

BIRDWATCHING *Group*

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NEWSLETTER OCTOBER 2023

TONIGHT'S MEETING (5th October)

Tonight we welcome the return of David Tolliday who will give a talk entitled "UK Travels with a Wildlife Camera". The talk will cover wildlife in a range of habitats including a local Cheshire Farm, by the roadside, RSPB Coombes Valley, Red Kites at Gigrin Farm, and much more. This includes mainly birds, but also flowers, mammals and insects.

David Tolliday lives in Cheshire and is a member of Macclesfield Camera Club. He has been interested in wildlife for as long as he can remember. One of his first wildlife memories is of a flock of lapwings in a field at Cuckmere in Sussex when he was about ten years old and was absolutely amazed by these beautiful birds. They remain one of his favourite species.

His first ever wildlife photograph was of a chaffinch taken with his dad's Fujica camera at the age of 13. Looking through the camera viewfinder it looked like the bird filled the frame, however when the film came back the bird was hardly visible in the picture. He knew he had to improve as a wildlife photographer.

Several years later he was given his first pair of binoculars and the very first bird he saw was a kingfisher sitting on a branch. It dived into the water, returned with a small fish, banged the fish against a branch and then ate it. What an introduction to using binoculars!

The most pleasure he gets from wildlife is just sitting, watching and listening.

David last visited us in March 2017.

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

COACH TRIPS

Our first coach trip of the season is on Sunday 22nd October to Spurn nature reserve on the Yorkshire coast, departing from the Guild at 7:30am.

We often go to Spurn as our first coach trip since over the years Spurn has proved to be a very successful destination because this reserve can be exceptionally good at this time of year – just about anything can turn up here while migration is in full swing. A good variety of seabirds, waders and wildfowl can be found on the coast and pools, while migrating passerines can be found on the extensive scrub and bush area. There is an excellent Visitor Centre on site with toilets and a café available.

The next coach trip after that 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 for both trips at the desk.

A quick word about recording sightings on our coach trips. Have you ever looked at the day's bird list in the coach on the way home and wondered: was I on a different trip? Our rule for recording sightings in the book is that any sightings added should have been seen and verified by at least two members. That should hopefully help eliminate misidentifications. If you are in the habit of wandering away on your own you may have seen some very rare birds, but if nobody else saw them they should not go on the list.

CAR PARKING FOR COACH TRIPS

Now that we are once again enjoying our coach trips, it seems an appropriate time to remind all our members about parking at the Guild on a Sunday.

Do not park in the car park in front of the Guild. Park only in the rear car park or along the side. Avoid obstructing the yellow cross-hatched areas, which must be left clear for turning. You can also park on Bourne Street taking care to avoid obstructing the residents' driveways.

Do not park in the Quakers' car park.

Do not park on Windsor Avenue at any time.

MINSMERE WEEKEND 23 – 25 FEBRUARY 2024

Bookings will be taken at tonight's meeting and 02 November meeting.

Please note the change of date for the weekend away (23-25th February).

Again we will be returning to the Furzedown Hotel at Great Yarmouth where we have always been made so welcome and comfortable. Although I have booked out the entire hotel for the weekend, there are only 3 single rooms, so it's first come, first served for those. We usually require 13 singles but there are enough rooms for single occupancy of a double or twin.

Cost of the weekend.

Single Room £315 per person

Double/twin Room sharing £270 per person

Single use of a double/twin £335 per person

Packed lunches are available at £10 per day.

Please note if you wish to pay the complete bill, payment by 02 November.

If you wish to pay in 2 instalments there is a Guild charge of £2.75 which will be added on to the second payment. Deposit of £160 by 02 November and final payment at the latest by 07 December.

The hotel requires our final numbers and deposits by 10 November.

The itinerary is as follows:

Friday: Leave Wilmslow 7.30, arrive Welney WWT by 12 noon. Leave Welney 4.00/4.15 to arrive at hotel two hours later.

Saturday: Westleton Heath for Dartford Warbler and Woodlark for about an hour then on to Minsmere 11.30 – 5.00 pm.

Sunday: Birding around the local hot spots till 2.00 pm, then heading for home intending to arrive in Wilmslow 7.30 – 8.00 pm.

A booking form is included with the email newsletter. You may wish to print that and fill it out before coming to the meeting to save time. Spare booking forms will be available at tonight's meeting.

BARBARA P

MEMBERSHIP CARD AMENDMENTS

1. The weekend away to Minsmere is on 23-25 February as noted above.
2. The speaker for the February meeting is Richard Steel and not Peter Booth. Peter will be the speaker at the April meeting as indicated.

FIELD TRIP TO HODBARROW & WALNEY ISLAND - 7th MAY 2023

This was our last field of the 2022/23 season and to two reserves that were new to me, the group having last visited in 2015. Also, it's a part of the Cumbria coast that I knew little about. We made up a party of 26.

The weather forecast sounded good but the reality as we left Wilmslow at 7.30 was dull and overcast and it did not clear on the journey up. At one point we were shrouded in mist with poor visibility. Comments that it would burn off later were not convincing. However, our first sighting was on the coach journey and a dramatic one. Passing under a low-boughed Oak tree overhanging the road, suddenly a startled Buzzard swept down from the tree right in front of the coach affording close views of this magnificent bird, so close in flight they are impressive. I am not sure who was more startled, the Buzzard or Mustafah, our driver.

Hodbarrow is managed and run by the RSPB but is an open site with public access. It comprises of a coastal freshwater lagoon, the site of a former Iron mine. The lagoon itself is 150 hectares in size and 3 miles to walk around, managed by the RSPB to encourage Tern breeding.



Chaffinch

The approach is through Willow scrub, mixed grassland and Gorse, the latter in full golden bloom and a stunning sight even in the still flat light. Chiffchaffs, Willow Warblers, Blackcaps and Whitethroats were all singing. On the lagoon Eider Ducks were there in numbers. The largest of the ducks, almost prehistoric looking heads the males are the most distinctive whilst the females are brown but beautifully marked plumage when seen close to. Also on the lagoon were Cormorants, Goldeneye, Black-headed and Lesser Black-backed Gulls whilst Greenfinch, Linnets and Goldfinches were flying overhead.



Sandwich Tern

Halfway around the lagoon is a hide overlooking an island where Terns are being encouraged to breed. Access is restricted and the site fenced to deter predators. Common, Sandwich and Little Terns were all seen. The Common Terns with their red bills tipped with Black and the Sandwich Terns black bill tipped yellow were difficult to distinguish in the still flat light. The Little Terns with their diminutive size are much easier to identify. They were for me the bird of the day. Not the best of sightings but nevertheless one of my favourites. Regrettably I did not see any of the distinctive hovering flight before

plunging into the water after small fish and shrimps. Mute Swan, Mallard, Tufted and Shelduck were all present.



Common Eiders (pair)

We left Hodbarrow at 12.30 for Walney Island, a Cumbria WLT managed site. It was a long fraught journey with road closures delaying us, but the sun burnt through the cloud and mist giving us a truly magnificent early May afternoon. And what a gem of a site. A low flat windswept almost treeless island with long views with Meadow Pipits and a pair of male Skylarks singing high overhead. Swallows and House Martins were seen as well as Stonechat and Wheatear.

Of all the waders by far the most numerous comprised of one very large group of at least 500 Dunlin on the seashore. If we had had the benefit of a scope, I am sure we would have picked out other waders mixed in with the flock.

Our total bird count for the day was 65 species seen and included, Great Crested Grebe, Greylag and Canada Geese, Red-breasted Merganser, House and Tree Sparrows and many more.

The whole day proved very successful and much enjoyed. A fitting end to our season of coach trips. May there be many more like them.

Photos by Dave S

STUART M

CAR TRIP TO BURTON MERE WETLANDS - 16th JUNE 2023



Oystercatcher

Burton Mere is always a good reserve to visit, not only is it fairly close for travel to but also has an exciting range of birds with good access and hide facilities. It was a fitting last trip for our 2022 / 23 birding season, and it was a group of ten who met in the car park for the start of the day.

The reserve itself has been gradually developed as a major wetland site and part of the Dee Estuary area managed by the RSPB. Originally known as Inner Marsh Farm with very restricted vehicular access and a parking space for a small number of cars. Since then the site has expanded considerably with the acquisition of the former fishing pools allowing much

improved site access, Visitor reception centre, expanded footpaths and hides and currently in construction a purpose built café area.

Our first sightings for the day came from the viewing area in the Reception hide with a commanding view over the main pool. The shallow depth of the water combined with the surrounding rich vegetation of reed beds, small islands make for an ideal habitat for breeding birds. Black-tailed Godwits, Shelducks, Teal, Redshank, Oystercatchers, Avocets, Gadwall and Mallard were all present in good numbers while Black-headed Gulls dominated the breeding on the islands. In particular the male Black-tailed Godwits looked particularly fine with their chestnut head, neck and breast contrasting with the white belly spring breeding



Common Redshanks



Spotted Redshank

plumage. Whilst they are seen here in the summer they only breed at a few sites in the UK, mainly in East Anglia. There are three distinct races of Black-tailed Godwits two of which occur in the UK. It is the Icelandic race that overwinter here and mainly the European race that breeds here and migrates through Britain but overwinter in West Africa.

Another bird good to see in breeding plumage was the Spotted Redshank and always making for a good find at the best of times but to see them with the black

plumage and white speckling is a special treat. The dark phase only lasts a few weeks and so you have to get the timing right to see it at its best.



Great Egret

Our next stop was the Bunker hide and completely open fronted with again good, views over the main pool. As soon as we entered something put up the whole flock of mixed waders, wheeling and swirling in flight they made for a spectacular sight. Soon settling back down again amongst them could be seen a group of Knot, similar but slightly larger than Dunlin and without the dark belly of the Dunlin in summer.

Leaving the Bunker Hide by the side of the path there was a group of feeders with visiting Blue and Great Tits as well as a family group of Great Spotted Woodpeckers, two adults and one young.

Retracing our steps back to the reception it was there we were lucky enough with the aid of a scope to find a Garganey showing with its distinctive white head stripe and grey

flank of the male. They are migrant summer visitors to the UK with fairly small numbers nesting here.



Ruddy Shelducks

Our next stop was the screen Hide where we saw a Great White Egret, a magnificent bird the size of a Grey Heron and on the way having a fleeting glimpse of a Cetti's Warbler and hearing its explosive call. Further on at the next screen hide a pair of Ruddy Shelducks, maybe escapees, who knows, were in good view.

From there we followed the path that eventually leads over the railway bridge and on to Burton Point with its

commanding view out over the whole of the Dee estuary and Welsh shore. We had hoped to see the Green Woodpecker which is often seen feeding on the ground in the field leading to the viewpoint, but not today. There was however a beautiful male Whitethroat singing in the hedgerow whilst Swifts and Swallows were flying overhead.

We left Burton Mere about 3.30pm after another very satisfying days birding and end to the Groups season.

Photos by Robert D

STUART M

LAPWING HALL LAKE WALK AND CHRISTMAS LUNCH

To take place on the 16th December at 9.30am.

Note parking is limited and there are no facilities or shelter at Lapwing Pool.

Dave will be sitting at the desk at the next meeting to take your deposit of £10 per person for the festive lunch. **Cash only please no cards or cheques.**

Remember to bring back your menu and the choices you have selected. We will be copying these and giving them back to you as a record.

For all those yet to commit give it a thought. It's a wonderful way to socialise with other members and have a lovely meal with good food and good company.

If you have any concerns or questions about the day or the meal let Dave or myself (Julie) know we are happy to help or advice.

Further details will be in the November newsletter.

JULIE

NEXT MONTH'S MEETING

The next indoor meeting will take place on Thursday 2nd November starting at 7:30pm when our speaker will be Garry Jones with a talk entitled "From the Mountains to the Sea".

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.



Sparrowhawk in the garden (RD)