curlews are summer visitors, arriving in late March and April.



Stone curlews are not really curlews at all, not related to the “proper” curlews that can be seen in coastal and upland areas

all over the UK. Stone curlews belong to a family known as Thick-knees (*Burhinidae*) consisting of about 10 species found in Europe, Asia, Africa and Australia.

In summer 2022 I was lucky enough to spend a week birding in the Suffolk area and did manage to see stone curlew at Minsmere, but only at quite a distance. Still, good views were had through the scope even if they were too distant for good photos. However on the journey home we travelled through Norfolk and stopped off at another reserve that is well known for stone curlews, namely Weeting Heath Reserve, managed by Norfolk Wildlife Trust. The reserve has a visitor centre and other facilities.



The main part of the reserve covers an area of open grassland and stony heath in Breckland dedicated to stone curlew conservation, but more importantly, a hide from



which you can safely view the stone curlews. In addition there is also a woodland area with woodland walks where birds such as woodlark and crossbill can be seen.

The first photo shows the view from the hide, basically a grassy field with a rough ploughed plot in the middle. It is in this rough area that the stone curlews nest. The photo shows the full field of view as seen through the camera lens. You may just be able to make out a bird in the centre of the photo. Not a big target to aim

at but still better than the photo opportunity at Minsmere! Fortunately, thanks to Photoshop, I can crop in for a closer view.

I always think that stone curlews have a rather sad appearance about them. Maybe it is just the large yellow eye. While the presence of a large eye indicated their nocturnal habits they are also quite active during the day as well.



We watched one bird wandering about for a while, enjoying good views through the scope, when it stopped and another bird popped up beside it. We hadn't seen that one at all. They are extremely well camouflaged particularly when hunkered low down on the ground. It looked as though the birds were exchanging brooding duties at a nest since the first bird sat down where the second bird had been and the second bird wandered off.

As it says in the reserve leaflet, this is probably the best place to see stone curlews in the UK.

**ROBERT D**

### **NEXT MONTH'S MEETING**

The next indoor meeting will take place on Thursday 7th December starting at 7:30pm when our speaker will be Group committee member Dave with a talk entitled "Belize".

Afterwards we will have our Christmas Buffet with festive nibbles and drinks (non alcoholic). There will be a cover charge of £3 per person if you wish to attend the buffet.

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.