

# BIRDING NEWSLETTER

Ely & District U3A Birdwatching Group



## Planning Team

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## Forthcoming Events

**26th April**  
**Fingringhoe & Abberton Res'**  
(Sean & Sue)

**3rd May**  
**Wicken Fen & Kingfisher**  
**Bridge**  
(Tony & Nigel)

**8th June**  
**Roswell Pits (evening) ?**  
(Babs & Graham)

**12th July**  
**Rutland Water**  
(Tony & Nigel)

## Spring is here!

19th March

Dear Birdwatchers,

At long last there are signs of Spring around. The days are getting longer, magnolias and cherry trees are in blossom and there is definitely a bit of warmth in the air. The start of Spring can also be detected in the notable increase of bird song. Once again, I am woken at dawn by blackbirds, dunnocks and robins singing their hearts out.

On Tuesday we had an excellent trip to the Brecks, led by Babs York and Graham Cole. It started with a few early-birders meeting at Cavenham Heath, who then joined the main bunch at Santon Downham for a walk alongside the river. After a good morning there we moved to Lynford Arboretum to add a few more interesting birds to our list. In total we saw 62 different species and heard another three. You can read all about it in the report sent in by Babs York with bird pictures from Sean Greenway.

If you have written down our future birding events in your diary, then please be aware of a change to our schedule on 8th June. Originally our plan was a daytime visit to visit Titchmarsh, but due to conflicts with other U3A activity groups, we have rescheduled that event to an evening walk, possibly at Roswell Pits. Further details will be sent out when a plan has been fixed.

With the current beautiful weather scheduled to be with us for a week or so, it's a good time to get out and observe nature.

Enjoy your birding! Nigel

## From Babs York - A day in the Brecks

Mid-March is a great time to visit the Brecks. The resident birds will have started their breeding cycle with some wintering visitors still lingering, whilst some of our summer visitors are newly arrived. Graham and I led this trip and I've shared here a few of the highlights with some excellent photographs by Sean Greenway.

For those who joined the optional early visit to Cavenham, the early start proved well worth it. As we approached the heath area, we wound down the windows to see if we could catch a song. The first bird we heard was a chiffchaff, followed by a yellowhammer, although it was a fair way off. Just as I was about to continue, 2 woodlarks rose from the track, their wonderfully rich song filling the air. They alighted on the wires and seemed to be involved in a battle for supremacy, totally oblivious to our presence just a few feet away. Their song contest continued for some while and the birds edged closer and closer to each other, until they engaged in physical combat; fisticuffs for larks. They tumbled earthwards, but pulled up short of the ground and flew off over the fields. I was about to set off again, when we noticed the yellowhammer had flown into the bush alongside the track and we enjoyed its well-known song for a few minutes. We continued along the track, which increasingly resembles the feeling of being on a cut-price roller-coaster and pulled up mid-way along the heath. Sue and Sean had already seen a stone curlew, but it had gone into hiding, so I ate my breakfast while we waited for others to arrive. Linnets, siskin and redpoll were singing and seen, although the latter gave some the run-around. Stonechats seemed to be in good numbers and were very active, putting on a good show as always. Both skylarks and woodlarks were singing in good numbers. I can't remember when I've seen so many woodlarks here and the observation of birds fighting over territory is a healthy sign. Meadow pipits were also doing their song flight and display, but were no match for the larks.



Linnets



Stone Curlew

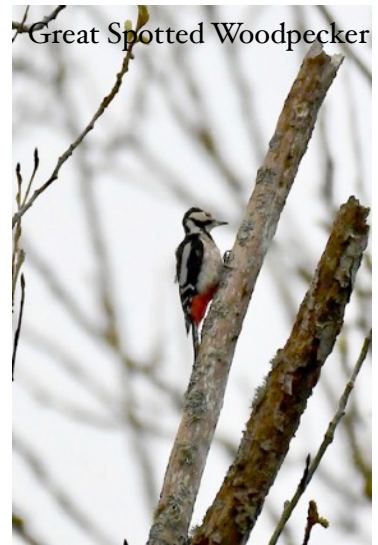
Once the others had joined us, we drifted along the track on a serious hunt for stone curlew. Several of the numerous rabbits put on passable stone curlew impressions until they were examined more closely. It was difficult not to let my scope wander towards the small area of water at the back of the heath, but I tried hard as it distracted from the main focus, and after all, looking at sitting ducks wasn't today's challenge! As with all good tales, the stone curlew waited until nearly the end of the road before showing itself. The sun shone on it and we looked in awe at its huge sleepy eyes, well adapted for a

crepuscular existence. So now we examined the water. Mallard, teal, gadwall, shelduck were present and we watched as a marsh harrier shook them all up, as it passed overhead. Lapwings were doing their display flight and as usual, they did a good job of harassing the harrier when it ventured into

their airspace. Time ran out before we reached the bridge, as we had to be at Santon Downham for roam. Perhaps on another visit?

Tony and I set off using a slightly different route to normal which involved crossing the river Lark further up and as we approached, I heard the ti-ti call of a grey wagtail and pulled up. It landed on Tony's side of the car and he watched it wagging its very long tail as it stood on one of the stones along a small weir.

The car park at Santon Downham was full of bird song, but seeing them is a different story as many of the trees are so tall. Greenfinch was giving us its wheezy and trilling song, but the dominant sound was the siskins. This was mainly their single-note call, but some were also singing their buzzy song. For the remainder of the day you could not escape that sound, not that you would want to! We wandered to the church, getting glimpses of the goldcrests and better views of the long-tailed, blue, great and coal tits. After much searching the nuthatch gave itself up to all but most of the birds stayed high up making viewing tricky. We moved on to walk along the river and it was almost as if siskin were in every tree and bush. Their sound made it difficult to pick out other songs and calls. A grey wagtail showed well from the bridge and it or other birds made frequent flypasts during our walk. Great spotted woodpecker alighted briefly, but didn't hang around. Marsh tits were calling and continued their teasing on and off for the rest of the day, but we never got on to them properly. Moorhens went about their business discreetly, avoiding any unnecessary attention as usual. After picking up its song we got good looks at a treecreeper even though that camouflage is second to none. We watched a green woodpecker on the other side of the river and could see that a number of redwings were around too. We crossed the bridge near the picnic area and walked through the wood. We could see the redwings well, some on the path, but most in the field. In with them were several chaffinches and a single brambling. Further back in the field were mistle thrushes and we could hear their rather melancholy song drifting across the space. Their close relative, the blackbird, bathed in a pool and nearby robins and dunnocks jostled for position. We returned via the woodland track. Early butterflies, comma and brimstone, enjoyed the sunshine and the shelter along the rides. Down the track were more redwings and we eventually got more views of goldcrests, as some came down lower. Jays were seen flying on several occasions through the day, but I didn't see one perched, so I guess they must be busy nesting. We drove down to the picnic area for lunch and enjoyed a sunny spot although, the reduction of the tables to just one is rather odd for somewhere advertised as a "picnic site".



Great Spotted Woodpecker



Yellowhammer

The car park at Lynford can be a good place for firecrests and we waited awhile but didn't hear any, so moved on to our main target. As we walked down, we saw many of the species already seen during the day again. We spend some time looking at the small pool through the gate, which gave excellent views of yellowhammer and brambling, the brightness of the former almost hurting your eyes. Sue had details of a 'nailed-on' tawny

owl and we proceeded with anticipation to the tall trees just before the lake. Surprisingly, you could see it with your naked eye even though it was almost at the very pinnacle of the tree. Scopes were immediately trained on it and all enjoyed day time views of this night time hunter. It deigned to open its eyes briefly just to check we weren't a threat and quickly dismissed us as harmless. Who could argue with that! We were able to share the views with many passing people, some with binoculars, some without, who gave us inquiring looks as we stared skyward. It's lovely to



Brambling



Tawny Owl

see the expression on faces as people see for the first time something as amazing as a tawny owl. A little grebe trilled constantly from the reeds, but stayed well-hidden. We tried really hard to find the hawfinches but it had gone cold and no-one had seen them yet, so we walked around the field hoping our luck would change. Wrens were busily dashing around and buzzards took to the air. We watched a male kestrel in pristine plumage drop to the ground, but come up empty-taloned. As we had nearly finished our loop, we picked up one, as it dropped to the ground to feed. We moved further round for a better angle and eventually saw 6 birds under one of the hornbeams. Their huge silvery bills shone in the sun, now shining again and providing good light for these very special birds.

We headed back to the car park, rather weary now from the early start. On a reconnaissance I'd noticed a new hut offering drinks and snacks and some of us thought it was our duty to try it out. I'm delighted to report the quality of drinks and cakes were excellent and rounded off perfectly another lovely day of birding



Hawfinch



## From Sean Greenway

Sue and I went for a few trips out last month .We got to see the grey shrike at Comberton after two attempts. It was quite hard to spot and very mobile, but did eventually see it on the opposite side of a hedge we had been looking through the time before.

We went to Earith for the first time this year. Whilst we were there, 6 glossy ibis dropped in. They stayed for a while, but got moved on by an aggressive grey heron .



Great Grey Shrike



Glossy Ibis

Welney was a chance to see the tundra bean goose as well as cattle egrets. Whilst there we had a flyover of Bewick swans. The weather still limited access to some of the site, but still worth the visit.

Picking our daughter up and dropping her back at university gave another chance to go to Abberton. We got a chance to see barnacle geese and a lone pink-footed goose that had joined with white-fronted geese, very close to the old causeway.



Barnacle Goose



Tundra Bean Geese



Bewick Swans



White-fronted Geese + one Pink-footed

