

**The Birders' Bulletin** - from Croydon RSPB Group (Mid-January 2009)

These Field Trips with the Croydon RSPB Group are coming up soon :-

**Saturday, 24<sup>th</sup> January : Lee Valley**

(Car trip, departing Fairfield Halls forecourt at 9 am. Check details with Roger Tarran - 8660 2664).

*After one or two poor years, **Bittern** are apparently back near the Bittern Viewpoint this winter. Lee Valley is always good for wildfowl, including **Smew** and **Goosander**, and close-up views of **Water Rail** and **Kingfisher** can also be expected. Flocks of **Siskin** are often encountered and **Water Voles** have been seen on our last couple of visits.*

**Saturday, 7<sup>th</sup> February : Rye Harbour**

(Car trip, departing Fairfield Halls forecourt at 8 am. Check details with Roger Tarran - 8660 2664).

*This is another site that has provided us with memorable views of **Bittern** and **Smew** in the past. **Red-breasted Merganser** and **Common Scoter** can also be expected and **Scaup** is very possible too. At the time of writing, a **King Eider** is being reported regularly just offshore from the reserve. **Barn Owl**, **Grey Partridge**, **Sanderling** and **Red-throated** or other **Diver** are usually seen and the likes of **Merlin**, **Long-eared Owl**, **Snow Bunting** or **Shore Lark** would be no surprise!*

**Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> February : Barn Elms WWT**

(Meet at Barn Elms at 10.15. Entry charge for non-members of WWT. Check details with Terry or Linda Osborn - 8679 2405).

*Another fairly reliable **Bittern** site. **Water Rail** is also likely, while **Jack Snipe** and **Water Pipit** are being seen regularly at the time of writing. Added attractions are the numerous hides and a warm café with an extensive ranges of cakes and beverages to round off the day!*

**Sunday, 22<sup>nd</sup> February : Burton Mill Pond**

(Car trip, departing Fairfield Halls forecourt at 8 am. Check details with Roger Tarran - 8660 2664).

***Bittern** winters regularly at this Sussex Wildlife Trust reserve too, but we've never yet seen one here! **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** and **Willow Tit** are also realistic targets during our walk through the mixed woodland and alder carr where wonderful close-up looks at **Siskin**, **Lesser Redpoll** and **Marsh Tit** have been enjoyed during lunch breaks in the past. **Common Buzzard** is a near-certainty over the nearby downs and **Green Sandpiper** could be wintering on one of the smaller ponds. Heathland sites nearby are good for **Woodlark**, **Dartford Warbler** or possibly **Northern Grey Shrike**.*

A little further ahead (but bookings are being taken now):-

**Saturday, 25<sup>th</sup> April : Fingringhoe Wick and Abberton Reservoir, Essex**

(Coach outing departing Fairfield Halls at 8am. Coach fare £14 with entrance fee of about £2 at each reserve. Check details with Sheila Mason - 8777 9370).

*We'll be spending two or three hours at each of these two Essex Wildlife Trusts in the north-east of that county. Both reserves have visitor centres and a variety of hides. Fingringhoe Wick is based around overgrown gravel pits (abandoned in the 1950s) on the bank of the River Colne. It is a prime site for **Nightingale**, which should be newly-arrived when we visit. Many other summer migrants should be coming in and passage waders will be present along the shoreline of the tidal river. Abberton Reservoir is only half a dozen miles away and the reserve there is located beside a sheltered bay on the shoreline of the vast reservoir. Many species of resident and passage wildfowl, waders, gulls, terns, etc will doubtless be present and the adjoining farmland usually yields some interesting sightings too.*

Reports of recent Field Trips. Four field outings with the Croydon RSPB Group have already taken place in 2009:-

Thursday, January 1st : Bough Beech. Seven participants (all with surprisingly clear heads) turned up for a rather chilly start to the birding year. Masses of birds were present out on the reservoir and a **Great Northern Diver** quite close in to the causeway was almost the first bird on our year lists. Two small mixed-sex parties of **Goosander**, a loose group of maybe ten **Mandarin** and a single sleeping male **Ruddy Duck** were perhaps the pick of the rest, though a pair of **Kingfisher** also hurtled by at close range. At the orchard, birds crowding around the feeders included two very bright male **Brambling** as well as **Nuthatch**, **Marsh Tit**, **Great Spotted Woodpecker**, **Reed Bunting**, etc. However, the biggest attraction thereabouts was a single female **Bearded Tit**, feeding happily on the seed-heads of willowherb only a few metres from the viewing point and (uncharacteristically) staying put in the open for long periods. A complete absence of Fieldfare and Redwing from the orchard was a little surprising and a walk along the nature trail was largely uneventful. Our species total for the (short) day was 48.

Sunday, January 11<sup>th</sup> : Isle of Sheppey. Large numbers of waders were encountered during a walk from the car-parks south of Leysdown along the seawall to Shellness, with **Knot** and **Sanderling** unusually plentiful along the water's edge and sizeable flocks of **Golden Plover** and a small gathering of **Ruff** notable in the pastures just inland. A **Purple Sandpiper** on the beach was only our second ever on Sheppey, while a **Woodcock**, flushed near Shellness Village, was our first record there. A flock of several hundred **Wigeon** had gathered out on the sea where the usual divers were lacking. Bizarrely, however, a **Red-throated Diver** did fly inland, passing low over our heads before making a U-turn and heading out to sea again. An American Golden Plover had been reported near Leysdown but when we located the bird in question (after three attempts), we were able to identify it as a **Grey Plover**, though still sporting much of its breeding plumage. **Marsh Harrier** seemed to be more numerous than ever on this southeastern part of Sheppey and some 20 - 30 were seen from the RSPB Raptor Viewpoint near Capel Fleet, from where three 'ringtail' **Hen Harrier** and a pair of **Peregrine** were also recorded. It was pleasing to note that the flock of **Corn Bunting** in that vicinity has now grown in size to 50+. The keen breeze discouraged our lingering on the mound much beyond sunset and no owls were encountered. The day's species list totalled 60.

Tuesday, January 13<sup>th</sup> : Sevenoaks Wildlife Trust. On a mainly dry and slightly warmer day than of late, highlights were a female **Goosander**, 20+ **Common Snipe**, and a close encounter with a **Water Rail**, all on the main lake, and repeated appearances by a large flock (or flocks) of **Siskin** (with a few **Lesser Redpoll** also in attendance) at various parts of the reserve. At least five **Kingfisher** fly-bys were noted during our walk-about and it was good to catch up with our first sizeable gatherings of **Fieldfare** and **Redwing** for the year. 55 species recorded.

Sunday, January 18<sup>th</sup> : Beddington Farmlands. Lots of **Tree Sparrow**, a **Little Egret**, a **Water Pipit** (very fleetingly), a **Green Sandpiper**, a pair of **Stonechat** and two **Long-eared Owl** at their day time roost were the highlights of a morning visit during which 46 species were seen in all.

Any nominations for the group's **Bird of the Year** for 2008? I'm going for the **Red-flanked Bluetail** at Ramsgate on 2<sup>nd</sup> November - purely on rarity value.

John Parish  
20<sup>th</sup> January, 2009