

Birders' Bulletin #10 - from Croydon RSPB Group

Prepared by John Parish in March 2010.

These Field Trips with the Croydon RSPB Group are coming up (or not!) in the near future:-

Saturday, 13th March : Gillingham Riverside Park & Funton Creek

(Car trip, departing Fairfield Halls forecourt at 8 am. Check details with John Parish - 8681 7475). We'll be going along the North Kent coast to visit two or three sites beside the Medway (on a stretch where the estuary is at least three km wide) and there we can expect to find a good range of coastal waders (such as **Avocet, Bar-tailed Godwit** and **Grey Plover**) and waterfowl (including **Red-breasted Merganser, Brent Goose, Wigeon, Gadwall**, etc) with grebes and divers also possible. Though Gillingham Riverside Park has excellent refreshment and toilet facilities, the nearby Motney Hill RSPB reserve by contrast has none at all and the Nor Marsh reserve can only be looked at from a distance. A little further to the east, Funton Creek will be scanned from the roadside initially but we should have time to walk its shoreline beside Chetney Marshes where we could be lucky enough to find **Short-eared** or **Little Owl** and **Marsh Harrier**.

Tuesday 16th 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 range 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 (if they've survived the winter) **Stonechats**, while exotica, such as **Egyptian Goose, Mandarin Duck** and (unfortunately) **Ring-necked Parakeet**, are certain to be present.

Sunday, 28th March : Pagham Harbour

(Car trip, departing Fairfield Halls forecourt at 8 am. Check details with John Parish - 8681 7475). Generally reckoned to be one of the best birding sites on the south coast, this Local Nature Reserve is managed by West Sussex County Council. We expect to start our day by the information centre near Sidlesham, check the nearby Ferry Pool and then walk alongside the edge of the 'harbour' (really tidal mudflats) to the spinneys and beach at Church Norton. At this season, a wide variety of waders should include **Ringed Plover, Whimbrel, Knot, Greenshank** and maybe **Spotted Redshank**, and in an equally wide range of wildfowl, we'll expect to find **Brent Geese, Pintail** and **Red-breasted Merganser**. **Slavonian Grebe** should still be present just outside the harbour mouth. We'll also be on the lookout for the earliest summer passerine migrants such as **Wheatear, Chiffchaff, Firecrest** and **Sand Martin** while raptors such as **Osprey, Peregrine, Merlin** and **Short-eared Owl** are also on the cards!

Sunday, 11th April : Rainham Marshes RSPB

(Car trip, departing Fairfield Halls forecourt at 8 am.) Just about the nearest RSPB reserve to Croydon but still more than an hour's drive away, across the Thames in Essex, Rainham Marshes seems able to throw up good birds at any season and the likes of **Penduline Tit** and **Serin** are by no means one-off vagrants. Various species of duck (maybe including **Garganey**), an unpredictable selection of migrant waders, raptors (maybe **Peregrine** or **Merlin**) and incoming summer migrant passerines (like **Wheatear, Yellow Wagtail, Blackcap**, even **Swallow**) can be expected. Before going into the reserve itself, we'll probably visit the shore of the Thames a little further upstream, by the Stone Barges (they're concrete actually, relics from World War II) - this is a renowned site for wintering **Water Pipit** and, if any are still

around, they should by now be getting into their bright summer plumage, very different to their dull winter garb.

[Saturday, 24th 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 the likes of **Common Buzzard**, **Nuthatch**, **Treecreeper** and **Marsh Tit**, while **Little Owl**, **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**, **Little Ringed Plover** and **Nightingale** (our declared 'target bird' for the day).

[NB: Saturday, 15th May : Coach trip to Minsmere RSPB is cancelled.](#)

After organizing coach trips for the RSPB Group for around 12 years, I am having to relinquish the task and advised the Group Leader of this last November. Unfortunately no-one else has come forward to take over the job and the trip to Minsmere planned for 15 May has therefore had to be cancelled. If you would be prepared to organize future coach trips (only two a year at present), please speak to John Davis - 020 8640 4578. It's not a difficult task - even I was able to manage it! JP

[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 Terry Osborn and/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.

An enormous amount of the work to reshape 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 their final nature reserve configuration has been carried out during the winter - and the new water bodies look as though they will be just superb for birds! Our next few visits will cover the migration period and who knows what might turn up in the restored areas, especially by way of waders. There is much other varied habitat to check too and a 2 - 3 hour visit usually produces a birdlist of 40 - 50 species. Just to give an idea of the potential, this year's sightings at the Farm have already included **Woodcock**, **Golden Plover**, **Water Rail**, **Water Pipit**, **Caspian Gull**, **Green Sandpiper**, **Jack Snipe**, **Yellowhammer**, **Short-eared Owl**, **Brambling**, **Peregrine**, **Mediterranean Gull**, **Red Kite**, **Lapland Bunting**, **Scaup**, **Little Owl**, **Marsh Harrier** and **Barn Owl** - not bad for suburbia! And, of course, the resident **Tree Sparrows** will soon be breeding and **Sand Martins** will be coming back to the artificial breeding bank.

[Bulgaria Trip.](#) The wildlife trip to Bulgaria (27th June - 8th July) has attracted sufficient support (just!) for it to proceed. I would like to thank the small but select band of group members who have decided to join us on this tour - you've made all the pre-planning effort worthwhile!

[Reports of recent Field Trips with the Croydon RSPB Group.](#)

Saturday, 16th January, 2010 : [Lee Valley LNR, Herts/Essex.](#) It was heartening for the organizers that eleven participants had been prepared to support this outing, in spite of a dire weather forecast - and that all were rewarded immediately when the first **Bittern** of the day was seen creeping stealthily through the reeds only 10 metres from the windows of the Bittern Viewpoint Hide. Later on, two of these curious birds were feeding and displaying in front of the hide and it was a possible third that flew in at dusk. Exploring more widely, we found that although only the last traces of the recent snow were still to be seen, most of lakes were still largely frozen over. However, plenty of ducks had gathered on what open water was available, female **Goosanders** and **Goldeneyes** amongst them. Given the unhelpful conditions, our birdlist of 54 for the day (and also including **Water Rail, Kingfisher, Siskin** and **Lesser Redpoll**) was quite respectable.

Tuesday 19th January : [Sevenoaks Wildlife Reserve, Kent.](#) Cold and grey, just the kind of day we've grown to associate with a Sevenoaks visit! Extensive ice sheets still covered most of the lakes, providing, on East Lake at least, safe resting places for many gulls, all of the five commoner species being present. On the same lake, good numbers of **Lapwing** and lots of ducks and geese - including a female **Goosander** - had gathered on islands or in the restricted areas of open water around them, while a closer check revealed a scattering of **Snipe** as well. A **Water Rail** was seen briefly scooting across a frozen corner and two more were later seen wandering in an open channel through the reeds close by the excellent new Slingsby Hide. The morning's passerines included **Treecreeper, Bullfinch** and **Reed Bunting**. An afternoon walk beside the River Darent out to the western extremity of the reserve produced the anticipated sizeable mixed flock of **Fieldfares** and **Redwings** but, though we did find some **Siskins** and **Redpolls**, numbers of these small finches were unusually low. Overall, 54 species for the day (again).

Sunday, 31st January, 2010 : [Rye Harbour, East Sussex.](#) Another cold day for our visit to this extensive Local Nature Reserve on the East Sussex coast, where we just about managed to complete a six-hour tour through varied habitats before darkness fell completely! **Rock Pipits**, a party of **Skylarks** and a wide range of waders and ducks enlivened the first leg beside the mouth of the River Rother, then scans over the open sea revealed a couple of **Red-throated Divers** as well as **Wigeon, Common Scoter** and **Brent Goose** flocks. A male **Marsh Harrier** was noted in flight over the beach reserve before we headed inland to reach Long Pit where highlights were single female **Scaup** and **Smew**, about four **Goldeneye** (including a single drake) and four female **Ruddy Ducks**. Castle Water, though partly frozen, held the day's best collection of birds, including two **Bitterns** (one of them standing out on the ice to display, with head and neck stretched high and puffed-out like a king-size feather duster), another six **Smew** (including two males), ten or so **Pintail** and finally a **Water Rail** just below the hide window. During the home stretch back to the cars, we halted to check through a flock of **Canada** and **Greylag Geese** browsing in the fields and were surprised to find a **Pink-footed Goose** amongst them, a local rarity that had evidently passed unnoticed during regular checks by the reserve wardens. At the very end, a burst of song from a **Cetti's Warbler**, welcome reassurance that one at least had survived the cold snap. Including a **Peregrine** on the Nestle offices in Croydon before departure, our collective species list for the day was a remarkable 79!

Sunday, 14th February, 2010 : [Staines Reservoir and Wraysbury Gravel Pits.](#) Though the sky was overcast, visibility was good, it wasn't raining and there was little wind - an ideal morning for viewing from the causeway dividing the two basins of Staines Reservoir. There was plenty to look at out on the water, the pick being four **Black-necked Grebes** (one of them quite close), a pair of **Smew**, a male **Scaup** (spending more time underwater than on the surface), a dozen or so **Goldeneye** and just a pair of **Ruddy**

Duck (in stark contrast with the total of 200-300 seen during our last group visit here in December 2005 - a testament to the effectiveness of the RSPB-inspired cull perhaps?). Along the banks of the causeway we discovered a **Grey Wagtail**, a **Redshank** and an unseasonal **Common Sandpiper**. Not far away, at Wraysbury, we followed the River Colne and then the railway line through the woodland and scrub surrounding a maze of old gravel pits and saw lots more wildfowl, including some more **Goldeneye**, many **Gadwall** and a single female **Goosander**. A decent-sized flock of **Fieldfares** (the more numerous) and **Redwings** showed up well as they sought food among the sheep grazing the grassy outer bank of Wraysbury Reservoir but departed rapidly when an unnoticed **Peregrine** took to the air. Our ten participants amassed a total day list of 58 species.

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

Definitely not the conditions we would have chosen for our initial visit to these two sites but 17 people did their best to ignore the incessant icy rainfall and enjoy their day regardless. First, at Warnham, (close in to the edge of Horsham, although you would never guess it) we explored the reserve fairly thoroughly during the morning, taking refuge for periods in each of the hides overlooking the large reed-fringed mill-pond and seeing **Reed Buntings**, **Wigeon**, **Pochard**, **Teal**, **Roe Deer**, **Treecreeper** and a lot more. Crossing the board-walks through the willow carr was quite an experience and there was food and hot beverages available to thaw us out at the end of the walk. A few minutes drive then took us on to Buchan Country Park, where a fairly brief foray out to the lake gave people a feel for the site but most of our time was spent in the warmth of the Visitor Centre, checking on the stream of birds visiting the array of feeders right outside the window. **Marsh**, **Coal**, **Blue** and **Great Tits**, **Nuthatches**, **Chaffinches**, **Greenfinches** and an obliging pair of **Bullfinches** all made repeated visits, giving our young photographer plenty of opportunity to put his new lens through its paces. A pity we didn't see these sites at their best but the return visit will be keenly awaited.

Saturday, 27th February, 2010 : Burton Mill, Lavington Common and Waltham Brooks, West Sussex.

Another venture into West Sussex took our 17 participants into some attractive countryside near the base of the South Downs escarpment. The main venue was Sussex Wildlife Trust's Burton Mill reserve where a longish walk around the big reed-fringed mill-pond also encompassed parkland, alder carr, conifer plantation, grazing pastures and heathland. Interesting sightings at the pond included glimpses of **Bitterns** (unfortunately for three of our number only) and a female **Pochard** bearing a numbered 'nose saddle' - an alternative to leg-rings used on the Continent for marking birds. (This bird was 'saddled' near Nantes in France in November 2005 and recent sightings at Burton Mill are the first to be notified since. It is thought the bird summers in Eastern Europe or Russia). Further on, we came across a flock of 100-200 **Chaffinches** repeatedly flying down from the edge of the wood into a field - and quickly back up again! With perseverance we managed to scope at least one male **Brambling** amongst them. Meanwhile, **Redpolls** and **Siskins** were also busy in the treetops nearby. Further on again and we spotted a **Mandarin** drake almost hidden among the tangled trunks in flooded carr and then a handsome **Buzzard** conveniently posing on a post.

Later, a brief visit to Lavington Common revealed the broad expanse of heather there to be totally lifeless, doing nothing to allay our fears that the recent period of snow cover had devastated local Dartford Warbler populations. So it was quickly away to the final stop of the day, at the roadside overlooking Waltham Brooks where numerous ducks were enjoying the extensive floodwater beside the River Arun - these including a single drake **Pintail** as well as groups of **Shoveler**, **Wigeon** and **Teal**. After we had waited in vain for the regular **Barn Owl** to show, the occupants of the leaders' car were rewarded only a few hundred metres into their homeward journey when our target bird was spotted sitting on a roadside fence, allowing us to park alongside and admire - until the inevitable white van came up behind us and

forced us to move on! I calculated a cumulative bird-list of 63 for the day.

Old Pals.

Great to have Alan (Edwards) join us for the recent outing to Burton Mill. You would have to be a long-term Group member to recall the days when Alan was one of our regulars - he moved down to Horsham back in the mid-1990s. However, he has been coming along with us now and again ever since. Quite a number of us recall the series of fabulous trips we made to Spain when we used Alan's villa at Sierra Cabrera (near Almeria) as a base for exploring birding potential far and wide in Andalucia and Murcia. Watching breeding **Bonelli's Eagles** from the breakfast-table at the villa, tracking down **Dupont's Larks** and **Sandgrouse** in the Badlands near Cabo de Gata, finding **White-headed Duck** and **Marbled Teal** in a flooded little gravel pit among many, many hectares of greenhouses, even recording a first for Spain (**Isabelline Shrike**). What memories!

The Noughties List.

Ken has done a great job in turning the Noughties List (contained in Bulletin #8) into a small checklist booklet. Look out for it at future meetings! It contains a list of all the birds, mammals, butterflies, etc, etc (even fishes!) that we saw on our outings during the first decade of the 3rd Millenium - with space to add anything new during the next decade!

[An invitation : why not tell people about a favourite wildlife site in Croydon? Or even your top birding spot further afield?](#) Please send me your contributions for future Bulletins. Also send your comments or queries on anything contained in Birders' Bulletin #10.

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