

BIRDING NEWSLETTER

Ely & District U3A Birdwatching Group



Planning Team

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Forthcoming Events

24th November

Christmas Social
(Graham)

6th December

Gun Hill and Holkam
(Babs and Nigel)

5th January

RSPB Ouse Washes
(Graham and Sean)

19th February

Cockley Cley and Lynford
Arboretum
(Sean and Sue)

22nd March

Kingfishers Bridge
(Babs and David)

2024 Group Weekend Field

Trip

Essex
Sunday 4th Feb – Tuesday 6th Feb

Surprise Sighting

3rd October

Dear Birdwatchers,

The year seems to be rushing by and we are into October already. I am now needing the light on for the evening meal due to the nights pulling in and I am getting twitchy about the central heating, although we have resisted so far. Talking of twitching, the recent ex hurricanes rushing across the Atlantic has delivered a rash of rare American vagrants across the country including some very exotic looking warblers. It is not just the West Coast and far-flung islands at the extremes of the country benefiting. There are opportunities to see rare birds closer to home. RSPB Frampton is living up to its reputation for good migratory sightings with a lesser yellowlegs, white-rumped sandpiper and black stork. Sue and Sean sent in a report for us to read and they were able to locate all three, unlike my visit where I dipped the black stork. I looked on bird guides tonight to find a buff-breasted sandpiper and a semipalmated sandpiper have recently arrived as well. I hope they are still around at the weekend when I am next free.

It is not just Frampton with rare goodies. After our group trip to the high tide spectacular at Snettisham it was possible to extend the morning and visit North Pools near Wells, where there was a small appreciative crowd watching a Wilson's Phalarope. I was amazed at how much bigger it was compared to a red-necked phalarope. There was also a pectoral sandpiper showing as well.

Thanks to Nigel for leading the trip to Snettisham, I have written a report, see below.

Birding Group Visit to RSPB Snettisham

A small group of birdwatchers met up RSPB Snettisham for the high tide spectacular. Nigel was our leader, and he was well prepared, he brought a torch! The RSPB had volunteers on hand to assist with parking and tickets. We walked from the car park along the path to the reserve and along to the shoreline close to the bottom of the lagoon in the dark. There was a covering of cloud which prevented a sunrise in the East, but as the light levels gradually increased, we could see the gathering numbers of waders out on the mud. The first species to appear from the gloom were oystercatchers. We also picked out avocet, dunlin, ringed plover, grey plover, knot, curlew, redshank and bar-tailed godwit. More and more waders came in massed groups, some landing and others swirled in the air above us until they went down in the sanctuary of the lagoon behind us.



Mass flight of Knot over Oystercatcher - Graham

Also out on the mud were graylag geese, shelducks and a surprisingly large number of little egrets. On the water were mallards, pintail, wigeon as well as herring, common, black-headed, great and lesser black backed gulls. Once the incoming tide had filled the creeks it very quickly raced across the exposed mud, so fast was the incoming tide, that the oystercatcher could only just trot ahead of the influx. Soon they were gone, leaving just the curlews at the top of the channel, until they too were forced into flight to stay dry.

At this point it was time to move location and join many of the other birders in attendance at one of the hides overlooking the lagoon. The shingle banks were covered in a mass of knot, so dense that none of the shingle could be seen. Elsewhere there was a couple of dense patches of oystercatchers and there were pockets of redshank, turnstone cormorant and dunlin.



Knot covering shingle bank to Lagoon - Graham

There was more space in the newest hide, with tiered steps for seats and large glass windows to look through. The glass does not give good views when using optics, so I am not a huge fan. However,

another RSPB volunteer was there giving advice and pointing out the more interesting birds. There was a single little stint with the dunlin, reasonably close to the hide, and a bit further back, there were two spoonbills on an island with little egrets and cormorants. We were unable to locate a spotted redshank and black-tailed godwit that was reported. The flocks were not settled, with lots of movement and bickering. One oystercatcher was in a particularly bad mood and was very aggressive towards any knot that was nearby and could be brought into pecking range.



We left the hides to return to the shoreline in preparation for the return flight to the mud. On route we stopped to admire some meadow pipits and goldfinches on the grassy area beside the boardwalk. I also scanned the fence posts, now surrounded by water on the salt marsh, locating a buzzard, but it was so distant it was described by one of the party as being in 'Lincolnshire'! Before reaching the shoreline, we were back on a grassy area, where some other birders warned us not to stand on the dunlin. We were stopped a couple of meters from a single bird that had decided to roost there for the high tide. I think it was a young bird, may never have seen humans before and could have been fresh in and exhausted. I hope that it was not ill.



Out at sea I picked up on a juvenile tern, not far from 'Lincolnshire', sat on a post. After much deliberation I decided that it was a common tern. By this time, we started to make our way back to the cars, ready for the rest of our day. Our thanks to Nigel for leading us.

Graham Cole

Juvenile Tern Misidentification

In the last edition of the newsletter, I identified a juvenile tern as a black tern. After publication it was pointed out to me that in fact it was a juvenile common tern. I was too quick to confirm the identification. I simply googled images of juvenile black terns, but the list of images returned included some from web sites comparing juvenile tern plumages, so all of the images displayed were not the same species. A good lesson, and I will refer to the handbook in future, hence my hesitation to make a hasty decision on the juvenile tern seen at Snettisham. The key features are: For black tern juvenile; extensive black cap, all dark bill, less forked tail, and obvious dark breast-side patches. For common tern. Upper wing has pale square shaped mid wing panel, orange at base of the bill.



Juvenile Common Tern - Sean

Graham Cole

RSPB Frampton

As there had been a lot of sightings at Frampton Sue and I set off to see what was there. It was a really dull windy day which made it a challenge to see anything. Fortunately, the hides had some seasoned birders who were able to spot some of these birds for us less skilled types. The Lesser Yellowlegs started off in the far distance but as we moved round the site, we did get a better view. The White-rumped Sandpiper was a different story. It stayed well into the distance making photo opportunities poor. Towards the end of the day, we did get a brief view of the Black Stork as it landed out in the salt marsh. We, and a dedicated band of birders, stayed for another hour hoping for another view but it did not show.

The next day the sunshine was better and started off less windy. We did get Little Stints, Curlew Sandpiper, Snipe, and even a Black Tern. We were walking along the sea wall but as it was a very high tide the cattle were on the path ambling along. We joined the slowest cattle drive in the history of Lincolnshire but eventually got through the gate.

Just as we were leaving we had great views of a Merlin hunting in front of the visitor centre, and Green and Goldfinch feeding on the sunflowers that had been such a spectacle on our last visit .



Greenfinch - Sean



Common Snipe - Sean



Lesser Yellowlegs (right) - Sean



Black Stork - Sean



Black Tern - Sean



White-rumped Sandpiper - Sean