

LOVE OF NATURE: 2016 - 2017

February – March 2018 Newsletter

Visit to Donna Nook

The Lincolnshire coast line is one of four breeding grounds of the British population of grey seals. Grey seals have been breeding along the coast here since 1970 and it is of international importance. For most of the year the seals, mostly the cows, are at sea, however, the ranger at the site did say that many of the bulls will stay isolated for longer on the sandbanks there waiting for the winter and the cows to return. Visitors flock to Donna Nook during November and December to observe the birth of the pups. The web-site maintains a daily diary of the births so no-one need be disappointed.

Pups are born with white fur coats and suckle for between two and three weeks. The mothers then leaves them. Cows will then mate and leave the beach. Pups grow quickly but have many dangers:

- ☐ Starvation
- ☐ Abandonment
- ☐ Infection
- ☐ Drowning

Having read the website diary and seen that there were over 500 bulls, 1,000 cows and 1,608 pups, I must confess, having not been to Donna Nook previously, I was expecting an audible and pungent fragrance as my introduction to brown seals. On our visit to the coast I was pleasantly surprised at the lack of smell and noise. That's not to say there weren't any sounds. There were distinctive sounds of babies calling mum, the sound that said 'get off my patch', a rather fetching mating call and a dramatic 'you're too close to my baby' call.

Though it is nature in the raw, when two bulls claim the same female or the male encroaches on the female and pup territory, it's well worth the visit. Pups are literally all over the beach - some very white and others in varying beautiful shades and designs. There are new born pups and pups obviously waiting for the urge to leave the beach to feed to manifest itself. I defy anyone not to fall in love with the doe-eyed pups.

A good visit (just make sure your list for the bus is correct – can't help being blonde some days). Good pathways by the coast - nice cup of tea. Wrap up warm and enjoy.

Vanessa Whaley

Photos by Geoff Norcliffe



Photos by Nora Boyle





Photos by Terry Gunnill





Photos by Bridget Thompson











October – November 2017 Newsletter

September's meeting commenced at the late hour of 7.30 pm when ten of our intrepid U3A members met up at Potteric Carr hoping to find some interesting night life at the nature reserve. We were kitted out with bat detectors and Kat, the Education Officer at Potteric Carr, gave us a brief talk about different types of **bats** and their habits. We set out, with our torches and detectors at the ready, hoping to find Noctule bats (found at 25kHz) and Pipistrelle bats (found at 45-55 kHz). After a quiet start we heard, and saw, numerous bats, mostly pipistrelle bats. We heard owls and encountered several biting insects!

Apart from the bites, a most enjoyable evening. Many thanks to Kat.

Bridget Thompson



June – July 2017 Newsletter

Bempton Cliffs

On a cold and windy 2nd of **May** our group, For The Love of Nature, visited Bempton Cliffs near Bridlington. The visit and coach were organised by our group leader, Vanessa. What a sterling job she made of it, and our visit gave us a spectacular display of Gannets, Kittiwakes, Guillemots and Razorbills. We also spotted Herring Gulls and Fulmars. We had hoped to see lots of Puffins too but, in the event, we only saw up to three. Not a disappointment because they are such beautiful little birds.

Jess Parkinson

Gannets



Nora Boyle



Nora Boyle



Nora Boyle



Terry Gunnill



Terry Gunnill



Vanessa Whaley



Vanessa Whaley



Bridget Thompson



Bridget Thompson

Razorbills



Nora Boyle



Bridget Thompson



Terry Gunnill



Bridget Thompson

Guillemots



Bridled Guillemot

Bridget Thompson

Puffins



Bridget Thompson



Bridget Thompson



Terry Gunnill

Kittiwakes



Norah Boyle



Norah Boyle



Terry Gunnill



Bridget Thompson

Rock faces



Norah Boyle



Terry Gunnill



Vanessa Whaley



Bridget Thompson



Bridget Thompson



Bridget Thompson

Bushcraft

In **April** a small but enthusiastic group set off from Potteric Carr visitor centre for a Bushcraft session led by Kat (Education Officer). We learnt how to erect a shelter using a timber hitch, a tension loop knot and an adjustable tension knot. Our mobiles came in handy as we videoed Kat's demonstrations and referred to the videos whilst attempting the knots. Tarps up, each pair then made a fire according to strict safety rules. I was amazed to see how, having created a spark with a firestarter, cotton wool blazed very quickly. Our efforts were rewarded with a cuppa, stirred with a whittled stick (because we forgot the spoon!).

Bridget Thompson







For Love of Nature: Winter Project 2017

For the first three months of the year, the nature group set itself a project, well, actually I set the group a project because I was a bit unsure what nature we might see during the cold wintery days and I couldn't have people sat on their comfy warm sofas through the bleak months. So, we set out: - To compare three local wetland habitats and identify any similarities or differences.

We aimed to visit Old Moor, Barnsley, Blacktoft Sands, Goole and complete our three months with a visit to Potteric Carr, Doncaster guided by the gate manager who we very much hoped would enlighten us to reasons as to any differences, similarities or specialties of the birds we observed.

Firstly, we braved the weather in early **January** and visited **Old Moor** in Barnsley. Situated right at the heart of Dearne Valley, half an hour from Doncaster Town Centre, this is a recently developed wetland area subsequent to regeneration. It's a 250-acre reserve managed by the RSPB and during the winter months is an important stopping off point for ducks, geese and swans plus... 8,000 Golden Plovers.



We were very pleasantly surprised by the numerous wetland and woodland birds we encountered. It's a well signed and laid out route, numerous hides, easy to follow map with a hide close to the entrance that has birdfeeders to enable a variety of birds (and squirrels) to be observed in relative comfort and dryness. A great start for beginners to bird spotting, whatever the age. We finished our visit with a very nice lunch in the cafeteria.

One of our members collated all the sightings on a chart and a second member added the pictures of the birds to try and help with identification in the future.



Our second visit (we were blessed with a bit of sunshine even though it was only the beginning of **February**) was to **Blacktoft Sands** out in the wilds of Goole, on the estuary of the Humber. Still only a 40-minute drive, unless you miss the sign as I did!!

Blacktoft Sands is a tidal reedbed, largest in England and is important for the breeding of bearded tits, bitterns and Marsh Harriers, and we had a fabulous display from one of them. It's a gentle walk along well laid paths to each of the hides. A very pleasant visit.

We were delighted by the sighting of a Smee. Sadly, only a female which is rather dull (unlike her mate but as few of us had even heard of a Smee we were quite excited) it's probably an age thing).

The highlight of the visit was the Bittern in flight. Normally a well camouflaged bird that frequents the reeds we were given a spectacular view of its colours and shape (apart from those that couldn't focus their camera quickly enough.)



Marsh Harrier



Finally, to **Potteric Carr** early in **March**, just off the M18 slip road for those that still haven't found it. Blessed again with bright, glorious sunshine, (must be something to do with the group leader), we were joined by Andy, the gate manager, a bit of a bird specialist.

Andy explained that Potteric Carr is the largest wetland reserve in South Yorkshire. Its development has been boosted by land acquired at varying times and through different forms of funding.

Bitterns and Marsh Harriers are two of species the reserve has been successful in improving habitats for,

unfortunately we saw neither. However, we did see a sparrow hawk displaying and swooping down. Last year, following a vigorous project by one of the rangers Barn Owls bred for the first time in the area for over 20 years.

Encouraging the habitats for one species can be detrimental to others, Andy explained, and one project for the future is to improve habitats for corncrakes and willow tits within the newly developed reed beds.

Due to the diversity of Potteric Carr's habitats, comparing with other wetland areas is a bit unfair. As Andy explained, each reserve is managed to encourage a differing species range and the size of Potteric gives it an unfair advantage.

Never-the-less one of a group members collated all the sightings and you can judge for yourself by looking at the chart below. Having the manager with us gave a different slant on our visit. It was very informative and we spotted (or he did) more woodland birds that perhaps we wouldn't have seen had Andy not been with us, and the size of the reserve meant we didn't actually get around to many hides.

Needless to say I, hopefully we, had a great time trying to find and identify what each of the reserves has to offer and appreciate the differences as well as the similarities.

Vanessa Whaley



Species		Old Moor	Blacktoft	Potteric	Comments
		3.1.17	6.2.17	7.3.17	
Bittern	Botaurus stellaris		*		inhabits large reedbeds
Blackbird	Turdus merula	*			thrush family
Black-headed gull	Larus ridibundus	*		*	small gull with red legs,black head only in breeding plumage
Blue tit	Parus caeruleus	*	*	*	passerine , blue and yellow
Bullfinch	Pyrrhula pyrrhula	*			passerine,male brighter pink
Canada Goose	Branta canadensis			*	large black and white goose originally from N.America
Carrion crow	Corvus corone	*	*	*	passerine
Chaffinch	Fringilla coelebs	*			passerine
Collared dove	Streptopelia decaocto				non passerine
Common Gull	Larus canus	*			gull with pale legs,yellow beak but no orange spot
Coot	Fulica atra	*	*	*	waterfowl, white beak and facial shield,grey lobed toes
Cormorant	Phalacrocorax carbo	*			dives from surface, seabird,holds wings out to dry
Gadwall	Anas strepera	*	*		non diving duck, male with black stern
Goldcrest	Regulus regulus			*	smallest bird in Europe
Goldfinch	Carduelis carduelis	*	*	*	passerine,red face,gold stripes on wings
Gooseander	Mergus merganser	*			sawbill,hooked beak,dives from surface to feed
Great Crested Grebe	Podiceps cristatus			*	freshwater bird with black head plumes
Great tit	Parus major	*	*	*	passerine,black stripe on yellow breast
Greenfinch	Carduelis chloris		*		passerine
Grey Heron	Ardea cinerea	*			tall grey and white wader
Greylag Goose	Anser anser		*		resident and migrant from Iceland
Herring gull	Larus argentatus			*	yellow bill with red spot
Kestrel	Falco tinnunculus	*			small falcon,bird of prey,hovers over prey
Lapwing	Vanellus vanellus	*	*		wader, plover with long thin crest

Lesser Black backed gull	Larus fuscus			*	slate grey back,yellow legs
Little Egret	Egretta garzetta		*		small white heron,wader
Little Grebe	Tachybaptus ruficollis	*	*	*	smallest diving duck
Long-tailed tit	Aegithalos caudatus			*	ball and stick shape,long tail
Magpie	Pica pica	*	*		crow family,eats eggs,blue,black and white,long tail
Mallard	Anas platyrhynchos	*	*	*	non diving duck,
Marsh Harrier-f	Circus aeruginosus		*		largest harrier, bird of prey
Moorhen	Galinula chloropus	*	*		waterfowl, red and yellow bill,green legs
Mute Swan	Cygnus olor	*	*	*	waterfowl,most common swan
Pintail- female	Anas acuta			*	tawny head,grey beak
Pheasant	Phasianus colchicus	*	*		game bird
Pochard	Aythya ferina		*	*	diving duck
Reed Bunting	Emberiza schoeniclus	*			passerine,male with black head and white collar
Robin	Ericathus rubecula		*	*	passerine
Shelduck	Tadorna tadorna		*		goose-like duck
Shoveller	Anas clypeata	*		*	non diving duck,sieve water for food with flat beak
Smew- female	Mergellus albellus		*		smallest sawbill
Snipe	Gallinago gallinago		*		wading bird, streaked body. long probing bill
Stonechat	Saxicola torquata		*		male with black head and rusty breast
Song Thrush	Turdus philomelus			*	v shaped brown spots on belly
Sparrowhawk	Accipiter nisus			*	bird of prey with long thin square ended striped tail
Teal	Anas crecca	*	*	*	smallest non diving duck
Tree Sparrow	Passer montanus		*		passerine,brown head,black mask and bib
Tufted Duck	Aythya fuligula	*	*	*	diving duck,black and white with tufted heads
Wigeon	Anas penelope	*	*	*	duck,feeds on short grass
Wren	Troglodytes troglodytes			*	passerine,loud voice,tail sticks up

Woodpigeon	Columba palumbus		*		large non passerine, white neck patch, grey head
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Chart compiled by Nora Boyle

Old Moor





Blacktoft Sands



Mute swan



Robin





For the Love of Nature

November brought sensuous autumnal smells and crispness of air to our nature session in **Potteric Carr**. With fungi on the agenda Kat, the educational lead at Potteric Carr was in her heaven. Fungi is her favourite passion????



It truly was a special English 'good to be alive' morning when Kat endeavoured to enthrall us with her knowledge, which she did very successfully. Most of us were surprised at the numerous varieties, types and species found in the woodland provided for us by the previous day's rain creating perfect conditions for a spectacular show. We were amazed at her ability to 'spot' the sometimes very tiny or camouflaged specimens amongst the undergrowth, but were soon excitedly finding our own examples eager to please 'teacher' as young students are.



December found us again, like young students animatedly making natural Christmas decorations with twigs, moss, leaves, natural string, and a little sprinkling of fairy dust. No one could have guessed we would have been so enthusiastic about making a Rudolph from twigs or a Christmas Log plus candle. Chris, very romantically made Diane a 'love heart' Christmas tree decoration. Long live young love. Following our session at Potteric Carr we scooted off for a light celebratory lunch



January 3rd we all met up at Old Moor, Barnsley. It's a RSPB reserve and our plan is to visit two wetlands Old Moor and Black Toft Sands prior to meeting up, at Potteric Carr in March with the bird expert there to compare the differences between the three wetland areas.

Old Moor is a recent development using European money to provide green spaces following closure of coal mines. Its



steadily growing and becoming very user friendly plus has delicious food. We meandered around between hides noting all the species we saw, wetland and woodland ready to create our very own U3A scrap book of sightings.



Our calendar has been prepared for the remainder of the year and if you are interested in joining us please ask.

Vanessa Whaley







Spurn Point – October 2016

The sounds of silence – gone is the traffic noise, the planes coming and going, the occasional siren. Instead the breeze rustles the long grass, sea birds cry mournfully and you can hear the soft sound of waves from the North Sea breaking on the shore. We are at the very tip of Spurn Point – one of Yorkshire's unique features and a jewel in the crown of Yorkshire Wildlife Trust (YWT).

It is unique in history and geography. A three and a half mile strip of dunes and clay. It has played its part in three wars – Napoleonic and the two World Wars, in the defence of the Humber Estuary. Evidence of the activities – gun emplacement foundations – can still be seen amidst the dunes, grasses and shrubbery.

The last notable historical event was the great storm two years ago. This washed away almost a kilometre of the access road and has now made the peninsula tidal and therefore restricts access. The YWT has overcome this with an unusual vehicle called a UNIMOG, a military style vehicle which had wheels that are large enough to clear the sea when the road is flooded. It was on this vehicle that our U3A group was taken to the extreme end of the peninsula. Andy, our YWT guide, spoke enthusiastically about the site. He was born a few miles up the coast. He gave us a good account of the local flora and fauna and took us into the old lighthouse, which is now used as an exhibition and information hub, and gave us panoramic views from the top.

One of Vanessa's many contacts must be the weather office as she managed to organise a perfect day – blue skies, a slight sea breeze and sunshine. Our lunch in the cafe at Kilnsea made a perfect end to our day.

Mike Bowser







For the Love of Nature: September 2016 Small Mammals

Intrepid naturalists were out again this beautiful September morning. Kat, our event leader had set some small mammal traps the previous evening for us to collect and explore the contents. Small mammal traps are set periodically on the nature reserve to check their health and number. A healthy population is necessary to ensure food for larger mammals and birds of prey.

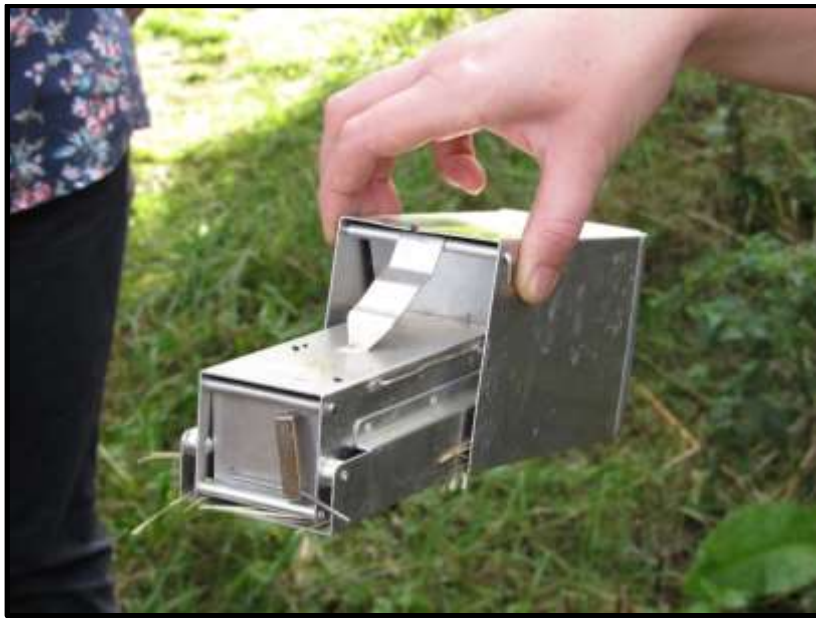
Kat had set a trail of traps in areas she had identified to be small mammal pathways and we were encouraged to look for these pathways, and evidence of visits, i.e. droppings.

Each trap was carefully emptied into a plastic bag (which someone very bravely held each time) and we identified what may have been caught. There were opportunities to get very close up and personal (if wanted). Not every trap was successful but we had an abundance of mice, some bank voles, one shrew and a slug.

Some surprising things we learnt. How high the mice can jump and just how well equipped they are to do so and how very stressed and tiny the shrew was.

Kat guided our handling of the mammals and none were hurt or over stressed.

Vanessa Whaley







The vole went for a wander



For the Love of Nature: August 2016

Butterflies

The session about butterflies was very well attended. The session started with a very informative presentation by Kat, Education Officer, about the types of butterflies that could be found at Potteric Carr.

The expectation was to see lots of butterflies on a lovely August morning. The reality was somewhat different as we set off on our search on a cool and rather overcast day. With everyone's eyes strained on the vegetation it was surprising what we did find including, among others, a Cinnabar moth caterpillar, Ringlet and Small Skipper.



For the Love of Nature visit – June 2016

Dragonflies



The Love of Nature group met in June to discover more about dragonflies. These beautiful winged creatures were seen flying around the ponds of Potteric Carr. Many species were spotted including damselflies and darters. We were very lucky to see one shed its nymph skin and emerge as an adult.

The group will be meeting again in July to look at tree identification. Please contact Vanessa Whaley for more details.

Diane Harris

For the Love of Nature Group: 3rd May 2016

Testing the health of the pond water at Potteric Carr

Armed with only a pond dipping net, magnifying glass and tray of water my staunch adventures were challenged to test the health of the pond water at Potteric Carr. The group knew little of what to expect but came equipped with rubber gloves, kneelers, sun screen, insect repellent and a smile.

Prepared with Health and Safety issues and safety for the pond insects they bravely stepped onto the platform. A quick look into the water gave nothing away. Cool, crisp, clear water and an obvious abundance of weed and pond mint. Nothing warned of the beasties that lay within.

This is my favourite event when I'm volunteering. There is always a look of disbelief on the youngsters' faces when I tell them they will be amazed once they dip their net in and it proved to be exactly the same for our re-cycled teenagers that day. It never fails to surprise me what we collect from that clear water. Invertebrates of all shapes and sizes. Some brutes (sadly, didn't think to get the photographic evidence) and some fragile, practically invisible nymphs. Always amazing, never boring. However, they had a job to do and gallantly dipped their nets time and time again collecting all sorts of species. Then came the task of counting (have you tried counting small wiggly things in a tray of water?)

Never the less, we counted Bloodworms x 5 and Water Louse x8 an indication of moderate pollution, Fresh water Shrimp x 4 Caddis Fly Larvae x 10 evidence of some pollution but Mayfly Nymph x 51 and Stone fly x 2 which is an indication of clean water. We also collected a great number of different species and with the fact that the water was actually very clear we concluded that the pond water was very healthy.

Job done - off to lunch.

Vanessa Whaley

Bridget, modelling some of the equipment, because I forgot to take photos earlier

