

CAR TRIP TO SANDBACH FLASHES - SATURDAY 12th DECEMBER 2020

It was exactly 10 years to the day since the group last visited Sandbach Flashes. Then it was cold and foggy, far from ideal for birding. There have been noticeable changes over the last 10 years, a small housing development has expanded and Clay Lane, the access road to the flashes, has been partially upgraded; at times it was quite busy.



Common Buzzard

and the lane leading to Brook Farm was well under water. Opposite PHF, Hancock's Flood normally limited to a small corner of the field in front of the farm, spilled over and lapped the side of Clay Lane.

It was lovely to see so many waterfowl present on the flash; plenty of Wigeon whistling away, Mallard, Teal, Moorhen, and a solitary Coot. Our first good scope was of a Buzzard sitting on a hedge just beyond the flash; he seemed quite content there just surveying the scene before him. By now the slight drizzle had eased and birding started in earnest. Several skeins of Canada Geese flew overhead calling, there were more than 300 in total, followed shortly after by a group of 35 Curlew also calling – what a delight - but they circled around before finally landing near to Hancock's Flood. Over PHF we watched a Peregrine harassing a flock of Lapwings. There was a good selection of gulls on the flash, Herring, Lesser Black-backed and plenty of Black Headed. The ground not under water in front of the interesting selection of smaller birds all searching for food. There was a small flock of Starlings, Pied Wagtail, Chaffinch and Redwing all foraging. 5 Greylags flew overhead and joined the large flock of Canada Geese now settled on PHF. On the higher ground behind the flash there were 2 male Pheasants seemingly oblivious to the sound of guns nearby.



Wigeon farm held an food. There was a

Just before 11 o'clock the two groups swapped over and it was our turn for Elton Hall Flash. Close to the flash there are two feeding stations with an excellent variety of feeders well stocked with an assortment of food supplied by SECOS (South East Cheshire Ornithological Society). There were plenty of small birds attracted to the

feeders and we noted 2 Robins, 6 Blue Tits, 5 Long-tailed Tits, 4 Great Tits, 4 Goldfinches, at least 8 Chaffinches and several House Sparrows.

Again there were plenty of winter ducks on the water including 6 Goosander (4 males and 2 females), Tufted Duck, Wigeon (I counted 50+), Mallard and Teal. There were 8 Cormorants perched on a dead tree in the middle of the flash and a Grey Heron skulking in the fringes of the reeds at the water's edge. The Great Black-backed Gulls favoured this stretch of water and I noted 15. In amongst all the Canada Geese we managed to find 2 Barnacle Geese and one lone Greylag. Tier 3 group saw a Pintail here, but by the time we arrived it had disappeared,



Goosander (male)

By 11.45 the skies had darkened again, threatening more rain, so we decided to head for home. Then we had a lovely surprise as Annette had brought mince pies for a festive treat, so we all tucked in, socially distancing. The general consensus was that it had been a most enjoyable morning's birding and a resolve to return sooner rather than later.

The count for the morning was 36.

BARBARA P