

RSPB Bexley Group Walk

Foots Cray Meadows – Tuesday 5th January 2016

The wettest December, a very wet start to January and still 19 members and friends joined us for the first walk of 2016 – no doubt wishing to walk off some of the festive season excesses and guess what – the sun shone all morning providing excellent light for viewing and photographing the meadows and its birdlife.



Looking at Stock Dove (Brenda Todd)



Watching Kingfisher (Brenda Todd)

We were governed a little, but not put off by, the incredibly wet, muddy conditions underfoot but getting close to the river was a priority and within 15 minutes of the start we were all enjoying fabulous views of a kingfisher – it sat for many minutes, certainly long enough for all to watch at least once through the telescope.



There is a kingfisher there (Brenda Todd)



Kingfisher (Donna Zimmer)

After such a start we were worried the morning could perhaps only go downhill but not so. We were soon enjoying stock dove, quickly joined by woodpigeon for comparison – then jackdaws with carrion crows. Jay and magpies completed the corvid collection. There was a constant racket of parakeets as background noise but there seemed to be more song thrushes trying to out compete and we enjoyed excellent views of one close by. Dunnock, wren and robin were also nearby as was a little egret perched in a riverside tree. Little egret was seen often flying up and down the river all throughout the morning – probably at least two birds present. Next up, despite the advice that grey wagtail would be hard to see given the high water level, but just to contradict, a fantastic adult male probed along the fencing put into the river for realignment purposes. With the sun shining on it we could easily understand why some people think they are seeing a yellow wagtail. I hope the photographers managed to catch the image with the yellow reflection in the river.



Long-tailed Tit (Donna Zimmer) Wren (Donna Zimmer)

The lack of garden birds has often been recorded this winter and this was reflected in our walk – no finches, no winter thrushes and no decent sized tit flocks though long-tailed tits gave frequent and good views. We even think we saw two blue tits pairing up as they displayed on a tree trunk. On the Loring Hall fields we watched four mistle thrushes though the light wasn't good here.

Continuing round to the edge of North Cray wood we didn't add much to the list so we returned to Five Arches, a cormorant flew overhead but didn't stop. On the open water there were many black-headed gulls and mallards gathered, primarily, because there were still some families out feeding the birds. Around 13 tufted ducks hung around the feeding activities but didn't participate. Moorhens were feeding on the grass edges – mostly muddy now and coots squabbled amongst themselves. We had really good views of up to four little grebe and a pair of gadwall (what a fantastic specimen the drake is).

Time was marching on so we made our way back – hearing the loud squeal of water rail but no sighting and returning to the cars by 12.15.

Birds seen : Little grebe, cormorant, little egret, gadwall, mallard, tufted duck, water rail (heard), moorhen, coot, black-headed gull, stock dove, woodpigeon, ring-necked parakeet, kingfisher, grey wagtail, wren, dunnock, robin, blackbird, song thrush, mistle thrush, long-tailed tit, blue tit, great tit, jay, magpie, jackdaw, carrion crow. (28 species).

Ralph and Brenda Todd

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