

**RSPB Bexley Local Field Trip – Lesnes Abbey Woods – Saturday March 11th.
Leaders Ralph and Brenda Todd**

Well, this time the weather surpassed itself, possibly the best spring day of the year yet, sunny, blue sky and warm – the omens were good. We arranged this walk hopefully to coincide with the bloom of wild daffodils in these ancient woods.

Fourteen members and friends (many first timers for our walks) gathered alongside the very smart new visitor centre. As the shutters rolled up to allow us our first view inside the centre our attention was diverted by a low thud and something brown dropping from the elevated shutter – a common toad. The toad was probably more shocked than us but it seemed to recover enough to move for shelter behind one of the metal stanchions thus avoiding being picked up and transferred to somewhere it clearly didn't want to be and also too many photos of its embarrassing arrival on the scene. A green woodpecker laughed in the background and some goldfinches arrived to see what the fuss was about.



Common Toad (Brenda Todd)



Long-tailed Tit (Donna Zimmer)

Wandering down to the dipping pond we weren't able to relocate the 3 redwing that were perched when we first arrived but two pairs of mallard and six moorhen (two perched high in a tree) were the only visible signs of avian presence on/around the pond. We did notice some mating frogs but no spawn as yet. We nodded to the carved monk as we passed and noted this, and other carvings in the woods (the work of Tom Harvey – more of his work can be found at www.carverharvey.co.uk)



Dipping Pond (Brenda Todd)



Chaffinch (Ralph Todd)

Retracing our steps to pick up the Blue Trail - blackbirds, dunnock, chaffinches, robins, long-tailed tits, carrion crows and magpies got the list off to a good start. The crocuses and garden daffodils were showing well.

We entered the woodland and were pleased to see the wild daffodils had waited for the date of our visit and were showing splendidly. We passed the carving of the Green man, undertaken by a Latvian artist some years ago and then began the slow and relatively steep climb towards the heath. Wren, great tits, woodpigeons and our first great spotted woodpeckers added to the list – a cormorant flew over. Ring-necked parakeets were to be ever present along the length of the walk either visibly or audibly.

We rested a moment before doing a circuit of the heath which looked wonderful and open in contrast to the woods. Three great spotted woodpeckers were clearly having some sort of territorial dispute. A single small tortoiseshell butterfly fluttered across the heather and a chiffchaff briefly called. A slightly longer rest was taken at the heathland carved seating area – a grand seat for the leader and benches (depicting leaves) for the group. We were able to discuss a little more about the woods, review where we'd walked and where we were

going and listen to the call of a nuthatch that was briefly seen as it flew across us. For more information about the woods, the Abbey and the project see <http://www.visitlesnes.co.uk/>

Continuing adjacent to some housing we were soon concentrating on the steep decline down quite difficult path/steps. We mostly emerged unscathed to a spot where some of us had our attention drawn to some noisy crows – eventually seen mobbing a common buzzard as it quickly left the area. Yet another couple of great spotted woodpeckers calling and another wren. Great tit song was an ever present reminder that spring had arrived in the woods. From here we decided on the short route back as time was marching on and so we adopted the red trail which took us to the fossil pit. Now the full beauty of the daffodils was evident as we slowly passed through the enclosures, a dazzle of yellow in the sunlight. I'd hardly finished saying we were surprised no wood anemones when the first clump was seen – from this point we saw more and more, then a few late flowering snowdrops.



Wild Daffodil enclosures (Brenda Todd)

For many of the group, even those who know the woods, to see the work that has been carried out as part the HLF funding project was a great surprise, not least the improvement to the access to the fossil pit, being greeted by a coryphodon (another of carverharvey's work) was a new experience for some – this being evidence of the Eocene period (54.5million years ago). Two young girls showed us the results of their family exploration in the sand – three sharks' teeth, what a treat to have them momentarily be part of our morning's enjoyment.



Coryphodon (Brenda Todd)



Snowdrops (Ralph Todd)

So, our walk was coming to an end, the last few hundred metres spent amongst the daffodils (and a couple of lesser celandines) plus a small flock of long-tailed tits and goldfinches before finally exiting through the formal gardens back to the Centre (and toilets which were much appreciated).

This was never going to be the best time of year for birds but to hear the first song of many species, some territorial behaviour and of course the main reason for our visit – the glorious display of daffodils made this a most rewarding and enjoyable visit.

Birds seen. Cormorant (over), mallard (2pr), common buzzard (over), moorhen (6), woodpigeon, green woodpecker (2), great spotted woodpecker (6+), carrion crow, magpie, great tit, blue tit, long-tailed tit, nuthatch, wren, song thrush, redwing (3), blackbird, robin, chiffchaff, dunnock, goldfinch, chaffinch. (22 species). Plus, small tortoiseshell (2), common toad, common frog.

Ralph and Brenda Todd
March 11th 2017