

Bexley RSPB Field Outing to Rainham Marshes RSPB Reserve Saturday December 17th 2016

There must be many enjoyable alternatives to shopping one week before Christmas but bird watching in thick fog doesn't come immediately to mind. Fortunately 22 members disagreed and decided to join Brenda and I across the river at the RSPB Rainham Marshes reserve.

We gathered in the car park at 9.30 with redwings, chaffinches, goldfinches, greenfinches, house sparrows, collared doves active and enjoying, along with blue and great tit, pheasant and the odd fieldfare, the feast provided by the garden feeders. As the drawbridge was lowered and we entered the Centre we weren't aware if it was high tide or not – we couldn't see the river. In optimistic mood we decided to venture via the woodland discovery zone in the hope of close views of small birds and the fog lifting by mid-morning to allow better views of the open marshes – neither came to pass unfortunately. A grey heron flew in off the river and to somewhere on the reserve. One or two saw blackcap in the hedge by the Centre, more redwings and finches flew up in front of us and disappeared into the gloom. A Cetti's warbler was heard and female reed bunting sat aloft a small tree for a brief glimpse. The woodland feeding station provided more good views of tits and finches.

From the Ken Barrett hide where much clearance had taken place to allow better views there was little to see: a snipe blurred against a pair of mallard occupied a little time before we headed off along the northern boardwalk to the two viewing platforms where what was thought to be a flock of about 20 lapwings roosting in the damp grass turned out to be more like 60 when they took off for no apparent reason. We did manage to find little egret, 14 pintail, some gadwall, teal, shoveler, pochard and tufted duck as the fog briefly lifted then dropped down again.



Northern Boardwalk – fog



Redwing (at garden pond)

Just before turning towards the Butts Scrape we were able to pick out six or seven cows which was quite fortuitous as wandering amongst their legs was a white blob – this white blob then grew a hefty yellow bill which confirmed initial hopes that this was the cattle egret that had been around for a day or two. Eventually everyone was able to enjoy this bird through assorted telescopes - a year/life tick for many.



Cattle Egret



Lapwing

The Butts hide provided a much deserved rest but sadly very little to see – Averly and Wennington marshes were barely visible so no chance of finding the reported short-eared owls or harriers (though one marsh harrier was seen briefly by a few of the group as it rose and drifted quickly out of sight). We couldn't relocate the cattle egret from our elevated position, better views of snipe were had but that was it. Three or four stonechats were seen, popping up onto reed heads or the temporary fence posts on the detour away from the dragonfly pool boardwalk which is being replaced. A small flock of meadow pipits were seen by some. Neither the Marshland Discovery Zone hide or Purfleet hide provided any more views of anything not seen before. Some wigeon loafed on one of the pools. Within minutes of stating no swans seen – one cygnet was noted swimming along one of the channels.

If it all sounds a bit negative – not a bit of it, with very few other people about (probably all Christmas shopping) we had a most enjoyable three hour walk, good company and chat, 42 species recorded including a good selection of duck and of course for many a lovely coffee/cake/lunch back at the visitor centre. Thanks to all those who did turn out to help make the walk so enjoyable.



Snipe



Can anyone see the Visitor Centre?

Birds seen: Grey heron, little egret, cattle egret, mallard, teal, gadwall, wigeon, pintail, shoveler, tufted duck, pochard, Canada goose, mute swan, marsh harrier, pheasant, moorhen, coot, lapwing, snipe, woodpigeon, carrion crow, jackdaw, magpie, great tit, blue tit, wren, fieldfare, redwing, blackbird, stonechat, robin, Cetti's warbler, blackcap, dunnoek, meadow pipit, pied wagtail, starling, greenfinch, goldfinch, chaffinch, reed bunting, house sparrow. 42 species seen/heard.

Ralph and Brenda Todd (who also took all the images).