

COACH TRIP TO MARSHSIDE AND MERE SANDS WOOD – 21st NOVEMBER 2021

A group of twenty eight left The Wilmslow Guild at 8am by coach on a cold bright morning, many of us having had to defrost our car windscreens after a week of very mild temperatures.

The coach was early and warm and we were welcomed by Mustafa, our driver. During a steady journey we had the sun rising on one side and the just waning full moon setting on the other. After a slight detour for a comfort stop where one member watched a rabbit on some scrubby grass, we arrived at Marshside RSPB Reserve on Marine Road in Southport. We were dropped off near Fairclough's Pool and as we walked along the path there were flocks of lapwings and small skeins of geese flying overhead. Many more geese were on the surrounding marshland, some greylags and Canadas and many pink-footed geese making their distinctive call. On the pool there was a good selection of ducks, gadwall, pintail, shoveler, teal, shelduck and a separate group of tufted ducks.

Moving along to Nel's Hide we saw many waders grouped together with their heads under their wings against the stiff breeze, many of which were black-tailed godwits. The currently resident glossy ibis was seen in the distance through some scopes.

More tufted ducks were at Junction Pool and moving on, a cetti's warbler was heard by some and briefly seen by one member. More flocks of geese were flying overhead as the busy coastal road was crossed to check the scrub and marshy fields on the other side. The geese were busy feeding in the long grass and some could only be spotted when they raised their dark heads above the foliage level. A trio of pied wagtails were flitting about along with several greenfinches, one of which posed on the top of a bush with its plumage gleaming in the sun. Two kestrels were together overhead while a curlew gave its evocative cry as it flew above the road.



Greenfinch



Pink-footed Geese



Glossy Ibis

Some were fortunate to see a male hen harrier fly low over the coastline from there, then watched it being stooped by a peregrine over

the marsh toward the coast. Others saw a merlin, two buzzards high up and in the distance, a little egret. In the adjacent hedges, a stonechat held his territory and further along a reed bunting was spotted. Those who walked along Redshank Road down to the beach picked up plovers, redshanks and oystercatchers though their scopes with the Blackpool Tower as a backdrop. A great egret was also seen. Around the car park were skylarks and meadow pipits, one member saw and heard a cronking raven flying over and a little egret was fishing close by in one of the channels.



Pintail

By the seat approaching the RSPB Visitor Centre a very visible wren noisily defended its territory as people walked past. A welcome relief from the breeze and seats to sit in comfort and look while having a warm drink awaited in the Centre. Quite close in the left channel, a pintail and a mallard were feeding together while flocks of lapwings and starlings checked the soft ground for food amongst the mixture of geese. Other occupants on the water included teal, moorhen and wigeon and further away, a great white egret was seen.

Across the road a sparrowhawk flew overhead into the nearby hedge and just along the track a birder indicated a male hen harrier flying left across the trees on the shoreline opposite, giving an excellent view, a real highlight of the day for many. Meanwhile the sparrowhawk flew back across the road while a kestrel hovered overhead.

Moving back to the coach, evening primroses were still blooming in sheltered spots and a large group of house sparrows chattered to each other while perched on the sunny side of a hedge. A pleasant surprise was the sight of three red-legged partridges nestled in the field near a cattle trough very close to the coach.

All on board, it was time for lunch while moving on, glimpsing a lone herring gull surveying his territory from a flagpole on a roundabout.

Mere Sands Wood.



Earth Star Fungi

The name Mere Sands Wood dates back to medieval times when the area was part of Martin Mere, covered by water. From Anglo-Saxon times there had been a fishery which included eels as well as fresh fish. It had been drained in the 18th century for use as fertile arable land. Between 1975-82 sand was quarried for glass making. Then the site was acquired by The Wildlife Trust for Lancashire, Manchester and Merseyside as a nature reserve and is also a SSSI for its geological interest.

No access was available to Marshall Hide but the woodland was sheltered and sunny with colourful leaves, some still on the trees but many crunching underfoot and bare trees giving more visibility to the wildlife. An interesting fungus called Earth Star attracted attention on the woodland floor then a group of long tailed tits feeding in the branches of the silver birches on route to Ainscough Hide. Here, a lone male goosander swam across the water along with cormorants and black headed gulls. Reaching the feeding station at Holmeswood Corner, it was found to be almost empty of food as well as birds, but with patience, blue tit, robin, great tit, dunnock and nuthatch appeared despite families with children and dogs constantly walking by.



Goosander (male)

Moving on to Redwing Hide, there was an array of posing cormorants, a lone moorhen, shoveler and several teal hiding in the rushes, detected by their yellow flashes gleaming in the sunlight. Then two little grebes suddenly popped up together in the centre of the pool.



Nuthatch

The next hide was closed as was the one dedicated to Cyril Gibbons, the only one looking over Mere End Pool. The latter had been destroyed by arson in March 2020 but is now being reconstructed. Continuing the woodland walk which was quiet, showing little wildlife although several plants including red campion were still in bloom, End Lake Platform was reached. Here a male swan was overseeing his one cygnet while a family fed them and the usual greedy mallards, a large group of elegant

gadwalls being further out on the water. Moving off, care had to be taken to avoid the protective hissing cob.

A field of maize stubble was checked but nothing of interest found on route to the cafe. This is a welcome new addition to the Visitor Centre with large floor-to-ceiling windows filled with bird safe glass. One member saw a great spotted woodpecker fly across the meadow from there and chaffinch and song thrush were also spotted in that area.

Other sightings around the reserve also included siskin, Canada goose, little egret, jay, grey partridge and whooper swans in adjacent fields, and a fortunate couple had a glimpse of a kingfisher.

The start of the journey home was brightened by the setting sun with clouds silhouetted by a red, gold sky and we arrived safely back at The Guild at 5.45pm.

Our total field count of birds was 73, a pretty good number as there had not seemed many around in the afternoon.

Photos by Robert D

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