

# BIRDWATCHING *Group*

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## NEWSLETTER APRIL 2025

### TONIGHT'S MEETING (3rd April)

Welcome all to our final indoor meeting of the 2024-25 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 AGM our speaker this evening is Group member Robert who will give a talk entitled "Romania – Carpathian Mountains & Danube Delta".

Robert has been interested in birds and wildlife in general from an early age. He was an avid collector of bird books and at primary school amassed a collection of RSPB postcards won as prizes for doing well in tests (a great incentive!).

The birding really took off in earnest when Robert moved to Cheshire in 1974 and joined the fledgling Wilmslow Guild Ornithological Society as the Group was then called. Yes, he really has been a member for 50 years! The coach trips were the main draw, which gave him access to many birds not seen in his native Scotland. Also at this time an interest in bird and wildlife photography developed which has persisted to this day.

Robert has been an active committee member since the 1980's serving in many roles such as trip report writer, website manager and more recently as newsletter editor.

I hope you enjoy this evening's presentation.

Afterwards we will enjoy a social evening and buffet with tea/coffee and cakes. The tea and coffee will be available at the canteen to pay for as usual, with cakes available in the hall for £1 donation on registration.

## **CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2024-2025**

I am pleased to say that after a few challenging years, mainly because of the Covid outbreak, we have now had a more settled and successful year with a full program of well attended indoor meetings and field events. Most importantly, to the viability of the groups future we have seen our membership Grow.

Attracting new members is always a challenge, particularly younger members. Last year our registered membership was 49 and this has now increased to 57, a trend we hope to continue. I have also checked with the Guild and as a result of our increased numbers our membership fee will **not** be increasing for the next academic year.

One of the most powerful ways of attracting new members is by word of mouth and I would continue to urge all members to spread the word to friends, family and social groups you are into anyone interested in birding or indeed learning about it to try one of our meetings or even better to join us on a coach field trip.

### **Indoor Meetings**

One of the other very noticeable effects of the post Covid period has been the difficulty Jenny I has had in finding speakers. The rise in Zoom meetings, speakers retiring and social changes have all had an impact. In time, once things settle down this may change as a new crop of enthusiastic speakers become available.

Despite a speaker not turning up in November (thanks to Dave S for stepping in) and the last minute cancellation of the meeting in January due to a heavy fall of snow making travel difficult we have had a varied an interesting series of meetings well attended with an average attendance of 37.

It does take a considerable amount of time, finding, contacting, agreeing dates and booking speakers and the task of putting together the programme, with all the challenges and ups and downs that occur with live presentations thanks must go to Jenny I for all her work.

Jenny is always on the lookout for new and interesting speakers so please do let her know if you have any suggestions.

### **Field Trips**

At the time of writing we still have two more trips to go before the end of the season and thanks to Steve M's work every trip so far has been very well supported. In fact our last very enjoyable trip to Blacktoft Sands and Old Moor saw the best attendance we have had. The Guild's financial arrangements require that every trip is self-financing hence our charge of £30 pp or £15 U16's. If we don't get the numbers to cover our coach costs, the trip must be cancelled so please do continue to support the field trips. They are one of the key elements that make our group so successful. It is not necessary to be a group member to participate so if you know anyone interested pass on Steve's number.

Sitting very comfortably on the coach its easy to forget how much work goes into booking and organising the trip and the responsibility on the day ensuring all goes well. Many thanks to Steve for all the work he does in this respect.

### **Weekend Away – Solway 2025**

It was 7.30am on the 21st February, a stormy day, that twenty five members set off from the Guild for the annual weekend away trip, this year to the Solway. On the first day the destination was the Wildfowl and Wetlands Reserve, Caerlaverock. With much improved weather on day two Wigtown, Portpatrick, Wig Bay and West Freugh were all visited. Sunday brought another change in the weather with heavy rain and strong 56mph winds forecast. A circular route around Loch Ken and then a stop at Mersehead RSPB reserve with its small information centre overlooking windblown feeders. The trip recorded a very creditable 160 species of birds, one Badger, Roe Deer and Hares.

The group had visited the area before but this was the first time that Michael and Janet took on the mantle as organisers from Barbara who had been the organiser for the past 14 years.

Again it is no small responsibility organising such a trip and much thanks must go to Michael and Janet who volunteer to make all the arrangements on our behalf. Regrettably I was unable to go but there were many comments on how enjoyable the trip was.

### **Newsletter**

Robert continues to do a sterling job keeping us all up to date and informing us of all our activities.

It's your Newsletter so please do contribute your own articles, photographs or sketches for inclusion, they will be most welcome.

If you have not already done so, speak to Robert and sign up for the email version of the Newsletter. Robert also prepares a small number hard copies available on the night of the meeting.

### **WhatsApp Group – Cheshire Birders**

In addition to the Newsletter the WhatsApp group is a fast efficient way for members to keep in touch with one another and particularly to share sightings and locations.

The group is administered by Dave S, if you are not already participating and wish to do so, contact Dave and he will add you to the Group.

### **Christmas Car Trip and Lunch**

The 7th December was set for the traditional festive car trip and Christmas lunch. This year a walk through Dunham Massey was planned but, it was the intervention of storm Darragh that caused the walk to be cancelled. The risk of falling branches and trees was too great. However, the worst of the storm could not prevent the 28 members from meeting at the Axe & Cleaver to share a good festive meal and chin-wag together. Everyone had a good time and it was with thanks to Dave and Julie as the trips organisers.

## **Winter Garden Bird Survey 2023 – 2024**

As a source of fascinating facts and figures on our local garden birds, Barbara's report is a gem. The survey covers 20 weeks from mid November 2023 to the end of March 2024 and is based on sightings from 16 gardens, an increase from the 13 gardens last year. The report is very detailed with Species recorded, weekly average species counts, flock size and occasional visits.

To get a copy of this excellent report, you have to participate and I strongly recommend you do so.

Barbara has agreed to compile the report for the 2025 – 2026 winter and will be taking participants names at our Autumn meeting.

I should also mention Brian Dyke who assisted Barbara with his IT skills in producing the tables, many thanks to you both and to Robert for his photograph and formatting.

### **Conclusion**

All things considered it has been a successful year for the group and this has been reflected in the buoyant attendance and support for the field programme and rising membership.

We still need to attract new members and as a committee we have been giving some thoughts as to how this can be achieved. Also please don't forget the power of word of mouth, the groups best ambassadors and advocates are all of us, the existing members.

Don't be shy .....spread the word!!

None of this would be possible without the groups committee members who freely volunteer their time and effort to plan and make the programme happen. I am aware of several groups similar to ours that have had to close or are struggling due to a reluctance, for a variety of reasons, to become committee members. In our own case I am very pleased that is not a problem. Peter B has recently agreed to join the committee which means that we now have a full compliment of members. Welcome Peter.

Lastly on your behalf could I thank all committee members who volunteer their time to make our group and a success and so very enjoyable.

Happy birding everyone.

**STUART M**

## **COACH TRIPS**

The next coach trip is on Sunday 27th April to Tophill Low reserve in Yorkshire departing from the Guild at 7:30am.

Tophill Low, managed by Yorkshire Water, is one of Yorkshire's best nature reserves, recording over 160 different species. Featuring two reservoirs, marsh, mud lagoons, and woodland, the reserve has an extensive resident bird population and attracts many migrants. There are 12 hides dotted around the reserve. We last visited in 2019.

A day ticket to the nature reserve costs £3.50 for adults and £2.50 for concessions (*note that you may need coins for the ticket machine*) Toilets are available but note that no food is available on-site so please remember to bring a packed lunch.

The final coach trip of the season is on Sunday 11th May to RSPB's Ynis-Hir reserve in mid Wales departing from the Guild at 7:30am.

This reserve was the base for BBC's Springwatch nature programme a few years ago. The reserve is located on the Dovey estuary and mixes Welsh Oak woodland, estuary salt marsh, lowland wet grasslands, freshwater pools, reedbeds and peat bog. It is particularly good for summer visitors such as redstarts, pied flycatchers and warblers which all breed here. Little egrets also breed on the reserve. Raptors are frequent visitors here and the breeding Welsh ospreys are just half a mile down the road.

The nature trails consist of three main trails: Saltmarsh (1.5 miles), Woodland (1.5 miles), and Wetland (2.5 miles). There are seven hides, two viewpoints and an enormous 1.2 metre feeder outside the visitor centre. Hot drinks and snacks (takeaway only) and toilet facilities are available here. Ynis-Hir is an RSPB reserve so members should bring their cards (£6 entry fee for non-members). We last visited in 2019.

Book your seat for both trips at the desk tonight.

## **SUMMER CAR TRIPS**

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

### **Morning walk to Lindow Moss, date TBA**

Lindow Moss, also known as Saltersley Common, is a raised mire peat bog on the edge of Wilmslow. It is best known for the discovery of the preserved bog body of Lindow Man in 1984 as well as Lindow Woman the year before. Lindow Moss is a unique home to a variety of peatland habitats – a large area of peat bog mixed with, fen, oak-birch woodland, open water pools and ditches. A heritage trail allows access to much of the site.

Details of the walk are still to be finalised and will be publicised later via the email circulation list and the WhatsApp group. Please ensure you are signed up to one or

either (preferably both). See Robert for the email circulation list and Dave for the WhatsApp group.

### **Burton Mere Wetlands (Dee Estuary), Sunday 8th 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. Bittern, Bearded Tits, Avocets and Mediterranean Gulls all breed here in. Non-breeding regular visitors include black-tailed godwits and spotted redshanks.

RSPB members should remember to bring their card; otherwise there is a £7 entrance fee. There is a new cafe on site but it seems to be temporarily closed due to shortage of staff. Whether that will still be the case in June is uncertain so it would be best to bring your own lunch to be safe (or check the RSPB website in advance).

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.

## **WEEKEND AWAY TO SOLWAY 21-23 FEBRUARY 2025**

### **Friday 21st February**



Barnacle Geese

With the forecast of a stormy day ahead, and a weekend of contrasting weather in prospect, twenty five hardy birders set off from the Wilmslow Guild at 7.30 a.m., destination Dumfries and Galloway. After a coffee break at Tebay (resisting, for now at least, the temptations of the renowned farm shops), we arrived at Caerlaverock Wildfowl and Wetlands Reserve at around 11.30 a.m., just in time for the wind and rain to start in earnest.

Undeterred, and after a short introduction by a reserve warden, our party scattered to the four winds and to the various hides around the site. A handful of us stayed at the Peter Scott observatory for an interesting short talk about the various wildlife to be found around the reserve and, in particular, the large flocks of whooper swans and barnacle geese that migrate south to these wetlands from Iceland and Svalbard respectively every winter. A scattering of grain by the volunteer warden provided a close up view of the whoopers and their varied beak patterns. This was how WWT founder Sir Peter Scott used to identify each and every bird that visited the reserve in his day.



Whooper Swans

The conditions made bird watching a challenge, but a respectable 51 species were spotted throughout the day. This including a varied selection of ducks and waders, little egrets and, for a lucky few, a female hen harrier that showed well from the Tower Hide.

A male goosander was present on the pool at the Peter Scott observatory along side the whooper and mute swans, Canada geese, mallards, teal and wigeon.



Roe Deer

On the walk down to the Salcot hide several members had a close encounter with a Roe Deer on the path, one of several Roe Deer seen over the weekend. Looking out to the merse from the hide was pretty nigh impossible as this was straight into the howling gale and driving rain. However looking inland towards the Folly field was better. There were several golden plover and redshanks present in the large flock of lapwings and starlings.

The sheltered woodland and feeders around the Peter Scott trail yielded a good variety of finches and other passerines, including tree sparrow, greenfinch and treecreeper, with small flocks of barnacle geese, curlew and oystercatcher also visible in the fields beyond. The main flock of barnacle geese, many hundred strong, had been seen near the entrance to the Caerlaverock site a mile and a half down the road, although not a very good view through the rain battered bus windows.

The late afternoon saw us travelling along the coast road towards our hotel at Newton Stewart. Now the evening sun came out and revealed to us the beautiful coastline. A just reward for our hardiness and dedication and promised good weather tomorrow.

We spent our first evening meal together while comparing notes of the day.

**MICHAEL AND JANET**

### **Saturday 22nd February**

Morning arrived with clear blue skies, sunshine 9C and remained so all day.



Rook

Wigton was our first port of call. En-route Crows and Lapwing were feeding in the lush green meadows and beyond wonderful views of the mountains. Starlings were perching on rooftops.

Leaving the coach, we walked down a country lane to the sound of birdsong, trees, and mixed hedges on either side with banks of Snowdrops. Chaffinch, Blue tit, Great tit, Goldfinch were busy in the hedges and trees, whilst a Goldcrest flitted around in a conifer. A Buzzard flew overhead, Magpie, Pheasant, Wood Pigeon were patrolling the fields with Curlews gathered. A Rook, one

of many that we later saw, made an appearance, then heard a Song Thrush with his cascade of notes, and later saw him. Grey Heron stood erect and tall in the distant field.

Next Wigton Harbour, a mixed habitat, with an area of two recently created wetlands, a new bird hide adjacent to the river Bladnoch, with a very smart footbridge The muddy banks yielded no birdlife but a Reed Bunting was spotted in the bushes. Two Mute swans seen away in the distance, a Whooper swan grazing, Shelduck, and a solitary Barnacle goose. Eleven Curlew added to our list, while three Skylarks gave a wonderful display of their song flight. Pink-footed geese and pintail were seen with a 'scope. A Little grebe and Redshank were spotted as we left this interesting area owned by the local farmer, no longer a harbour for boats.



Black Guillemot

Portpatrick – a drive about 45 minutes, admiring the Gorse in flower, banks of Snowdrops and large flocks of Gulls in the fields including Lesser Black -backed. The aim was to find Black Guillemot, and we saw one through the 'scope at sea, then another with a super closer view in the harbour. Also on the list of must see was the Rock Pipit, and one obliged by sitting high on a rock then flying to join another one in the cliff face.



Pale-bellied Brent Geese

Wig Bay – a short drive took us to Rhins of Galloway Coast path. Oystercatchers and Curlews in huge numbers were spotted grazing in the fields, a Buzzard sat waiting for a meal. Common gull stood to attention in a field. Handsome Brent geese paddled along in the sea. Slavonian Grebe (or Horned Grebe), Red breasted Merganser and Long tailed duck were seen in the 'scopes, many thanks to those who generously allowed us to use them on so many occasions. A colourful Stonechat sat on a rock



Eurasian Oystercatchers

alongside the shingle beach full of shells. Brent geese paddled in quite close to the edge of the water, murmuring to themselves, Redshank wandered around probing for food.



Common Gull

Onwards to West Freugh – this marshy area is operated by a defence contractor on behalf of the MOD. Stopping at the roadside en-route 2 Pied wagtails bobbing along on the shingle beach were seen from the coach window, Wigeon, Teal and many gulls in the distance on the water.

'Scopes at the ready to find Hen Harrier, a Grey Heron flew over and a couple of Roe deer quietly grazed. We waited for a while,

then patience paid as two Hen Harriers gave a wonderful flying display. A Buzzard was also spotted sitting on a fence post.

The day ended with a beautiful sunset and WGBG members bursting with pleasure and awe at the sightings we had that day.

### **Sunday 23rd February**

The morning dawned with a forecast of heavy rain, 8C feeling like 4C, 56 mph winds. Undaunted we set off in full waterproof regalia. Andy the coach driver in cheerful mood.

Loch Ken circular – Red Kite was spotted flying in wide circles, high in the sky, then dropping and landing in the field by the Loch. Pink-footed geese and Canada geese, Greylag geese Grey Heron, Kestrel had also been seen through the windows of the coach. It was difficult to focus through the mist and pouring rain but Buzzard, Crows, Magpie, Wood Pigeon, a bedraggled Pheasant and Roe deer were added to the list of the day, and a third Red Kite. Wigeon, Teal, Mallard and a Shoveler, bobbed about on the Loch. Poor Kestrel fought against the high winds.



Barnacle Geese at Mersehead

Mersehead RSPB nature reserve – this was a welcome sanctuary. A small site with a visitors centre and toilets. It has wetland, and coastal trails with sand dunes and hides but not to be visited today unfortunately. Well worth another visit sometime.

Some members sat looking out from the windows of the small information centre onto the windblown feeders, others stayed on the coach, to take a short stroll later to the centre. Chaffinch and Greenfinch and Goldfinch hung onto the feeders blowing in the wind, House sparrow picked up the fallen seeds, along with Dunnock, Blackbird and Robin.

Later Robert reported that a small group of four had seen a Badger and 2 Roe Deer on their short windblown, very wet stroll to the Meida hide. Not much was seen from the hide other than a couple of Shovelers and a Great Spotted Woodpecker that flew over. They had also encountered the main flock of many hundred Barnacle Geese in a neighbouring field.

**2.45pm** – time to return home. The wind and rain was relentless, Andy our coach driver drove us safely home. We all agreed the weekend was a huge success with a great field trip total for the weekend, a total of 160 birds, one Badger, Roe deer and Hares.

Our many thanks to Janet and Michael for booking and organising the hotel, as well as the group and hotel staff. Many thanks also to Steve for organising the coach and routes for the weekend, and during the season.

Also thanks to Brian for his expertise and knowledge, and to Barbara for her record keeping of past field trips, these are a great help.

Thanks to all those members who supported this weekend away.

*Photos by Robert D*

**JENNY I**



## **GARDEN BIRD SURVEY**

Our survey finishes on 20 April. Please will you email me your forms after this. An electronic copy is preferable, but if this is not available please post a hard copy. I'm away in Cape Town over Easter for best part of a month and will reply on my return.

**BARBARA P**

A copy of the Excel template is attached to the email with the newsletter. You can find Barbara's email address and postal address at the bottom of the template. Contact Barbara if you have any problems (phone number is on the membership card).

## **NEXT MONTH'S MEETING**

There isn't one! The first meeting of the 2025-26 season will be on Thursday 4th September starting at 7:30pm when our speaker will be John Gardner with a talk entitled "Hebridean Spring".

Best wishes for a good summer from the Committee.

## **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 Thursday before the meeting.