

COACH TRIP TO THE FYLDE COAST – 26th JANUARY 2020

The Fylde coast comprises of the area above Liverpool and below the Lake District. From Fleetwood in the North, through Cleveleys to Lytham St. Anne's with the Irish Sea in the west and the Ribble estuary in the south. To the east lies the Bowland Hills. It is an area rich in diverse habitat. The complex of sand banks and mud flats associated with its several large estuaries provide overwintering and passage habitat for hundreds of thousands of wading birds. The inland waters and pools are also ideal quarters for wildfowl and the flat Lancashire moss lands hold huge numbers of overwintering flocks of Pink-footed Geese. Along with Blackpool, Cleveley and Fleetwood, this area was to be the destination for the twenty three of us who set out from Wilmslow on this January morning.

Newton Marsh near Freckleton village was our first stop. Waterlogged fields, large areas of standing water and water filled ditches and channels all provided sheltered sites for Wigeon, Shoveler, Little Egret and Black-tailed Godwit. Persistent rain was a problem but the coach itself proved to be an excellent "hide" for us; it was dry, warm and comfortable as well as providing an elevated vantage point over the tops of the farmland hedges. Despite the good viewpoint there was a great deal of speculation the length of the coach regarding the identification of a grey and white bird fluttering its wings in the shelter of a small ditch. Perhaps one of the, for me, confusing, plumage stages of an immature gull? No, I got it embarrassingly wrong.....it was a Tesco's plastic carrier bag.



Wigeon

Our next stop was Fairhaven Lake, Lytham St Ann's, a salt water lake, just over one meter deep and managed for recreational use with a café and RSPB visitor centre. Our visit coincided with a local run and so it was full of visitors. The site, adjacent to the shore, provides welcome shelter for overwintering birds in poor weather and at the time of our visit we saw Redshank, Cormorants and Mute Swans and in the distance we could hear Curlews calling. Access to the shoreline was restricted due to major engineering works taking place as part of the sea defence improvements.



Redshank

Driving further north we came to Starr Hills / Starr Gate where we walked along the adjacent sea shoreline. We found a group of busy Sanderlings following the ebb and flow of the sea along the sand whilst in the shelter of the sea defences there were Turnstones and Redshank resting from the gusting wind. The sea itself was quite choppy but with careful observation and the aid of a scope there were small numbers of Common Scoter riding out the peaks and troughs of the waves. It is a fairly bulky, uniformly black duck that overwinters in large numbers all around our coast.



Turnstone

Rossal Point Coast Guard Station was our next destination. The station itself is a tower that provides public access to an excellent viewing point on its uppermost storey from which there are superb views across Morecambe Bay, the Large Deep Channel and the approaches to Fleetwood. A good spot for a bit of sea watching, and yes, we were rewarded with sightings of Eider Ducks far offshore. Back inland, in the shelter of the dunes a solitary Stonechat was showing, perched on the top of scrubby bushes.



Goldeneye

Our last stop of the day was Marton Mere, a local nature reserve that was once one of Blackpool's rubbish tips. Long closed the tip has been transformed into a diverse range of maturing habitats including open water, reed beds, grassland with pockets of scrub and woodland. So successful has the transformation been that now the site has been designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest for its birdlife.

Goldeneye ducks, Kestrel, Song Thrush, Fieldfares, Linnets, Pink-footed and Canada Geese were all seen and even a Cetti's Warbler was heard calling. As the day drew to a close there was a Starling murmuration and, perhaps the star sighting of the day, seen by only three of the group who stayed out for the full allotted time till exactly 5.00pm..... two Woodcocks. I only wish I had been one of them; perhaps there is a key field craft lesson to learn from this:

You don't see many Woodcocks while sitting on a coach!!

Photos by Robert D

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