

COACH TRIP TO LUNT MEADOWS AND MARTIN MERE - 24TH NOVEMBER 2019

30 Birding Group members climbed onto the coach in Wilmslow on a misty and gloomy morning. It was The Wilmslow Festive 5k run this morning so there was a steady stream of sports clad enthusiasts walking along to the start. They think that we are mad and we are not too sure about them! It was a bit cool for flimsy shorts!

We set off along the motorways towards the Lancashire coast. Being inveterate birders we checked for birds to start our day list but they were scarce and I only noted a Carrion Crow in each field and a Magpie every half mile on the hard shoulder.

An essential detour for our first stop - toilets on the sea front at Crosby! It was high tide so only the heads of the Gormley statues were sticking up out of the water. Nonetheless I was able to expand my day list. A flock of soggy looking feral pigeons were mooching about near the car park and on the grassed area there were Gulls, Black- Headed, Common, and Herring and a small flock of Starlings. There was Cormorant and Shelduck on the sea.



Barn owl at Lunt Meadows

We moved on to Lunt Meadows, a new reserve for several Members. The Meadows are a 77 hectare flood basin for The River Alt and rather lacking in facilities such bird hides. We had to make do with screens.



Whooper Swan

The main barrier was closed when we arrived so we all trudged about 400m down to the car park. As we walked down, and right from the start, we were all treated to several large skeins of Pink-footed Geese identified by their constant 'wink - wink' call. There was also a large number of Pheasants foraging in the crops in the fields. Once we reached the car park we searched nearby bushes and found Reed Bunting, Robin, and Blackbird.

From there and as far as I could tell the birders split into three groups, one larger, one small, and one of a single person. The

single person group was rewarded by a sighting of Short-eared Owl.

The group which I was in moved on to The Main Pool and was rewarded with a large number of ducks; Wigeon, Mallard, Tufted, Teal, Shoveller, and Gadwall. There were

also Coot, Moorhen, Mute Swan, Greylag Geese, and Grey Heron, and in the air there were Snipe, Lapwing, Kestrel, and Bar Tailed Godwit. We then moved on to the screen overlooking No1 Reedbed but this did not yield anything to be added to my day list but looking back over the Garganey Scrape we caught brief glimpses of Pintail and Goosander.

The lone birder then met us with a report of a Short-eared Owl seen from the flood barrier of the river. We climbed up onto the bank beside The Pump Station. No Owl, but we got good views of Sparrowhawk, Buzzard, and Blue Tit, and Robin in the shrubs and Wood Pigeon across in the fields studiously ignoring the gas fired bird scarer that was sounding off at regular intervals. I could also see Magpie and Jackdaw. We continued the circuit of the reserve, whilst seeing many birds the only thing that I added to my list was Coot and Starling.

We got back to the car park and were just turning back towards our coach when there was a cry of 'Barn Owl' so we hurried over to where the smaller group was gathered and were rewarded with a distant but clear view of this bird.



Ruff

Time to move on and we climbed back into the coach and the majority took advantage of the journey time to have their lunch. Initially it was a torturous route which made drinking tea or coffee a bit tricky but we soon arrived at our second venue, Martin Mere. This is a much more civilized experience with hides and seats!

I first walked along to The Ron Barker hide to add Whooper Swan to the day list. Then a much more satisfying view of a Barn Owl

although it was being harried by a Carrion Crow. I also got splendid views of two Marsh Harriers looking for their lunch. I walked back along to the Kingfisher Hide where there are bird feeders to attract the smaller birds and expanded my day list with Chaffinch, Dunnock, Coal Tit, Greenfinch, Goldfinch, Song Thrush, Mistle Thrush and Great Tit. There was also Little Egret, Moorhen, and Little Grebe.

I then walked back to the main hide to watch the feeding of the swans although this is a bit of a misnomer as there are not so many swans on the reserve but hundreds of ducks all jostling greedily for that grain. There was not many species that I had not seen at Lunt Meadows but much closer views were on offer and I did add Shelduck and Redshank and rather aggressive Ruff which would only allow one of their species near the food at any one time.

I walked the main route and visited all of the hides up to the Harrier Hide but with no further additions to the day list.

It was now dusk and getting increasingly difficult for viewing or photography so I made my way back to our coach and the journey home happy with our bird list total of 62 species.

On examining the list that is passed around the coach I noted a number of species were included that I hadn't seen. These were Grey Partridge, Water Rail, Goldcrest, Wren, Tree Sparrow, Nuthatch, and Stonechat.

Photos by Chris S and Robert D

CHRIS S



Barn Owl at Martin Mere