

The Birders' Bulletin #2 - **from Croydon RSPB Group** (Early-March 2009)

These Field Trips with the Croydon RSPB Group are coming up during March and April :-

Saturday, 7th March : Gillingham Riverside Park & Snodland

(Car trip, departing Fairfield Halls forecourt at 8 am. Check details with John Parish - 8681 7475). *We'll be going into north Kent to visit two sites located beside contrasting tidal reaches of the River Medway. At Gillingham, the estuary is at least two miles wide and we can expect a good range of coastal waders such as **Avocet**, **Bar-tailed Godwit** and **Grey Plover** and possibly sea-ducks and divers. RSPB's Motney Hill reserve will be visited and the Nor Marsh reserve scanned from distance. Only half an hour away at Snodland, the Medway is only a stone's throw across. Our interest there will be in the extensive reedbeds and overgrown gravel pits on the western bank of the river where **Marsh Harrier**, **Kingfisher**, **Water Rail** and **Cetti's Warbler** should be present, as well as a range of wildfowl which has on past visits included **Smew**, **Scaup** and **Red-necked Grebe**.*

Tuesday 17th March : Bushy Park

(Meet in Bushy Park at 10.15 am. Check details with Terry or Linda Osborn - 8679 2405). *This royal park displays surprisingly varied habitat and a good variety of birds is likely. There is a realistic chance of our seeing **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker**, **Tawny Owl** (at its daytime roost), **Marsh Tit**, **Grey Wagtail**, and **Stonechat**, while exotica, such as **Egyptian Goose**, **Mandarin Duck** and (unfortunately) **Ring-necked Parakeet**, are certain to be present.*

Sunday, 22nd March : Thorney Island

(Car trip, departing Fairfield Halls forecourt at 8 am. Check details with Roger Tarran - 8660 2664). *If conditions are good, we may make a circuit around the shoreline of this island (an MOD site) on the coast of West Sussex, a walk of some 5-6 miles. The going is easy, there will be no hurry and this is one of the few bits of the coast where the weekend crowds may be left behind! **Bearded Tit** and **Cetti's Warbler** should be encountered in areas of reedbed and **Short-eared Owl** often hunt in winter over the rough grazing marsh. Sea duck such as **Red-breasted Merganser** and **Common Eider** are likely, as are **Brent Geese** and waders, especially **Greenshank**. Depending on the weather, the first incoming migrants, maybe **Whimbrel**, **Sand Martin**, **Chiffchaff** or even **Osprey**, may appear too.*

Saturday, 4th April : Pulborough Brooks RSPB

(Car trip, departing Fairfield Halls forecourt at 8 am. Check details with Roger Tarran - 8660 2664). *This West Sussex site will be well-known to most group members. Many wildfowl and waders are sure to be seen here as are **Common Buzzard**, **Nuthatch**, **Treecreeper** and **Marsh Tit**, while **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker**, **Woodlark** and **Crossbill** are all possibilities and, by this date, a variety of summer migrants should be trickling in, hopefully including **Garganey**, our declared 'target bird' for the day.*

Saturday, 18th April : Blean Woods RSPB & Reculver.

(Car trip, departing Fairfield Halls forecourt at 8 am. Check details with John Parish - 8681 7475). *We'll be spending the morning a few miles west of Canterbury in the extensive forest of Blean Woods RSPB reserve. **Nightingales** should just have arrived by this date and these are at their easiest to see while setting up their territories. **Willow Warbler**, **Redstart** and **Tree Pipit** have also been regulars on our lists here in the past. Just a short drive away, on the North Kent coast, Reculver is well positioned for incoming migrants and we'll expect the year's first sightings of **Cuckoo**, **Sedge Warbler**, **Whitethroat**, **House Martin**, **Swallow**, etc, and hope for something rarer (we had a **Woodchat Shrike** here a few years back!). Keeping an eye on passage offshore, **Gannet** and a selection of **terns** and **auks** can be expected.*

Saturday, 25th 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. **Seats still available.** 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 with the Croydon RSPB Group.

Saturday, 24th January : Lee Valley. I missed this outing but Ed was kind enough to provide details. Seventeen participants enjoyed favourable weather for an exploration of the River Lee Country Park during which 46 bird species were recorded. Among the usual abundance of wildfowl at the site were **Smew, Goosander** and **Goldeneye** (several males and females of each) and a pair of **Ruddy Duck**, while passerines included **Siskins** and a **Treecreeper**. Single **Kingfisher** and **Water Rail** were also found but the real prize came at the very end of the day when a **Bittern** showed at very close range indeed during a final visit to the Bittern Viewpoint Hide (again justifying its name after some very lean years!)

Saturday, 7th February : Dungeness. I am again indebted to Ed for details. After a snowy week, it was decided to change the venue from Rye Harbour to nearby Dungeness in the (justified) belief that underfoot conditions would be better. Only ten people attended but they enjoyed an excellent day. A visit to the beach behind the power station proved very productive (1st winter **Iceland Gull, Mediterranean Gull, Gannet, Common Eider, Common Scoter** and **Guillemot**) before the party moved on to the RSPB reserve. A tour of the hides there produced both **Black-necked** and **Slavonian Grebes, Smew, Pintail, Ruddy Duck, Marsh Harrier** and, a novel experience, a **Bittern** swimming across an open channel on one of the pits! A small covey of **Grey Partridges** was also noted as the party set off for home.

Tuesday 17th February : Barn Elms WWT. Perhaps the best turnout yet for a mid-week outing! We enjoyed a cloudy but mild day and a decent score of 47 species by the close of play. The most memorable find was a **Woodcock**, crouched amongst the leaf-litter beneath a hedgerow at the back of a small pond - through a scope wound up to 60x magnification, the frame-filling view of the intricately-detailed cryptic plumage was really sensational! We worked hard to find a scattered few **Common Snipe** but the Jack Snipe and Bittern known to be present eluded us. We had better luck with the **Lesser Redpolls** (males becoming really colourful) and **Siskins**, small flocks of which seemed to follow us around the 'Wildside' section of the reserve.

Sunday, 22nd February : Burton Mill Pond. Seventeen participants turned out in spite of the rigours of the previous evening's Quiz Night! On another mainly cloudy but mild day, we searched the reserve's alder carrs and ancient sweet chestnut trees diligently for our target bird (Lesser Spotted Woodpecker) but without success - only to learn later from a local birder that none had been seen this winter. Spirits were raised by a very obliging **Firecrest** - a lifer for some - and there were distant scope views of many **Bramblings** and **Lesser Redpolls** around a field of cattle. A male **Mandarin** was an unusual sighting amongst **Teal** and **Mallard** in another cattle pasture and a mixed flock of **Yellowhammers** and **Reed Buntings** was also good to see. A pair of **Kingfishers** was the pick of sightings at the Mill Pond itself. During a brief stop at nearby Lavington Common, six **Dartford Warblers** were found within 100

metres of the car park (so no damage done here by severe winter weather) and then a visit to Waltham Brooks produced a hunting **Barn Owl** even before our cars had halted. 65 species for the day - quite acceptable for inland birding in winter!

Wildlife Sites in Croydon.

Bramley Bank. Peter & Pam Bateup have mentioned to us the visits by a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker to their garden in Chapel View. A glance at a map (or a visit to Chapel View) reveals that the Bramley Bank Nature Reserve is very close to the subject garden and it seems a good bet that the Lesser Spot is visiting from that site. In any event, this somewhat-neglected London Wildlife Trust reserve is well worth a visit - it consists of 10 hectares of mature natural woodland together with a clearing of acid grassland and (rather improbably since the reserve is located on the highest ridge for some distance around) a nice pond. Two paths run the length of the site (the London Link follows one of them) - both can be a bit greasy, but neither is steep. Now is the best time to check out reserve for woodpeckers, while the birds are displaying and there are no leaves on the trees. You will certainly find Green and Great Spotted Woodpeckers there, as well as Nuthatches and Treecreepers, and I've seen Moorhen, Kingfisher and Firecrest near the pond in the past. The reserve is best entered from the southern end of Riesco Drive (reached from Coombe Lane via Ballards Way). There is a large car park (free, as far as I know) off Riesco Drive (serving the adjacent Heathfield). Better, use public transport and follow the London Link footpath markers from Coombe Lane tram stop (a third of a mile to walk, at most). If you are feeling especially energetic, take in the grounds of Heathfield (hilly) on the way to the reserve and leave it by following the London Link onwards from the far end to pass through Littleheath Woods. Carry on then to Farley Road and catch a 64 or T33 bus back to Central Croydon.

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