

RSPB Bexley Group Walk - Hall Place and Crayford Rough – Tuesday 26th January 2016.

Once again rain was forecast for the day of our walk but 16 members and friends were not deterred and joined us for a gentle wander in search of birdlife. Before we left the car park we saw three greenfinches in the bushes and had the opportunity to sort out a single common gull from the group of black-headed gulls on the nearby football pitch (a habitat in need of more observations – especially for gulls and thrushes). Gull ID workshop part one complete, we ventured into the “formal” area of Hall Place Gardens – a goldcrest made a brief appearance, seen by some before it flew high away toward the north. Once into the gardens it was great tit that seemed to dominate though a dunnock and a robin perched nicely together on the path side fence – the dunnock keeping just enough distance to avoid the wrath of the robin, they can be quite aggressive at this time of year.

Viewing the filled up bird feeders around the hide from a distance it was obvious that great tits were also dominating the feeders, nine moorhen fed on the nearby grass and a blackbird fed on the ground. We were about to continue when a flock of what we thought were siskins flew into a nearby alder but at the same time a nuthatch called and was soon located sitting at the entrance to a nestbox – having enjoyed that we were then too late to get better views of the siskins – they had seemingly moved on.



Group members Hall Place Hide*



Nuthatch – Hall Place (photo Ralph Todd)

Looking from the weir bridge along the Cray River we saw only mallards and Canada geese until a family walking close by put up a grey wagtail that some of the group saw. A green woodpecker was also noted flying away but not many of us were able to catch up with that.

Retracing our steps back through the gardens and car parks we followed the river down to Crayford Rough. The open grasslands were over run with dogs but a large group of gulls remained stationary long enough for us to sort out common, lesser-black backed and herring gulls (adult and juvenile) from the 200+ black-headed gulls (Gull ID workshop part two complete). Birds were mostly absent from the riverside vegetation with goldfinch being the most abundant apart of course from woodpigeons, magpies and carrion crows. A couple of jackdaw flew over and were later seen on the ground. One flowering celandine added a small splash of colour.



Group members Hall Place – River Cray*



Common Gull (photo Ralph Todd)

Once in Crayford Rough we concentrated on trying to find water rail or grey wagtail but to no avail – very little bird life at all - not even the ever present ring-necked parakeets with only the odd two or three being seen/heard. There was the odd glimpse of robin, dunnoek, wren, song thrush and one fieldfare seen by one or two of the group but nothing that stayed long enough for all to enjoy.

For many Crayford Rough was a new “destination/habitat” and the potential was clearly noticed, just not today. We made our way back to the river, crossed the bridge and had good views of two mistle thrushes feeding amongst the gulls, magpies and crows.

Our return to the car park was greeted by a single dunnoek and a pair of chaffinches feeding on the ground. By now the chilly wind had increased to a level where it was becoming uncomfortable for us and clearly the birds with most presumably hunkering down in the bushes. Nonetheless it had been a most enjoyable two hours in good company, 30 Species were seen and the rain held off so we kept dry.

Species seen: Canada geese, mallard, moorhen, black-headed gull, common gull, lesser black-backed gull, herring gull, woodpigeon, ring-necked parakeet, green woodpecker, grey wagtail, wren, dunnoek, robin, blackbird, song thrush, fieldfare, mistle thrush, goldcrest, blue tit, great tit, nuthatch, jay, magpie, jackdaw, carrion crow, starling, chaffinch, greenfinch, siskin.

Ralph and Brenda Todd

*photos Brenda Todd