

RSPB Bexley Group Walk – River Cray/Thames Road Wetland – Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> September 2016 – Led by Chris Rose with Ralph and Brenda Todd.

The morning was very dull and threatened the odd shower as three members joined us and Chris Rose for a new walk for the group – a wander along the River Cray from Cray Waterside Gardens Crayford to Thames Road Wetland.



River Cray – Cray Waterside Gardens



Giant Hogweed

Chris was able to impart much of his general natural history knowledge especially the plant life of the riverside. As we headed off a Cormorant flew over the town centre and a jackdaw called. After that it was rather slow going for birdlife apart from the expected common species – robin, chaffinch, collared doves (a single stock dove sat on a nearby pylon for good comparison), wood pigeons, great, blue and long-tailed tits. Moorhen was the only water bird seen. Sometimes depressing to see the amount of rubbish thoughtlessly discarded, sometimes lovely to see the water crowfoot swaying in the gentle run of the river. Also alarming to see just how much the Himalayan balsam is encroached along much of the river bank. A single house martin flew over.

By-way 105 continued as we crossed Maiden Lane (where a dozen or more mallard were drifting on the river and a single mute swan observed) – first pointing out where the little egret roost can be seen and also pointing out where the River Wansunt flows through Stanham Farm land – more moorhen seen here and a Cetti's warbler heard. Giant Hogweed was quite prolific at the stretch of the river despite attempts to remove it. Another cormorant was disturbed from the peace and quiet of the Cray and a couple more moorhen seen.

After about 80 minutes we arrived at Thames Road Wetland, first viewing it from the perimeter where Chris was able to describe the history of the site and some of the management challenges. It was nice to see where a free supply of horseradish could be taken should the need arise and also have square-stalked St. John's wort pointed out. Water rail was heard.



Overlooking Thames Road Wetland

Entering along the route of the sewage pipe we had another perspective of the reserve though it is much overgrown at this time of year with few bird species. A couple more Cetti's warblers heard and another water rail – one member taking a “comfort break” saw a water vole swimming along the Wansunt.

Next we entered the reserve proper, following the narrow footpath cut through the vegetation by Chris and his volunteers – there were many “basking places” for common lizards but sadly not enough sun to attract them out. Once into the thick of it, Chris was able to show us the extremely rare (for London) Marsh Sow-thistle – once found only in one area of Crayford Marsh before being destroyed, these thriving plants are descendants of those plants as seeds were taken, stored, then reintroduced to TRW, also Crossness Nature Reserve though Chris was quick to point out theirs are nowhere as big as his. Continuing round to the bank where we would have a look across the Stanham Farm and into Kent Chris pointed out a couple of other rare plants – vervain (associated with chalk) and brookweed. The River Stanham forms the border between Bexley (London) and Kent – not often you can see three rivers in Bexley within a two hour walk.



Marsh Sow-thistle Thames Road Wetland



Stanham Farm

Looking across towards Crayford Marshes, there was a sizeable gathering of gulls (mostly herring and lesser black-backed) on the roof of the warehouse and a flock of 100+ starlings flying around.

As we walked back along Thames Road we had a final good look across the reserve and noted the various varieties of sedge and reed (including greater and lesser reedmace along with common reed – which Chris has managed in the hope of attracting bearded tits to the flourishing seedheads – worth looking for if you are passing by).

At this point, and having been walking for two hours, we bade farewell to Chris who was staying around to do some more work. The rest of us retraced our steps towards Crayford (following the River on By-way 105) where a most enjoyable walk concluded at 12.15.

Many thanks to Chris Rose for his time, enthusiasm and knowledge of the River Cray and Thames Road Wetland and to those who chose to venture out to this new location – one we shall return to perhaps on a spring time walk.

Birds seen: Cormorant, mute swan, mallard, water rail (heard), moorhen, black-headed gull, lesser black-backed gull, herring gull, stock dove, collared dove, woodpigeon, ring-necked parakeet, house martin, pied wagtail, wren, dunnoek, robin, blackbird, Cetti's warbler (heard), long-tailed

tit, blue tit, great tit, jay, magpie, jackdaw, carrion crow, starling, house sparrow, chaffinch. 29  
seen or heard.

Also seen – speckled wood, red admiral and small white butterflies and migrant hawk.