

Birders' Bulletin #9 - from Croydon RSPB Group

Prepared by John Parish in January 2010.

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

Saturday, 16th January, 2010 : Lee Valley LNR, Herts/Essex.

(Car trip, departing Fairfield Halls forecourt at 08:00 am. Check details with John Parish - 8681 7475). A river, canal, various large overgrown disused gravel pits, wet grassland and areas of woodland located just beyond the M25 north of Waltham Abbey (and all unaffected by pre-Olympic building activity - as far as we know!). During walks radiating out from Fisher's Green, we'll have a very good chance of finding **Smew**, **Goldeneye** and **Goosander** among a range of other ducks and maybe one of the rarer **grebes** on the gravel pits, where **Water Rail** and **Kingfisher** are probable and **Bittern** also likely (two seen at the Viewpoint this week). There may be waders, including **Snipe**, on the marshy grassland, while **Siskins** and **Redpoll** should be found in the alder woods. As always, **Cetti's Warblers** are more likely to be heard than seen. **Water Voles** have been observed along the canal during recent visits.

Tuesday 19th January : Sevenoaks Wildlife Reserve, Kent.

(Meet at the site at 10:15. Check details with Terry or Linda Osborn - 8679 2405).

This 55ha reserve, now run by the Kent Wildlife Trust, has been created over many years from disused gravel pits and includes five lakes as well as a mixed habitat of ponds, reedbeds and woodland. A good range of wildfowl should be present and we'll also be expecting to see **Kingfisher**, **Water Rail** and mixed flocks of **Goldfinches**, **Siskins** and **Redpolls** and **Redwings** and **Fieldfares**. On one of our recent visits we were surprised to find several **Yellowhammers**, while **Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers** are still being reported here from time-to-time. A **Bittern** has been recorded on the site this year.

Sunday, 31st January, 2010 : Rye Harbour, West Sussex.

(Car trip, departing Fairfield Halls forecourt at 08:00 am. Check details with John Parish - 8681 7475).

This extensive seaside reserve is another site that has provided us with memorable views of **Bittern** and **Smew** in the past. **Red-breasted Merganser**, **Common Scoter** and **Red-throated Diver** can all be confidently expected, **Barn Owl**, **Grey Partridge** and **Water Rail** are regular, **Scaup**, **Merlin** and **Woodcock** have been reported at the time of writing - and maybe we'll find the **Long-eared Owl** roost this year! Another new hide has been provided since our last visit, making a total of five by my count.

Sunday, 14th February, 2010 : Staines Reservoirs and Wraysbury Gravel Pits.

(Car trip, departing Fairfield Halls forecourt at **09:00**. Check details with John Parish - 8681 7475).

The elevated causeway between the two reservoir basins at Staines affords extensive views over the open water where the large duck flocks usually include **Goldeneye** at this time of year and may also be concealing rarer **Grebes** (**Black-necked** the most likely) or a **Great Northern Diver**. **Ruddy Ducks** used to be numerous - but will they still be? The pumphouses and other infrastructure beside the basins are traditional haunts of **Grey Wagtail** and **Black Redstart**. A couple of miles away at Wraysbury, we'll expect to find **Smew** and **Goosander** on the overgrown disused gravel-pits and, again, unusual **Grebes**, such as **Red-necked** would be no surprise. Wintering **Chiffchaffs** are quite likely and, historically, we always found **Ring-necked Parakeet** here!

Tuesday, 16th February, 2010 : Warnham Nature Reserve & Buchan Country Park, West Sussex.

(Meet at the site at 10:15. Check details with Terry or Linda Osborn - 8679 2405). Terry and Linda have introduced these two new sites into our programme and an interesting and enjoyable day is in prospect as

we explore their potential. Warnham (near Horsham) has a large mill pond, good areas of both alder/willow carr and mixed woodland and some unimproved grassland. Buchan CP (near Crawley and at the northern edge of St Leonard's Forest) has a string of ponds set in over 150 acres of mixed woodland, heath and meadow. **Crossbills** are being seen here at the time of writing. (Both sites have refreshment and toilet facilities).

Saturday, 27th February, 2010 : Burton Mill, West Sussex.

(Car trip, departing Fairfield Halls forecourt at 08:00 am. Check details with John Parish - 8681 7475). **Bitterns** regularly winter on the large pond at this Sussex Wildlife Trust reserve and have been reported recently, while both **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** and **Willow Tit** are realistic targets during our walk through the mixed woodland and alder carr. Last year a mixed bag included excellent views of young **Tawny Owls**, a drake **Mandarin** and a **Firecrest** and more distant sightings of **Bramblings**, **Siskins** and **Lesser Redpolls**. At nearby Lavington Common, we counted six **Dartford Warblers** among the heather within 15 minutes of arriving last time, but will they have survived this winter's snows? If time permits, we'll drop in at regular **Barn Owl** site before leaving for home.

Monthly Visits to Beddington Farmlands

This is your regular reminder that a guided tour for RSPB members around the local birding hotspot at Beddington Farm is arranged for one Sunday morning each month. These are led by either Terry Osborn or John Parish, both of whom are keyholders to the Farm. Contact Terry (8679 2405) or John (8681 7475) if you wish to know the dates and entry arrangements. However, you should be aware that the farm is an active landfill, recycling and sewage treatment site and, although our visits take place on Sundays when no work is in progress, there are some potential hazards to health and safety. Participants must be aware and agree in advance to accept the hazards at their own risk.

The recent inclement weather has delayed completion of the work on and around the lake and scrape in the southwestern corner of the Farm (ie the areas where our visiting parties have hitherto spent most of their time) to reshape these areas to their final configuration - which looks as though it will be superb for birds! During the next few visits, therefore, we'll be unable to enter this part of the Farm although it is now possible to overlook both reshaped water bodies from the permissive footpath outside the fence. If you haven't seen the new layout, a visit is recommended asap! During the winter period birds such as **Teal** and **Common Snipe** are very common and there have been regular recent sightings of both **Jack Snipe** and **Water Pipit**, two of the scarcer specialities of the site. **Lapland Bunting** was seen yesterday, while **Little Gulls** and **Short-eared Owl** have also been reported during the last few weeks. The first **Bittern** record for the Farm can't be too far away, either! A flock of the resident **Tree Sparrows** will doubtless be around and a species list of 40 - 50 for a morning can be anticipated.

Bulgaria Trip. If the frost, snow and leaden skies outside your window have prompted wishful thoughts of warm sunshine, the smell of new-mown hay, swathes of bright flowers and colourful butterflies floating by to the mellow accompaniment of black redstart song and oriole call, why not turn your dreams into reality? We still have a few places available on our wildlife trip to Bulgaria (27th June - 8th July) - contact me for details [John Parish, tel: 8681-7475, e: john@jparish4.wanadoo.co.uk]

Reports of recent Field Trips with the Croydon RSPB Group.

Saturday, 12th December, 2009 : Bewl Water, East Sussex & Bedgebury Pinetum, Kent.

Fourteen participants saw 53 bird species during a day of mixed weather. Round at the back of Bewl Water Reservoir in the morning, we found a range of commoner wildfowl, but not much otherwise. Then, at Bedgebury Pinetum, an initially quiet afternoon was brought to an early end just as things were

beginning to liven up - you have to exit the carpark by 4 pm in December, which is a bit rich when you've been charged £7.50 for parking! We did see **Marsh Tit**, **Siskin**, **Lesser Redpoll**, **Brambling** and **Bullfinch** but the experience was rather an anti-climax following the midweek visit in November.

Tuesday, 21st December, 2009 : Beddington Park, Greater London.

Surely a record-breaking attendance for any of our field trips - too many for me to count, but probably almost 30 people present! Though the day was cold and grey, no one complained as we had many good birds sightings in Beddington Park, including fabulous scope-filling views of a perched **Kingfisher** (with fish), close encounters with a pair of **Grey Wagtails**, sightings of **Little Egret** and also of **Rooks** (rarely seen in this part of suburbia). As a bonus, we went up beside Beddington Farm landfill site to be amazed at the new bird-friendly landscape that is being created - and now fully visible from the footpath. Our timing was immaculate because we bumped into Marcus Kohler (Viridor's consultant ecologist) and Roger Wardle (specialist consultant responsible for designing the layouts of the two lakes) who were able to give us a brief explanation of the work in progress. **Tree Sparrows** were seen, as well as thousands of **gulls** of at least five species. To end the day (and the year's formal birding programme) we all de-camped to Terry and Linda's house for a convivial couple of hours supping mulled wine and enjoying an assortment of eats. Great stuff! Many thanks, Terry and Linda!

Saturday, 2nd January, 2010 : Shellness & Capel Fleet, Isle of Sheppey

This first outing of the New Year (and of the 'teeny' decade) was a successful one, and nineteen participants were able to kick off their new lists with a healthy total of 63 species - by my reckoning! Bright sunshine, little wind and a temperature hovering just above freezing point were good conditions for a stride along the seawall from Leysdown to Shellness, though progress was frequently halted to check out the large numbers of birds all around us! At sea, single **Red-throated Diver** and **Red-breasted Merganser** and a couple of **Slavonian Grebes** with the more usual **Great Cresteds** were detected, whilst on the beach two **Purple Sandpipers** were found amongst huge numbers of **Turnstones** and **Sanderlings**. Thousands of **Golden Plovers** and **Lapwings** were feeding in the fields just inland, where a flock of many hundred **Brent Geese** also demanded attention. The Ness itself was reached just before high tide and the wader roost was already crammed with **Oystercatchers**, **Knots**, **Dunlins**, **Redshanks** and **Bar-tailed Godwits**. Passerines encountered during the walk out and back included **Rock** and **Meadow Pipits**, **Skylarks**, **Reed** and **Snow Buntings**, **Stonechats** and a **Black Redstart**, the latter unexpectedly discovered feeding out in the fields. After lunch we visited Capel Fleet and the nearby RSPB Raptor Viewpoint where, it must be said, birds-of-prey numbers to be a little less numerous, both in numbers of individuals and range of species, than in recent years, though we did still see at least ten **Marsh Harriers**, a couple of ring-tail **Hen Harriers** and two **Peregrines**. At the end of the day, we all gave best to the biting cold and retired to the cars before any Owls had appeared.

Noughties List - an amendment.

It has been brought to my attention that there was one omission amongst the Gulls and a couple more among the Finches in the Noughties Bird List (see BB #8). So these amendments need to be made:- add 'Yellow-legged Gull' immediately after 'Herring Gull'; add 'Siskin' immediately before 'Linnet', and add 'Twite' immediately after 'Linnet'. That brings the total for the noughty decade to an even-more remarkable 242 species!

Incidentally, my 'bible' on lumps and splits in preparing the bird list is *The Howard and Moore Complete Checklist of the Birds of the World (3rd edition)*. Yellow-legged Gull was only split from Herring Gull when the 3rd edition appeared.

An invitation : why not tell people about your favourite wildlife site in Croydon? Please send me your contributions for future Bulletins. Also send your comments or queries on anything contained in Birders' Bulletin #9 (or, indeed #1 to 8).

John Parish. [john@jparish4.wanadoo.co.uk]