

BIRDING NEWSLETTER

Ely & District U3A Birdwatching Group



Planning Team

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Forthcoming Events

13th March

Sculthorpe Moor (Nigel & Graham)

11th April

Monks Wood (Babs & Sue)

28th April

Lakenheath / Maids Cross
(Babs & Graham)

17th May

Snettisham & Dersingham
(Babs & Graham)

7th June (evening)

Wicken Fen
(Nigel)

Five in a Day!

23rd February

Dear Birdwatchers,

We have been blessed with some dry weather recently as well as a warm spell. Too early to say that spring is on the way, but you do get that feeling that things are starting to waken up and the winter is getting behind us. There seems to be a lot more activity out there and birds are starting to pair up and prepare for the nesting season. In fact I have a pair of great tits in my garden popping in and out of the next box, obviously sussing the site out.

On Tuesday our group visited Deeping Lakes and Eldernell on the Nene Washes. The field trip was organised and led by Graham Cole and Sue Greenway. It was my first time to visit these two sites (close to Peterborough) and I was not disappointed. You can read all about our day out in the article written by Graham Cole.

One of the objectives for this field trip was to see five different species of owl in one day. We were exceedingly lucky and did manage to spot all five, but I have to say, without Graham and Sue's expert knowledge of the birds habitat and usual roosting sites, I would not have seen more than one.

Our next trip out will be on 13th March to Sculthorpe Moor near Fakenham. The last time we went there was pre-pandemic. Since then they have opened some new hides, so there is something new to look forward to. Details of the visit will be circulated a couple of weeks before the event.

Enjoy your birding! Nigel

Graham Cole - Deeping Lakes and Eldernell

This month's field trip took the group to two new locations and a show of hands from those attending revealed very few had previously visited these sites. We started at the Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust Reserve called Deeping Lakes, which is located 40 miles from Ely, just to the North of Peterborough. We started looking for birds from the car park and after everyone was ready, we made our way towards the main hide. On route we took in the West lake and scanned for owls along the channel. The lake held a few ducks such as pochard, tufted, wigeon and mallard plus a single oystercatcher and Egyptian goose. The channel has been a reliable location to find roosting long eared owls in past winters, but today we came up empty handed. Once we were in the hide overlooking the main lake and island, we could see goldeneye, little grebe, a male goosander and a cormorant colony. On the top of one of the trees on the island there is a nesting platform which may have been installed in the hope of attracting ospreys. So far it is unused, although a lesser black-backed gull found it to be a suitable perch while we were there. The path continued around the West Lake coming up onto the Welland riverbank. A short distance along the river there are a few mature willow trees on the opposite bank, which are often frequented by little owls. We approached carefully and stopped a good 50 yards or more from the closest point where the path passes the trees on the opposite bank. We did see a little owl, but it had also seen us! It had its back to us and had rotated its head completely around to look at us, before it moved away into cover further back, so not all of the group were able to get to see it before it left. There were also a few teal in the river. Walking back along the river bank gives an elevated view over the West lake and there is a line of individual small trees between the lake and the river bank. Here we encountered a mixed tit flock consisting mostly of long-tailed tits, but we were pleasantly surprised to briefly see a tree creeper. We were nearly to the



Long-eared Owl



Kingfisher

end of the lake when a cry came from the rear of the group. They had just seen a long-eared owl flying away from us heading for the channel we had searched earlier. Only a few saw it, but at least Sean managed to obtain a photograph of it, from behind. After a short discussion we decided to have another look along the channel without success, while a couple of the group went back to the hide. They quickly returned with good news. There was a long-eared owl no more than 10 feet from the hide standing in the tree giving a clear view. We all entered the hide very quietly and we were able to enjoy spectacular views, including views of two more long-eared owls in the same tree, but slightly more obscured. A fantastic end to the first location of the day.

We relocated for an afternoon at the Nene Washes, parking at the Eldernell view point. Our plan here was to walk West along the bank. An obliging kingfisher was seen before we left the carpark and a stonechat



Short-eared Owl

was soon seen as well. Looking away from the wash a short-eared owl was found in the line of small trees close to the barn. It was completely in the open, again offering completely stunning views. In the opposite direction we found at least 20 common cranes on the far side of the wash on the banks of the river. We got talking to a visiting birder who had a thermal imager, which he had been using in the morning to search the closest hedge line adjacent to the bank we were standing on, and he had located several owls, but he was uncertain if they were long or short eared (both have been reported there recently). Unfortunately, as he offered to locate the first bird his imager batteries were exhausted, and we were unable to locate any

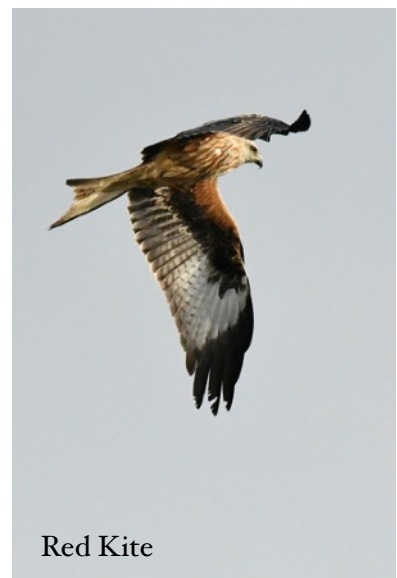
by eye. So we made our way to Lord Holt Wood, which is located in the wash separated from the bank by the stream. Here two mute swans were in the stream and were definitely courting, giving us a chance to see their display. In the wood we had come to see one particular tree. Sure enough we located the tree which has a sizeable hole, which is just the perfect size for a sleepy tawny owl to roost in. With four owl species seen in the day so far we returned to the bank closer to the car park where we had a good view of the barn. On the way there we had two red kites flying over our heads. We were also tipped off about a perched merlin, but it took flight just as we got there, so we were not able to confirm. At the barn a kestrel was perched in one of the bushes and it remained there until two barn owls emerged from the barn. The kestrel immediately took to the air and had a set-to with the barn owls, who quickly retreated back into the barn. But they came out again a short time later giving us a five owl day. Quite a spectacular achievement that is unlikely to be repeated for quite some time.



Tawny Owl



Barn Owl



Red Kite



On the flood bank at Eldernell

Bird pictures by Sean Greenway

From Sean Greenway

Sue and I spent a couple of days in Essex visiting a couple of new locations.

Our first site was RSPB Rainham Marshes. It nestles alongside the Thames, so there's a bit of everything there. There was wild fowl, hedgerow birds, raptors and waders on view and I got my first clear view of a Cettis warbler this year. The Reed beds were very busy and we even got views of bearded tits as well as avocets feeding on the edge of the Thames.

Next day we went to RSPB Old Hall Marshes. The weather started off a bit dull, but after a while it cleared up. We only did the short walk, but the marshes were full of birds. We saw large numbers of Brent geese and pintails in the water, with grey and common plover in good view. The reed/scrub ground still looked like it was recovering from bush fires, but there were plenty of waders and wild fowl around. I saw my first turnstones of the year and the fields had good numbers of golden plover, meadow pipits and curlew.

In the afternoon we went to Fingringhoe Wick and after using the cafe went round the site. The woods had early signs of spring with chiffchaffs in good view and a lot of territorial activity. Good numbers of Brent geese, avocets, dunlin, golden plovers and oystercatchers.

On our last day we went to Abberton Reservoir, a favourite of ours. Among the various locations there we saw long-tailed duck, Bewick swan, black-necked grebe, smew, corn bunting and great Northern

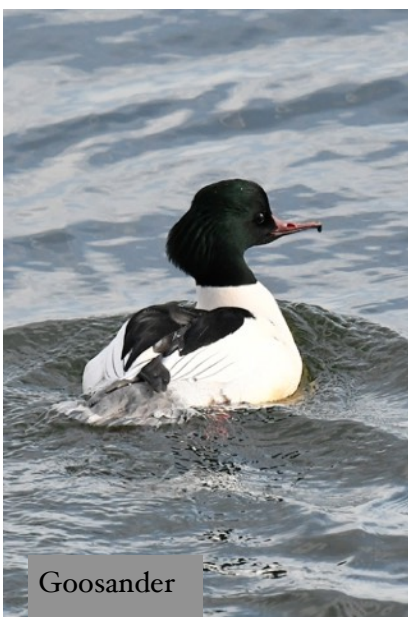
diver. There was also goosander and Caspian gull there. Unfortunately, the Caspian was only really visible with a very strong scope, but there was plenty to see there.



Brent Geese



Smew



Goosander



Redshank



Goldcrest



Black-necked Grebe

