

BIRDWATCHING *Group*

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

NEWSLETTER APRIL 2024

TONIGHT'S MEETING (25th April)

A warm welcome to all to our final indoor meeting of the 2023-24 season.

The meeting will commence with our Annual General Meeting, **starting at 7:15pm.**

The AGM is your chance to raise questions, comments, suggestions etc on any aspect of the running of the Birdwatching Group. Please be sure to use it.

The Chairman's report is included in the Newsletter (see below). Please read this before the meeting as Stuart will not be reading it out at the meeting. The agenda for the meeting and minutes from last year's AGM are included as separate documents with the e-newsletter. Again, please read these beforehand. Paper copies will be available at the meeting.

Following the (hopefully) short AGM our speaker this evening is Group member Peter Booth who will give a talk on the birding delights of Ecuador.

Having had an interest in nature and the environment from a young age, Peter went on his first dedicated birding holiday in 2018 to the Cairngorms. He was immediately hooked and has subsequently enjoyed many UK and international trips since, slowly building up his knowledge and expertise. It was during the Covid pandemic that he decided to photograph and record the various birds he saw, thus allowing him to share his experiences with others.

Please join me in welcoming Peter for what I am sure will be an entertaining evening.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2023-24

Time flies and it hardly seems a year since I wrote the last Christmas Report and after a year of challenges the group has faced we do at last seem to be getting back to a more settled period.

MEMBERSHIP

Without a healthy membership the group could not survive and so it is good to report that again we have seen a steady rise in the registered membership and with a good mix of old friends returning as well as new members joining.

People can sometimes be put off joining a group such as ours thinking that they need a good knowledge of bird identification to participate. This is a misconception as we accommodate all levels of birding with the more experienced members very willing to share their knowledge. It is one of this group's strengths.

I am pleased to say that currently we have 49 registered members compared with 38 this time last year.

INDOOR MEETINGS

Our program of indoor meetings commenced in September and with a very good attendance.

Planning a programme has been made more difficult due firstly to the cost of booking speakers as the effects of inflation push up fees and the difficulty of finding suitable speakers.

However, Jenny Irwin put together a very interesting mix of talks covering local topics as well as more exotic locations with two provided by our own member's David Swann and Peter Booth. The programme consisted of

2023

7th September **Discovering the Birds of North Wales**

David Winnard

5th October **UK travels with a Wildlife Camera**

David Tolliday

2nd November **Kingfishers**

Jon Morris

7th December **Belize followed by Christmas Buffet**

David Swann

2024

4th January **Frodsham Marshes**

Bill Morton

1st February **Beyond 66 degrees North - Arctic Norway**

Richard Steel

7th March **Mersey Estuary Birds**

Dermot Smith

25th April **Ecuador followed by AGM**

Peter Booth

Thanks to Jenny, our programme secretary, for all the work that goes into organising the programme.

FIELD TRIPS

2024 was our first year that under the Guild's revised financial arrangements we have had to ensure that each trip is self financing and cannot run at a loss. Combined with the raised charge of £30 per person per trip it has made Steve McGann's job planning the trips more difficult.

Despite this Steve has ensured that no trip has had to be cancelled and whilst at the time of writing, there are some to go, we are confident the Programme will be completed.

		Departure from Guild
2023		
22nd October	Spurn	7:30am
19th November	Attenborough	8:00am
16th December	Car Trip to Pennington Flash	
2024		
28th January	Far ings / North Cave	8:00am
23rd-25th February	Minsmere weekend away	7:30am
24th March	Middleton Lakes	7:30am
28th April	Rutland Water	7:30am
12th May	Bempton / Flamborough	7:30am

The clear message remains as it did last year, that the coach trips are a major part of the group membership, please continue to support them and if you know of non members who would be interested in participating please encourage them to do so, we may even convert them to new members!

The cost of the trips for 2024 / 2025 remains the same at £30pp and £15 for U16's.

WEEKEND AWAY 2024

This year's weekend in late February was well supported by 30 people. Day one spent at Frampton, day two Westleton Heath and finally day 3 Sea Palling and Strumpshaw Fen. Organising the weekend, as everyone can appreciate, is a considerable task, every year taken on by Barbara Punchard along with Steve McGann who looks after the coach and site access arrangements.

2024 was Barbara's last year of organising the weekend after doing so successfully for 13 Years. I have to admit that Barbara standing down from the role gave me as Chairman my biggest worry for the future weekends away. How do you replace and follow on from someone like Barbara?

Well, I am pleased to say that new committee members Janet and Michael Turner have agreed to take on the task. This year they have been shadowing Barbara with the plan to organising the 2025 trip.

I am also pleased to say that Barbara will be continuing to remain a committee member and provide her experience and her knowledge to the running of the group.

NEWSLETTER

Robert Davidson has continued to edit and circulate the newsletter on our behalf and it provides an excellent source of up to date information on group activities.

Robert is always on the lookout for articles from members willing to share birding tips and expertise.

If you have not already signed up for the email version of the newsletter, please do so, it's our preferred method of delivery.

WHATSAPP GROUP - CHESHIRE BIRDERS

Administered by David Swann the WhatsApp group has proven to be a popular and fast way of sharing birding information quickly. Any new members who wish to join please contact David who will add you to the group.

CHRISTMAS LUNCH & BUFFET

On the 7th of December David Swann gave a talk on a birding trip to Belize which was followed by a buffet provided by Jenny Irwin with help from other group members.

Our last meeting of this year was on the 16th December with a trip to Pennington Flash followed by an excellent Christmas dinner. Organised by David and Julie Swan. A good social end to the group's 2023.

CONCLUSION

It has been heartening to see our new membership grow and with good participation in all the groups programme. Having said that, it would be good to see membership to grow further and underpin the viability of the whole group and its activities. Word of mouth remains perhaps the best way of introducing new members, so if you are able to encourage relatives or friends with an interest in birding to join, it helps.

On behalf of members thanks to all committee members for their work throughout the year.

Lastly I must mention Tina Green who is standing down from the committee, Tina meets and greets and is the first point contact for all the new members and who has provided support. Thank you Tina.

Happy and productive Birding for 2024 - 2025.

STUART M

COACH TRIPS

Our next coach trip is this weekend on Sunday 28th April to Rutland Water, departing from the Guild at 7:30am.

This internationally famous nature reserve is managed by the Leicestershire & Rutland Wildlife Trust in partnership with Anglian Water and provides one of the most important wildfowl sanctuaries in Great Britain, regularly holding in excess of 25,000 waterfowl. It is a Site of Special Scientific Interest, designated as a European Special Protection Area and internationally recognised as a globally important wetland RAMSAR site.

The reserve occupies shore line and shallow water lagoons along 9 miles of the western end of Rutland Water and covers a total area of 1000 acres. It was created in the 1970s with the construction of the reservoir. There are over 30 bird watching hides and nature trails from two visitor centres with experts to help you with identification.

The Reserve is also home to the successful **Rutland Osprey Project** which in 2001 celebrated the first Osprey chick to fledge in Central England for 150 years. Currently several pairs of Ospreys breed in and around Rutland Water and are regularly seen fishing over the reservoir from April – September.

The Anglian Water Birdwatching Centre at Egleton offers exciting environmental displays, viewing gallery, excellent schools service, Wildlife Trust shop and In Focus optical shop. At the Lyndon Visitor Centre there is a fascinating Weather and Wildlife exhibition as well as a Wildlife Trust shop.

There is a £7.50 ((£6.50 concessions) admission charge for the reserve although we should get a group discount. Please retain your ticket during the day as you will need it when visiting the various parts of the reserve.

The last coach trip of the season is on Sunday 12th May to Bempton and Flamborough reserves departing from the Guild at 7:30 am.

Bempton Cliffs, on the spectacular Yorkshire coast, is home to one of the UK's top wildlife spectacles. Around half a million seabirds gather here between March and August to raise a family on the towering chalk cliffs that overlook the North Sea.

The huge white chalk cliffs at Bempton are impressive at any time of year. But visit between April and July, and you'll find them transformed into England's largest seabird city. Here Puffins, Guillemots, Razorbills, Gannets, Kittiwakes and Fulmars live life on the edge. There are more Gannets acrobatically diving into the deep here than anywhere else on mainland England.

But it's not all about the cliffs. In spring and summer Corn Buntings, Skylarks, Linnets and Partridge breed in the grassland and scrub where land meets the sea, Peregrines are often present and occasionally Short-eared Owl and Barn Owl hunt on the farmland behind. There are usually Tree Sparrows around the Visitor Centre. At Flamborough the cliffs are less pronounced but the farmland/woodland area is better.

Toilets and café facilities are available at both sites. RSPB members should bring their cards. There is an entry charge of £8 for non-members at Bempton.

Book your seat for both trips at the desk tonight.

COACH TRIP TO MIDDLETON LAKES – 24th MARCH 2024

24 members set off at 7.30 for this RSPB reserve in the Lower Tame Valley, that we had last visited in 2018. We enjoyed a smooth journey down, travelling via the M6 toll road, arriving at our drop off point outside Middleton Hall. The only concern on route had been a short heavy shower but thankfully that proved to be the only rain of the day.

As we walked across the car park towards the welcome hub and a briefing by one of the wardens, we were encouraged to see a small group of local birders, with telescopes trained on a number of mature trees. We were told that a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker

had been seen just 20 minutes earlier and that this was one of its favourite haunts. Unfortunately, it failed to make a reappearance, although a couple of group members heard it calling later in the afternoon.



Great Tit

After our briefing we made our way onto the reserve via a small boardwalk alongside a pond. There was little birdlife on the water itself, but over in the trees at one side was a Heronry. A number of birds were perched high in the trees like some strange prehistoric statues. In the distance a Buzzard was circling overhead and in one corner beneath the trees were some feeders, active with a constant flow of visiting Great Tits, Blue Tits, Goldfinches, Chaffinch and one lucky member spotted a Willow Tit.

We then followed a path alongside a lovely woodland, with a carpet of Ransomes, Dogs Mercury and flowering Lesser Celandines. There were plenty of mature trees, some of which were peppered with likely nesting holes, but no woodpeckers! While studying these holes Janet and Michael spotted a small bat, crawling up the trunk. An amazing spot!

Chiffchaffs were singing and we got some close views. We also added Nuthatch, Treecreeper, Goldcrest, Robin, Wren and Long-tailed Tit along this section. Towards the end of the track there was an active Rookery, with much coming and going and noise in preparation for the nesting season.



Little Egret & Glossy Ibis

We left the woodlands and passed over the Birmingham and Fazeley Canal onto a viewpoint over one of many pools and reedbeds. A pair of Blackcaps could be heard calling, striking up their territories but they kept themselves well hidden. Looking out over Fisher Mill Pool, a female Garganey was seen, together with Tufted Duck, Mute Swans, Shoveler and Gadwall. As we walked alongside the lake, Cetti's Warbler song would burst out, sometimes from what must have been just a couple of feet away. A few members of the group were rewarded for their patience later in the day in actually getting a view of one of these elusive birds.

We walked on via the Seasonal Trail overlooking the Jubilee Wetlands where we were told a Glossy Ibis had been seen. From the viewpoint we observed Wigeon, Shelduck, Teal and a male Goldeneye. At the second viewpoint the Glossy Ibis gave magnificent views, its long curved bill probing the mud and then it stopped and posed for a photograph with an Egret in the background.

We moved on via a path alongside the River Tame, hoping we might spot an early Sand Martin but views of the river were rather obscured and there was little bird activity there. We entered the only actual hide on the reserve, a large brick built structure giving good views across the North Pool. A Green-winged Teal had been seen right in front of the hide. It was partially obscured in one of the channels when we first arrived but then emerged for a swim round, showing off that distinctive vertical white shoulder stripe. We added Lapwing, Redshank and Oystercatchers to our tally.



Green-winged Teal



Red Breasted Goose

feeding with a group of Greylag and Canada Geese was a very striking Red-breasted Goose.

At one spot we had heard the low booming of the Bittern which the warden had informed us were present. Dave and Julie had a close encounter with one. A local birder approached them to ask if they had seen the Bittern that had just flown over their heads and dropped into the reeds behind them. Seeing the look of disbelief on their faces she proceeded to prove it with a photograph, just confirming the rule that when out birding it pays to have eyes in the back of your head!

Making our way back we were rewarded with one last surprise: in a field alongside the path



Reed Bunting

A male Reed Bunting was singing for us as we left the wetland and returned to the courtyard cafe for a coffee, while above us a Pied Wagtail flitted across the roof.

Our driver Scott returned to the pickup point at 4.30 to complete a very enjoyable day, with the total number of species seen at 62.

Photos by Steve M

STEVE McG

CORRECTION

In the last newsletter photos from the coach trips to Far Ings/North Cave and the weekend away to Minsmere were wrongly attributed to Steve McGann. The actual photographer was in fact Steve Miller. Apologies to both Steves for the error. I will try not to mix up my Steves in the future!

SUMMER CAR TRIPS

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

Goyt Valley, Saturday 25th 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.

Tittesworth Reservoir, Saturday 15th June

Tittesworth Reservoir is situated near Leek in Staffordshire. The visitor centre is situated at the north end of the reservoir. Here there are 2 hides overlooking the reservoir and several trails for walking. The Churnet Trail (0.5 mile) takes you down to the river where kingfisher is possible.

The Waterview Restaurant offers food and snacks all day and toilet facilities as well. I believe that the car park is pay and display.

Directions: Follow the A523 Macclesfield to Leek road to Rushton Spencer. As you drive through the village you will see a road to the left in front of you that goes straight up the hill (Leek Old Road). Follow that for about 600 yards then turn left onto Meerbrook Road and follow the road through Meerbrook village. Just beyond the village you go over the end of the reservoir on a causeway then turn right into the visitor centre area. The post code is ST13 8SW.

Meet at the visitor centre car park at 9am.

WEEKEND AWAY

Here is a date for your diary. Next year's weekend away will be to the Solway Coast in south-west Scotland from Friday 21st – Sunday 23rd February 2025.

More information to follow in the September newsletter.

WINTER GARDEN BIRD SURVEY 2023 - 2024

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 MEETING

The first indoor meeting of the new season will be on Thursday 5th September at 7:30pm when our speaker will be Paul Hobson who will talk about the Peak District.

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.



Robin at Middleton Lakes