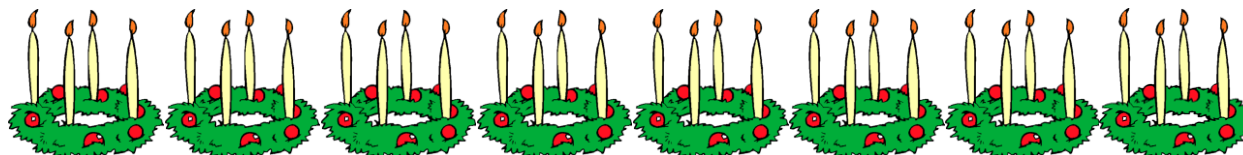


BIRDWATCHING *Group*

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



NEWSLETTER DECEMBER 2024

TONIGHT'S MEETING (5th December)

Tonight we welcome Group member Brian with a short talk entitled "Tasmania in Spring".

Brian joined the group over 50 years ago, not long after its formation as the then Wilmslow Guild Ornithological Society. He served as chairman for many years, and also lead the field trips, researching new venues and adding them to the growing list of sites visited on our coach trips. He has given a number of talks to the group in the past, usually based on holidays taken with his wife Alison. The talk on Tasmania was originally scheduled for the December 2020 meeting, but was postponed due to the Covid-19 outbreak.

Tasmania is Australia's only island state, and holds many of its special mammals; kangaroos, wallabies, wombats, pademelons and platypus can all be found on the island, together with a wide range of birds (including 12 species endemic to Tasmania). This talk shows a selection of species seen and habitats visited during the tour.

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

The Christmas buffet should start at around 8:30pm. Please bring your own plate, glasses will be provided.

There will be a small cover charge of £2 per head if you wish to attend the buffet, cash only, correct change appreciated.

COACH TRIPS

Our December outing is the car trip to Dunham Massey followed by Christmas lunch (see later).

Our January coach trip will take place on Sunday 19th January to the North Lancashire coast, departing from the Guild at 8am.

We will visit various sites along the coast that attract large numbers of wildfowl and waders during the winter months. The area is good for raptors as well. Locations we may well visit include Knott End, Pilling Lane End, Glasson Basin Marina and even Heysham Nuclear Power Station. Older members may recall the time there when we were challenged by two machine gun wielding police officers!

We last made this trip in January 2019. Book your seat at the desk.

The February coach trip is the weekend away to Solway.

COACH TRIP TO SPURN - 20th OCTOBER 2024

Any birder listening to the 5:10am Shipping Forecast (perhaps a few were?) could have been forgiven for thinking this was not the best of days to be venturing out to Spurn, an exposed place with little cover. "Warnings of gales in all areas except Trafalgar". Humber, the area where we were headed forecast storm force winds up to gale 8 and persistent rain. Fickle is the British weather, Saturday the day before was a benign and beautiful, warm, clear autumnal day.



Grey Plover

Spurn itself located on the east coast includes a unique feature, Spurn Point, a sand and shingle spit 5.5km long and reaching across the mouth of the Humber estuary. It is colonised by a unique ecosystem comprising of salt and wind tolerant plants providing some low shelter and is a valuable source of food for exhausted birds. At its narrowest point the spit is only 50m wide. In December 2013 it was breached by a strong storm surge and the road linking the point to the mainland was destroyed. Care must be taken at this point as at high tide the sea can inundate the area.



Common Redshank

So unusual and important to wildlife is the area that it was made a National Nature Reserve and designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest and as such is managed by the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust. Associated with Spurn are three other reserves, Kilnsea Wetlands, Hodgson's Fields and Welwick Salt Marsh.

Spurn has become a popular destination for our Group and the Autumn visit is timed to coincide with the seasonal migration across the North Sea from Europe. For my own part I always love the walk along the Spit itself but by the time you have walked there and back it leaves little time for exploring the other areas.

On the estuary side of the spit is an area of salt marsh and it was here there were several flocks of Brent Geese, a winter visitor to the UK. They comprise of three different breeding populations with the Spurn birds being of the dark bellied forms having travelled from Arctic Russia. There are two lighter bellied forms, one from Canada and the other from Svalbard which tend to overwinter further north although some are often seen at Spurn.



Common Shelduck



Little Egret

luckily it was the last of the weather the storm was to throw at us.

Meadow Pipits, Little Egrets, Shelducks, Cormorants, Kestrel, Curlew, Black-tailed Godwits, Turnstones and Oystercatchers were seen at various points down to the Lighthouse which was open for visits. At 36m tall and 144 steep steps to its top was well worth the effort for its spectacular views from the top.

The shelter is very limited along the length of the spit and the worst of the rain came just after leaving the Chalk Bank Hide but

Whilst only two of us ventured down the Spit most of the group explored the triangular area leading up to Kilnsea Wetlands. With its wider variety of habitat it proved to be a good choice. Little Grebe, Grey Heron, Mute Swans, Wigeon, Teal, Mallard, Common Scoter (on the sea), Buzzard, Ringed Plover, Grey Plover, Knot, Dunlin, Little Stint, Redshank, Greenshank, and Common Sandpiper were all seen. Also six species of Gull, Mediterranean, Black-headed, Common, Lesser Black-backed, Greater Black-backed and Herring Gull.



Water Rail

By the end of the day, between us we had seen a total of 61 species.

After a day of blustery wind and intermittent rain, the skies cleared, the wind calmed and the sun shone. Several members managed to get nice views of Water Rail and Little Egret from the Canal Scrape hide next to the Visitor Centre.

A good and fitting end to another Spurn day.

The bird of the day for me.....the Dark Bellied Brent Geese.



Dark-bellied Brent Goose & Dunlins

Photos by Robert D

STUART M

FINAL UPDATE FOR XMAS LUNCH

We will be meeting at the Axe & Cleaver (post code WA14 4SE) car park at 9.30 on Saturday 7th December. The car park may be busy due to a festive event going on until 11.30, so if anyone can share a lift, it would be helpful.

In case of emergency, i.e. running late or can't attend, please get in touch on my mobile 07983392685.

Coffee & tea will be available from 11.30 for those who want it.

Here's to a lovely festive walk followed by great food and good company.

JULIE & DAVE

MIGRATING BIRDS ON OUR CRUISE SHIP - NOVEMBER 2024

We have just returned to Liverpool from a 2 week cruise on Fred Olsen's Bolette via the Bay of Biscay, after visiting Portugal, Cadiz, Madeira & the Azores. So early for the spring nesting season, we were not expecting any land-based birds to hitch a lift, especially as the weather at home seems far too poor anyway. But remarkably, in the Bay of Biscay, on the way back, 9 species made themselves at home on deck 8, a small open deck strewn with artificial plants. It was a most unexpected opportunity for some great close-ups.



Here is my best shot, a trio of Common Starlings in pristine winter plumage and grouped together. So many spots! A total of 8 birds arrived in dribs and drabs, but often they all tended to flock close together, as Starlings tend to do, on the ship rails.



We had about 4 female Blackcaps like this one - all very active and quite bold in the artificial shrubbery.

No sign of a male Blackcap until the final day in the Bay of Biscay. Here he is peering out from under a sun lounger.





Above left - I lost count of the Chiffchaffs. Here is one with its breast feathers ruffled by the wind.



Above right - And here is a Robin, perched on one of the loungers.



Above left - Here is a White Wagtail (the continental version of our Pied Wagtail). There were several constantly patrolling the deck looking for scraps and crumbs.



Above right - A Song thrush also arrived. That also patrolled the deck and seemed less intimidated by human passengers than the other birds.

Presumably most of these birds intended migrating north over the open ocean. Whatever the case, they all stayed on board for several days, with the exception of a very surprising Redwing. Maybe that bird realised it had made a mistake, because it promptly left shortly after it had arrived!



Also seen were a pair of Chaffinches. The male landed unexpectedly on our balcony rail during the night when the balcony lights were on. Hesitant for some time, it eventually flew up to the light. After flying around the ceiling, it settled up next to the light, dropped to the floor, and having seemingly decided the set-up was a waste of its time, disappeared into the dark next door balcony.

A final treat was a juvenile Canary. The bird had fluffed up all its feathers and huddled into a corner away from the wind. Seeming to feel the cold, it flew off as soon as I got nearer for a photo. I suspect that this bird also realised it was going the wrong way.

As for sea birds, at various times in the voyage we saw the usual Manx and Cory Shearwaters, Common and Sandwich Terns, Gannets and Gulls.



But the most spectacular is this shot of countless thousands of Gulls swarming over the moored fishing boats in Leixoes harbour (Oporto's main port). Every available nearby space, including on every rooftop, seemed occupied by a gull – with the overflow on the adjoining beach too. Maybe at 9:30am the rest of the fleet had not yet arrived back?

Another interesting incident was reported by the two experts on board from Orca (the cetacean protection charity). On our way south they rescued a petrel and a shearwater that landed on board. Both birds had been unable to take off again, due to their well-known poor walking abilities. So they had to be rescued by launching them by hand over the side of the ship.

**PETER M
NOVEMBER 2024**

NEXT MONTH'S MEETING

The next indoor meeting will be on Thursday 9th January at 7:30pm when our speaker will be Chris Galvin with a talk entitled "Bee-eaters and Kingfishers".

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.



Merry Christmas from the
Committee