

COACH TRIP TO OLD MOOR & IDLE VALLEY – 13th MARCH 2022

Departing Wilmslow at 7.30, our coach travelled along the M62 towards Old Moor RSPB. The skies to the east were grey and threatening, though much to the relief all 23 on board the rains held off and the sun broke through. Our driver, Mustafa, timed our arrival impeccably, pulling up dead on 9.30 just as the reserve gates were opened and where a volunteer warden was on hand to give us a briefing on the latest sightings and the new reserve layout. The paths to the east had been re routed and recent lottery funding had been used to try and restore habitat damage following some serious flooding in recent years.

The feeders and bushes around the visitor centre proved to be productive for smaller birds: Greenfinch, Goldfinch, Chaffinch and Bullfinch were seen along with Brambling and a single Lesser Redpoll. We soon added Blue and Great Tits along with Reed Bunting before I joined a smaller group who set off to explore the path out to the west along the reed beds.

Before reaching the first hide, from a viewpoint overlooking the reed bed we had our first view of a female Marsh Harrier: its creamy head shining in the sunlight, and above the woodland 3 or 4 Buzzards circled the skies. The lakes themselves held a good variety of ducks and we soon added Great Crested and Little Grebe. The reported Black-necked Grebes were sought in vain and we later discovered they were on the Adwick Washlands some 2 miles to the east of Old Moor.

Not unsurprisingly there was no sighting of the Bittern from the Bittern hide. The warden had raised our hopes in his briefing by informing us he had heard the Booming Bittern just before our arrival and indeed later we met a local photographer who had caught a quick glimpse.

We retraced our steps back to the visitor centre and reflected on the loss of the tree sparrows that the warden had mentioned. Indeed checking back on the trip report from our last visit, which was on exactly the same day in March 2016, we had recorded good numbers of Tree Sparrow and Yellowhammer both sadly absent today.

We followed the paths out towards the main hides with views over the mere and wader scrapes where we observed a good variety of duck: Tufted, Shoveler, Teal, Wigeon, Pochard and Goldeneye along with Gadwall which I would say were the most numerous.

There were good numbers of Lapwing and a solitary Redshank to add to our list and from the Wath Ings hide we spotted a Goosander on the bank. The dominant birds on the mere were the very vocal Black-headed Gulls and after a somewhat half hearted search for a possible Mediterranean Gull amongst them we concluded they must have been sighted in one of the outlying parts of the reserve. As we left the final hide a chiffchaff was singing, clearly audible above the cacophony from the gulls.

After an enjoyable morning we departed at 12.45 to enjoy our packed lunches during the short transfer to the Idle Valley reserve.

Idle Valley is run by the Nottinghamshire Wildlife trust, a totally new venue for the group and indeed everyone on board. The reserve consists of a 375 hectare network of lakes, wetland, grassland and scrub and is also the site of a beaver re introduction scheme, with 8 beavers including 4 kits being released in 2021.

We were greeted by a lady who ran the cafe who was rather alarmed by the sight of the coach. When we assured her we had all just eaten and were not about to order Sunday lunch, she calmed down. The visitor centre overlooked Bellmore Lake and although there was no warden in evidence we were able to download reserve maps via a Q code to our phones. There was a path around the lake and a further path followed the Idle River through woodland and out towards some further wetland areas.



Red-crested Pochard

Bellmoor Lake proved very rewarding: we viewed Goldeneye, Shoveler, Tufted and Shelduck but the highlight was a magnificent Red-crested Pochard. As well as Canada and Greylag Geese, a single Egyptian Goose gave us good views.

I joined a small group who set off along the river, enjoying the sunshine and early spring blossoms on the Blackthorn, a peaceful path with very few other members of the public. The woodland was still rather quiet, certainly lots of

habitat for migrants and warblers arriving later in the season. Today there were chiffchaffs singing every few hundred yards. One eventually obliged and sang for us in full view. The hoped for fly past from a kingfisher failed to materialise though some members back at the lake did spot one as it circled the island.

Time was pressing on and checking our downloaded maps we realised we would have to step up the pace if we had any chance of reaching the Chainbridge Lakes and Scrapes. As our leisurely stroll turned into a route march and the sweat trickled down my neck, I reflected on the irony: this was a riverside walk anything but Idle!

We just about reached the southern end of the first lake before admitting defeat as the bank was rather overgrown and views restricted. A Kestrel flew overhead and a couple of shoveler were seen.

On our return to the coach for a 4.30 departure we added Siskin and Song Thrush.

We shall have to explore the possibility of coach access for dropping us off nearer the Chainbridge end of the reserve and walking back to the Bellmore Lake visitor centre in a future visit and making it an April or May date.

All in all, a very enjoyable day's birding: the species tally was 61.

STEVE M