

Thornbury U3A Birdwatching Group – Visit to Westhay NNReserve on the Somerset Levels 14.5.18

Fifteen members met in the car park at the Somerset Wildlife Trust Westhay Moor reserve on the Somerset Levels, the first time we had visited this reserve. The weather was unbelievably warm and sunny with a gentle westerly breeze which prevailed all day. Before we left the car park we were treated to excellent views of Hobbies wheeling high over us while some Swifts passed through. Walking along the drove to the Island Hide, a Sedge Warbler was heard and a family of Mute Swans with 7 cygnets were on the nearby lagoon. The lagoon was very quiet with just a couple of Coot and a Mallard and Cetti's Warblers called from close by.

As we walked to the large Viridor hide, a Bittern was booming in the distance and a Grey Heron flew overhead. Again, the lagoon in front of the hide was very quiet but in the grassy droves butterflies, particularly Brimstones, damsel flies and dragonflies were abundant. Moving on we decided to have lunch at a wood sculpture and a nearby hide, during which a Cuckoo called close by for many minutes and a Willow Warbler sang joyfully from a tree top. The hide gave us a view of a Marsh Harrier quartering the marshes while more booming Bitterns could be heard. Following lunch we continued along the drove accompanied by singing Blackcaps, Chiffchaffs and Willow Warblers.

We headed for North hide which overlooks yet another lagoon and, crucially, on the far side a Great White Egret on its nest. When we arrived the bird was standing and quite visible but soon returned to incubating the eggs, out of sight. As we returned along the drove, we made a detour around the Mire, an area of scrub, gorse and patches of cotton grass. A Dunnock stood motionless atop a gorse bush carrying a food morsel and waited for us to move on before it went to the nest. As we left the Mire we had excellent views of a Kestrel at the top of a dead tree before it flew off to join the Hobbies which had been flying over us all day.

Back in the car park we all agreed it had been a good day. The all-important weather had played its part and, although the birds were not abundant, many only being seen as singles, we gained a tally of 38 species. A worrying feature was that no one saw a Swallow or House Martin. We could expect to see these species flying over the water, trees and fields. In the couple of days following our visit, I have also noted a great scarcity of Swallows and Martins in the fields around Thornbury and fear there has been a catastrophe that has decimated these summer visitors. Charles Hiscock

Bird List

Hobby	Blackcap	Butterflies seen – Brimstone
Swift	Willow Warbler	Small Tortoiseshell
Mallard	Chiffchaff	Peacock
Coot	Little Grebe	Red Admiral
Canada Goose	Blue Tit	Large White
Great Crested Grebe	Great White Egret	Green veined White
Sedge Warbler	Little Egret	Orange Tip
Gadwall	Greater Spotted Woodpecker	Speckled Wood
Cetti's Warbler	Wren	
Carrion Crow	Raven	
Grey Heron	Dunnock	
Cuckoo	Chaffinch	
Robin	Blackbird	
Cormorant	Kestrel	
Moorhen	Buzzard	
Marsh Harrier	Greylag Goose	
Bittern (booming)	Herring Gull	
Mute Swan	Magpie	
Goldfinch	Rook	

38 species