

The Birders' Bulletin #3 - from Croydon RSPB Group (Early-May 2009)

Some exciting destinations are lined up for the Croydon RSPB Group's Field Trips during May and early-June, 2009 :-

Sunday, 10th May : Samphire Hoe & St Margaret's Bay

(Car trip, departing Fairfield Halls forecourt at 8 am. Check details with John Parish - 8681 7475).

*We can't promise Bluebirds over the White Cliffs of Dover but you can expect plenty of other avian interest thereabouts during this outing! Samphire Hoe is a 30 hectare site that was created at the foot of the cliffs using the spoil excavated during the construction of the Channel Tunnel. Over 140 bird species have already been recorded there, with **Peregrine, Fulmar, Mediterranean Gull and Black Redstart** are among those seen regularly at this season. The butterflies and plants (especially the remarkable **Early Spider Orchid** colony) are also rather special. Later on in the day, we'll move from the foot of cliffs west of Dover to the tops of cliffs further east at St.Margaret's Bay. As this is the closest point of England to France, it is obviously a favoured crossing point for birds and practically any summer migrant is a possibility there.*

Tuesday 19th May : Northward Hill & Cliffe Marshes

(Meet at Sparrow's Den at 9.15 am to arrange car sharing. Check details with Terry or Linda Osborn - 8679 2405).

*Two excellent RSPB reserves just four miles apart in north Kent. Northward Hill has extensive woodland, particularly noted for its heronry - the UK's largest and now used by **Little Egrets** as well as **Grey Herons** - and breeding **Nightingales**, but with a wide variety of other warblers, etc, too. Viewpoints on the reserve give wonderful panoramas across the North Kent Marshes to the Thames. The former dereliction at Cliffe has now been cleared away, good paths have been prepared and raised observation points provided which look out over the several large saline lagoons. The declining **Turtle Dove** can still be found here, **Barn Owls** breed, **Marsh Harriers** and **Hobbies** should be hunting over the marshes and, during our last visit, we found a school of **Harbour Porpoises** in the Thames alongside the reserve.*

Sunday, 24th May : Stodmarsh

(Car trip, departing Fairfield Halls forecourt at 8 am. Check details with John Parish - 8681 7475).

*The Stodmarsh National Nature Reserve in the Stour Valley, to the east of Canterbury, is an outstanding birding site at any season! The vast reedbeds, river, lakes, scrapes, grazing marshes, copses and bushy areas attract such a wide range of breeding and passage species in spring, it's difficult to know where to begin! **Marsh Harrier, Hobby, Water Rail, Garganey, Barn Owl, Yellow Wagtail, Bearded Tit, Cetti's Warbler, Grasshopper Warbler** and **Nightingale** are all on the cards, with much else certain to be found besides - and always the chance of something more scarce.*

Saturday, 6th June : Lakenheath & Weeting Heath

(Car trip, departing Fairfield Halls forecourt at **7.30 am**. Check details with John Parish - 8681 7475).

*Our trip to the Suffolk/Norfolk Brecklands is another highlight in the calendar! The newly-created reedbeds at RSPB Lakenheath are home to breeding **Bittern, Marsh Harrier, Bearded Tit, Sedge and Reed Warblers, Water Rail**, etc, while the poplar plantations offer your best chance of seeing **Golden Oriole** in UK. A large lagoon beside the Little Ouse River often holds **Garganey, Grasshopper Warbler** is a possibility in scrub beside the river and **Hobby** is probable overhead. And, of course, there were multiple sightings of **Common Crane** and **Red-footed Falcon** here last year. As if that isn't enough, the Norfolk Wildlife Trust's Weeting Heath reserve is only two or three miles away, a site where we usually get good looks at the breeding **Stone Curlews** as well as **Woodlarks, Little Owl**, etc, not forgetting the **Spotted Flycatchers** sitting in open nest boxes almost within touching distance!*

Reports of recent Field Trips with the Croydon RSPB Group.

Saturday, 7th March : Gillingham Riverside Park & Snodland. A party of eleven members enjoyed the sunshine for a morning on the Medway Estuary, initially at Gillingham Riverside Park. Sightings here included 30-plus **Brent Geese**, a party of 5 **Red-breasted Mergansers** (3m, 2f) and a dazzling, breeding-plumaged **Mediterranean Gull**, dozing on a bouy less than 50 metres away. A little further east, we walked along the shoreline of Motney Hill to take a closer look at the semi-submerged Nor Marsh, these being two of the lesser-known RSPB reserves. A huge flock of **Black-tailed Godwits** (c 500?) were seeing out the high tide on the Marsh, many of them already coming into their spectacular brick-red breeding plumage, while closer in was a mixed flock of ducks, including at least 30 **Pintail**. By the time we had followed the Medway upstream to the gravel pits at Snodland, the sky had clouded over and rain threatened. Trevor's local knowledge proved useful here and he was able to point out the recently-established heronry on the further bank of the river where **Grey Herons** were busy wooing one another and adding a few extra sticks to their huge nests. In all, 58 species of birds were recorded during the day.

Tuesday, 17th March : Bushy Park. I missed this trip but have seen an amusing photograph taken on the day by George of an **Egyptian Goose** peering out of its presumed nest hole in one of the park's ancient trees.

Sunday, 22nd March : Thorney Island. I also missed this outing to the south coast but Ed was kind enough to provide some details. A party of nine walked the perimeter of the island, enjoying sunshine but being blasted by a keen southerly wind on the southern shoreline. Three **Common Buzzards**, a **Sparrowhawk**, a female **Peregrine** and a **Kestrel** was a good showing of raptors. Reasonable numbers of the anticipated waders, **Brent Geese**, ducks including **Gadwall**, **Teal** and **Red-breasted Merganser**, and passerines such as **Skylark**, **Meadow Pipit**, **House Sparrow**, **Chiffchaff** and **Cetti's Warbler** (the latter heard only) contributed to a day's total in excess of 40 species.

Saturday, 4th April : Pulborough Brooks RSPB. I am also indebted to Ed for info on this trip down to scenic West Sussex. There were 11 participants and it sounds as though they had something extra on their cornflakes before setting out - not content with a full circuit of the Pulborough Brooks RSPB reserve (including the plantation area behind the car park) lasting until after 2pm (late lunch!), they then tackled the full length of trail over at Burton Mill Pond! Summer migrants were beginning to appear at Pulborough (eg **Little Ringed Plover**, **Swallow**, **Chiffchaff**, **Willow Warbler**) and the Ahhh!-factor was taken care of at Burton Mill by a pair of **Tawny Owls** perched snugly together up in the branches. George took another striking photograph, this time of a newly-awakened female **Adder**.

Saturday, 18th April : Blean Woods RSPB & Reculver. The 15 participants found things distinctly chilly at the beginning of our walk around Blean Woods, a few miles west of Canterbury. This seemed to be reflected in a low level of bird activity, although we did find a reasonable range of woodland birds, including **Marsh Tit**, **Treecreeper** and several singing **Willow Warblers**. The only indication that **Nightingales** were present was a single chorus of song as we ate our lunch amongst the wood-piles. By the afternoon, the sun had some warmth to it but, once out on the sea wall and in the open fields at Reculver, we were exposed to a sharp north-easterly wind. Nevertheless, sightings of **Whimbrel**, **Sanderling**, **Ring Ouzel**, **Wheatear**, **Yellow Wagtail**, etc, contributed to a respectable day's birdlist of 67 species.

Tuesday, 21st April : Seaford, Cuckmere Haven & Belle Tout. A beautiful spring day for this visit to the coast of East Sussex - probably too good, in fact, as most of the summer migrants coming in overnight

appeared to have pressed on through without halting. However, **Whimbrels**, a **Wheatear**, **Swallows**, **Common** and **Lesser Whitethroats** and **Blackcaps** were encountered, while the **Kittiwake** colony on the cliffs at Seaford was a hive of activity, with **Fulmars** and **Rock Pipit** also present and **Gannets**, **Common Scoters** and **Common Terns** seen passing at sea. A colony of tiny **Early-spider Orchids** coming into bloom, then a swathe of more robust **Early Purple Orchids**, were nice finds.

Saturday, 25th April : Fingringhoe Wick & Abberton Reservoir. Our first coach visit to these two neighbouring Essex Wildlife Trust Reserves just south of Colchester began with a few tense moments as our driver skilfully manoeuvred the large vehicle round some very tight bends on the narrow lane into Fingringhoe Wick. However, all was well and we were soon enjoying the songs of many, many **Nightingales** - and even managing to see a few! Various warblers, **Bullfinch**, **Cuckoo** and some very approachable **Red-legged Partridges** were also found along paths among the bushes and trees now covering the old sand and gravel workings. Then from the hides overlooking the River Colne and its adjacent salt-marshes we were able to pick out an adult male **Marsh Harrier**, a **Peregrine**, remnant parties of **Brent Geese** and also waders, including **Whimbrel**, **Avocet**, **Bar-tailed Godwit** and **Grey Plover**. In the afternoon, we drove the few miles to Abberton Reservoir where there were plenty of birds in evidence, though these were predominantly **Coots** and the commoner ducks and gulls. A **Greenshank** did fly in and we were pleased to see **Common Terns** back on their breeding rafts, but the highlight for most people was the pair of **Hobbies** hawking insects in the updraft above the reservoir wall a little further round the shoreline. From reports that reached me, the aggregate bird list for the day totalled at least 64 species.

Wildlife Sites in Croydon.

Hutchinsons Bank, Three-corner Grove & Chapel Bank. Sheila, Ted and I have an interest to declare in this choice as we each spend some of our winter Sundays helping with conservation tasks on these three reserves - the manual labour helps us to keep our figures trim and just occasionally we get the chance to straighten our backs and observe some of the wildlife around us! The three reserves are managed by the London Wildlife Trust and form a 2km chain along a dry chalk valley at the southeastern boundary of the borough. Working from north to south, Hutchinsons is mainly chalk grassland that has been invaded by scrub in many areas (though goats are currently busy munching into this), Three-corner Grove is a patch of ancient woodland, and then Chapel Bank (owned by Croydon, though actually just in Tandridge) is described as 'gladed woodland'. Featherbed Lane runs past all three sites. **Sparrowhawks** and **Kestrels** are regular above these reserves, and **Common Buzzards** occasionally soar overhead, too. **Tawny Owls** are flushed from their daytime roosts from time-to-time, **Woodcock** have been seen during the last two winters, **Bullfinches** may be found all year round and **Lesser Whitethroats** can be heard singing during most summer visits. However, it is not for their birdlife that the reserves are most renowned, but rather for their summer combination of orchids (doing a quick mental tally, I think I have seen nine species there) and butterflies (it is said that 28 different species may be found during a good year - **Grizzled** and **Dingy Skippers** and **Green Hairstreak** are amongst the early ones that should be on the wing about now, while a few **White-letter Hairstreaks** may be found later, as well as Hutchinsons' real speciality, the **Small Blue**). It goes without saying that many other unusual plants and invertebrates are out there to be found. Visitors to the sites may park (with consideration for residents, please) in Farleigh Dean Crescent (adjoining Featherbed Lane) and walk from there directly onto Hutchinsons Bank. Alternatively, take a tram to the New Addington terminus, then follow the footpath to the left of the gorilla (it makes sense when you're there!). Upon reaching North Downs Road, look for an enclosed paved footpath left of the recycling centre - this leads steeply down to Featherbed Lane, with Farleigh Dean Crescent nearby. Guided walks around the reserves led by knowledgeable local specialists are due

to take place on Wednesday 6th May (emphasis on butterflies and moths), Saturday 13th June (concentrating on orchids) and on Sunday 5th July (butterflies and general conservation issues), all starting from the lower end of Farleigh Dean Crescent at 11 am (check with Malcolm Bridge - 020 8289 3839 - to confirm arrangements).

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