

BIRDING NEWSLETTER

Ely & District U3A Birdwatching Group



Planning Team

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Forthcoming Events

24th April

Fingringhoe Wick
(Sue and Sean)

13th May

Lackford Lakes
(Babs and Marilyn)

15th May

Chippenham Fen
(Babs and Graham)

12th June

Fen Drayton
(Graham and David)

5th July

Rutland Water
(Graham, Sue)

8th August

Dernford Reservoir
(Sean and Marilyn)

17th September

Welney WWT
(Graham and David)

Kingfishers bridge

26th March

Before the report on our trip to Kingfishers bridge and Wicken Fen, I want to give you two pieces of news. Our May trip is to the wonderful reserve at Lackford Lakes, but when we contacted the reserve to let them know that we were planning to come on the 9th of May, we learned that this clashes with a Suffolk Wildlife Trust meeting resulting in the closure of the visitor centre and toilets. Consequently, the trip has been rescheduled for Monday the 13th of May. Remember to update the diary now!

Secondly, in the last newsletter we asked if there was interest in the 2025 residential trip going to the Yorkshire Coast and an extension to the Teesdale area. I am happy to say that there was enough response for the decision to be made to proceed into detailed planning. More news in due course.

Graham Cole

Ely and District u3a Birding Group Visit to Kingfisher's Bridge and Wicken Fen 22nd March 2024: the Day of the Chiffchaff

It was only a small band of birders but they braved the cold wind to enjoy being in nature at the small nature reserve so nearby that you can see Ely Cathedral from most of the trails. The bird of the day was singing his heart out in the largest tree in the car park: chiff-chaff, chiff-chaff; the easiest song to learn in the U.K. We had had quite a few cancellations of people mainly due to the poor forecast and although it was a bit challenging, it wasn't as bad as predicted with only one very short shower.

We wandered down through the wood and started scanning. The other competitor for 'bird of the day' put in its first appearance, **marsh harrier**. Like the **chiffchaff**, this bird seemed omnipresent today, what a treat. We made our way to the small mound by the entrance to gain some scanning advantage. Sadly, the little owls haven't been seen here for a while, but the area seems to be being used as a dumping ground for rubbish from the rest of the site, so maybe they

thought they weren't being appreciated and moved on. **Chaffinch**, **greenfinch**, **goldfinch** all put in an appearance, but we couldn't find the **bullfinch** calling quietly and probably hiding low-down out of the wind. We did pick up the **great spotted woodpecker** even though he was doing his best to stay hidden. When searching for the singing the **song thrush** we spotted a lone **redwing**. The fields held **red-legged partridge**, **pheasants** and hares. The flooded area at the back of the fields had **shelduck**, **shoveler**, **teal**, **oystercatchers**, **redshank** plus plenty of displaying **lapwings**. Of course, the **marsh harriers** were active the whole time, always trying to steal our attention.

We descended the mound and skirted the wood listening to **robins**, **wrens**, **dunnocks**, **blue** and **great tits**. A pair of **long-tailed tits** zipped through the trees, picking off tasty morsels as they went. A **kestrel** hovered but he must have been looking at small mammals because small birds were missing from the damp meadows. Only **piebald wagtail** was apparent. **Coot**, **moorhen** and the usual geese; **Canada** and **greylag**, were most of what was on offer. A **mistle thrush** perched in the lonely tree and we moved down to the stream area. Despite creeping up quietly, the kingfisher wasn't at home. But the silence meant we could hear the **bittern** booming, although it was quite tricky to hear above the noisy wind.

We moved to the large mound listening to the song of **Cetti's**

warbler and the quiet low whistle of **bullfinch** but were unable to connect with either. More **long-tailed tits** were busy collecting lichen for their nest. We carefully climbed up to the top of the mound. A recent addition here has been a platform which gives stability to the viewing experience but the protection only comes up to waist height, which meant we were still getting thoroughly wind-blown. We saw roe and Chinese water deer as well as **mallard**, **gadwall**, **tufted duck**, **pochard**, **wigeon**, **little** and **great crested grebes**. The main pool is dominated by **black-headed gulls** and they were joined by a few **lesser black-backed gulls**. It was difficult to tear your eyes away from the antics of the **marsh harriers**. We spotted 2 males and 3 females. Their interactions were constant and it was tricky to judge what was going on, however one of the males was definitely trying to impress by carrying a huge stick to one of the nest sites. After some eye-watering scanning, Graham eventually pinned down a couple of **common snipe**, but our search for its rarer cousin wasn't successful which wasn't surprising as it hasn't been seen here for a few years now. The **Egyptian geese** showed off their youngsters. A **sparrowhawk** put in a brief appearance and a **great egret** lurked in the rushes. **Buzzards** remained perched to avoid a battle with the wind and a **grey heron** kept low too.

We moved back towards the Visitor Centre and mainly saw the same birds but also picked up **goldcrest**, **lesser redpoll** and **linnet**.



Potential new Birding Group member – Graham Cole



The view from the top of the Big Mound showing Ely Cathedral in the distance. – Graham Cole

A few of us decided to continue at Wicken Fen.

After some delicious scone-based sustenance we did a long walk around Adventurer's Fen as far as Burwell Fen. Birds were pretty much same as at Kingfisher's Bridge although our ears were treated to some very close booming from at least 2 **bitterns**. A **skylark** braved the still-gusting wind but only briefly. A single **meadow pipit** flew up from the grassland and quickly went back down. **Reed buntings** were much more in evidence here although most were still keeping a low profile. The **little egrets** were perched on the edge of the heronry. The **marsh harrier** and **chiffchaff** action continued right through the afternoon. A **red kite** put in a brief appearance and we decided to head home.

Babs York

It's that time of the year!

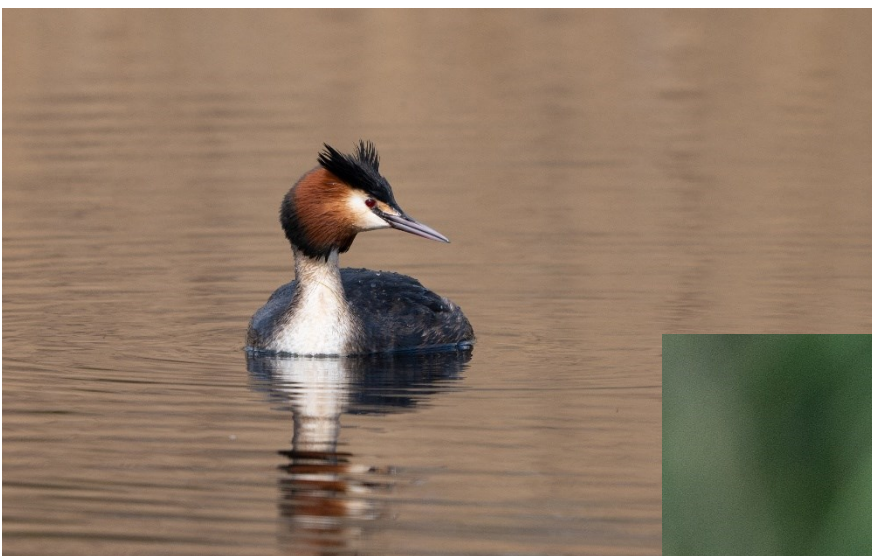
Saturday 16th March, was a lovely sunny day with little wind. At last the sun seemed to have a little warmth and the feeling of spring was in the air.

Dorothea and I decided to go for a walk to enjoy the day and decided on a visit to RSPB Lankenheath. We hadn't been there for a while so we were looking forward to seeing how the reserve was doing after all the rain we have had this year. There were a couple of objectives to our visit, one was of course enjoying nature and seeing what birds were around and the second, was to test my new lens for the Nikon Z.

At the visitor centre we asked if there was anything special we needed to look out for and were told the usual things about cranes, marsh harriers, etc. However, a visiting photographer told us he had been in Mere Hide and there were bearded tits around and a showing of a kingfisher. He said it was

the first time he had seen a kingfisher from Mere Hide this year. Ten years ago in August I had a fantastic time in Mere Hide watching kingfishers feeding their young and was able to take loads of good pictures. After that, I haven't seen one there since.

With the possibility of seeing bearded tits (which Dorothea has never seen) we marched up the reserve to Mere hide. On arriving I was surprised to see a sign saying it was a "short time hide" and that you shouldn't spend more than 2hrs there, in order to let others enjoy. Opening the door I expected it to be packed out, but no, just three other people. We settled down and scanned the reeds for those elusive bearded tits. There was a great crested grebe in the channel to the left of the hide and another in the main pool, but well off to the right and almost out of sight. There was a pair of gadwall, a coot and after a while a pair of greylags appeared out of the reeds. We looked and looked, but no signs of any beard tits.



Great crested grebe. – Nigel Puttergill

quite stunning to look at. After fishing a little it made its way into the channel on the left side of the hide and headed towards the other grebe. They met up and faced each other and to our surprise, they started their courtship ritual. The male (I assume) picked up a big clump of weed and facing each other they rose up and danced together for several seconds. We have never seen this before, other than on television nature programs and were so happy to witness it. Who would think that a couple of grebes dancing with a bit of weed, could bring so much joy. Due to other people in the hide and the speed at which this happened, I couldn't get a picture, but who cares, the memory is still there and will be for some time to come.

Slowly, the great crested grebe in the main pool came closer to the hide and close enough to get some reasonable shots with the new lens. It was lovely to see the great crested grebe in its best plumage and it was



Kingfisher – Nigel Puttergill

As for the new lens. It passed the test and I am well pleased.

Nigel Puttergill

A Day Out in Norfolk

With the seasons moving on Sue and I went to Weybourne to see the reported Lapland Buntings. It was a lovely bright day when we got there and managed to get a view of one in the middle of a field. It was too far for a decent photograph, but Sue's scope came into its own again. We also got good views of Twite, Snow Buntings, and even a Grey Partridge shouting from the field margins. We went on to RSPB Titchwell afterwards whilst the weather was on our side. The car park was really busy, but the reserve was quite quiet. In the various pools we saw Mediterranean Gulls, Avocet, Pintails, Curlews and Redshanks. The soundtrack was definitely Brent Geese which kept taking off with a cacophony of noise. The beach had Sandling and Oystercatchers running around, and there were Red Breasted Merganser and Common Scoter on the sea.

Sean Greenway



Brent Geese and Mediterranean Gulls – Sean Greenway



Linnet– Sean Greenway



Oystercatcher– Sean Greenway



Reed Bunting – Sean Greenway



Pintail – Sean Greenway



Stonechat – Sean Greenway



Redshank– Sean Greenway



Brent Geese– Sean Greenway



Marsh Harrier – Sean Greenway



Red Kite – Sean Greenway



The Wading Pheasant of Welney– Sean Greenway