

RSPB Bexley Group Walk – Foots Cray Meadows Tuesday 25th April 2017

Led by Ralph and Brenda Todd

Well, at least it was a beautiful clear blue sky with sunshine – quite like April – except for the Arctic cold breeze arriving this far south in time for the walk which was attended by 11 members. Soon after leaving the car park a busy great tit was back and forward to its nest with food and above the noise of tree cutters and parakeets were heard a nuthatch which we assumed to be the same bird that some saw disappear into a high up nest hole.

Apart from ever present robins, wrens, occasional dunnock and chiffchaff, the most prolific accompaniment of the walk was that of the lovely song of blackcap – however sightings mostly eluded us – perhaps the cold wind kept them hidden. The occasional long-tailed tit put in an appearance – presumably birds nesting close by as we only ever saw singles.

Jackdaws, jays, carrion crows, stock and collared dove and woodpigeons made regular appearances. It was nice to see lady smock, red campion, buttercups and bluebells though sadly the invasive Spanish plant mostly outnumbered the native variety.



All photographs Ralph and Brenda Todd



Blackcap

As we exited the wood into the open meadow a pair of sparrowhawk spent some time flapping and gliding above us.

A bit of local history was included in the walk with snippets about North Cray Place, Foots Cray Place and why the Red Cross is now the White Cross in North Cray Road.

With not so much activity in the woodland we ventured across to Five Arches and the River Cray – a few mallard, coot and moorhen were noted and three pairs of tufted duck – no gulls at all. A grey heron stood motionless on one island, thinking it was hidden from view, but not from us. We were pleased to see the female swan eventually wake up to prove she was alive on the nest but little else stirred around the islands and river's edge.

Basking in the sunshine, out of the wind we pondered the plight of many of our songbirds and wondered if there really is a decline in once common species as we failed to find chaffinches, greenfinches, any woodpeckers, starlings and only three swallows drifting high over Five Arches gave any real indication migration was underway.

Approaching Penny Farthing Bridge some keen eyes did find blackcaps, their alarm call drawing attention – with more eyes looking we discovered the probable reason – two males and a female though none showed well for long. Two grey wagtails flew over, quite high.

Making our way back to the car park, mistle and song thrush along with a couple more blackbirds were noted.



Jackdaw



Mistle Thrush

As always, this was a very pleasant walk with good company. For some this part of the Meadows was a new experience which is always gratifying as this is one of the purposes for these local walks.

Birds seen/heard: Grey heron, mallard, tufted duck, mute swan, sparrowhawk, moorhen, coot, stock dove, woodpigeon, collared dove, ring-necked parakeet, swallow, carrion crow, jackdaw, magpie, jay, great tit, blue tit, long-tailed tit, nuthatch, wren, mistle thrush, song thrush, blackbird, robin, blackcap, chiffchaff, goldcrest, dunnoek, grey wagtail, goldfinch. (31 species).

Ralph and Brenda Todd
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