

## **RSPB Bexley Group Walk – Crayford Marshes Tuesday September 19<sup>th</sup> 2017**

### **Leaders Ralph and Brenda Todd**

The first walk of the autumn season and it was decidedly chilly, overcast and damp in the air – hence the 21 who joined myself (dressed in shorts and light top) and Brenda were all sensibly dressed in layers, some with woolly hats and gloves. I felt very under-dressed though not at all cold.

The walk began with a brief resume of the proposed and subsequent refusal by Sadiq Khan of the Roxhill rail terminal/logistics centre that would have covered a considerable amount of the landfill land that we walked past during the next 20-30 minutes. Adjacent to Moat Lane are some horse grazing fields and it was noticeable how much these were appreciated by the local collared doves with house sparrows/starlings in the surrounding hedges.

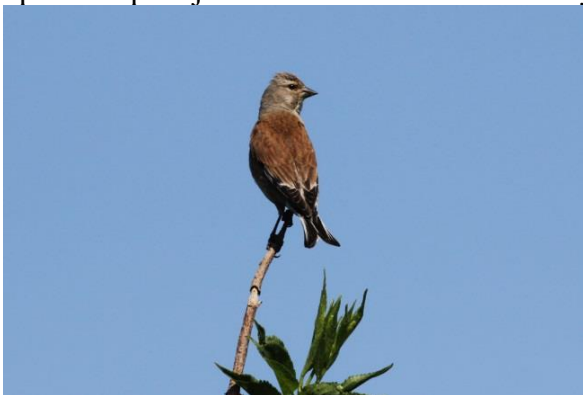
A little history was exchanged as we walked past Howbury Farm, Tithe Barn and Moat where we also saw moorhen, coot and lots more collared doves – possibly 50+ in total. Walking along the narrow path, overgrown with wonderful vegetation it proved difficult to communicate with a group already strung out some 50 metres but the chilly air was keeping small birds hunkered down so very little to see/hear other than the occasional blackbird/robin and great/blue tit.

The willows didn't produce the little owl that is often seen roosting but the numbers of carrion crow, woodpigeon, collared dove (again) and ring-necked parakeets were much in evidence. Two or three jackdaws were added to the list on the walk back. As we approached the river bank along the Darent a couple of jays took to the air and were lost in the dense vegetation. Our first sparrowhawk (2 possibly 3 seen) and kestrel (4 or 5 seen) of the walk along with great spotted and green woodpeckers were seen from this vantage point.

Whilst it was not conducive for such a large group to attempt the walk around the landfill, the site of some waders around the bend of the Darent caught our attention so a short detour gave everyone good views of at least 3 greenshank, one standing obligingly alongside a redshank, 2 common sandpipers and the first of 5 or 6 little egrets.

The tide was rising so a brisk walk down to the Thames was only interrupted by a distant view initially of a male marsh harrier – (a female was also seen by some at even greater distance). More little egrets, a few mallard and one or two teal loafing along the water's edge were seen, and then the male harrier gave much closer views as it continued to hunt over Dartford Marsh. We were now seeing one or two kestrels almost all the way as we continued towards Crayfordness. Three cormorants, a single greylag goose and a distant, small flock of Canada geese were also seen on this stretch of the walk.

Alongside the Darent Barrier a small flock of linnets showed well then a fabulous female wheatear popped up on the path just metres in front of us: everyone had great views.



Linnets Ralph Todd



Wheatear Ralph Todd

We could see a few waders and gulls on the point so telescopes were brought into action again. Across the Darent on the Dartford side four shelduck were feeding high up on the mud and a single avocet was close by to give good views. Also on that side of the river just 22 redshank, a couple of teal and black-headed gulls were seen. On the Crayford side we had really close views of a selection of gulls, well enough for a quick “masterclass” in ID for great and lesser black-backed and herring and the single yellow-legged gull. Sadly not much else to be seen and it was already time to be heading back, no time for the saltmarsh (which would have been covered by now) or the marshes towards Erith Yacht Club. Comments about feeling cold were also circulating so the walk back was taken at a pace, hearing Cetti’s warbler and some seeing swallow and/or reed bunting on the way ended what had been a most enjoyable walk with a good variety of some quality species.



Avocet Ralph Todd



Greenshank Ralph Todd

An interesting piece of market research for this very well attended walk showed that despite possibly the best Facebook/Twitter/web-site coverage of the walk, only one person claimed to have seen any of it and all attendees arrived having secured the information from the good old Bexley RSPB newsletter/programme.

**Birds Seen:** Cormorant, grey heron, little egret, mallard, teal, gadwall, shelduck, greylag goose, Canada goose, sparrowhawk, marsh harrier, kestrel, moorhen, coot, common sandpiper, redshank, greenshank, avocet, great black-backed gull, lesser black-backed gull, herring gull, yellow-legged gull, black-headed gull, woodpigeon, collared dove, green woodpecker, great spotted woodpecker, swallow, carrion crow, jackdaw, magpie, jay, great tit, blue tit, blackbird, wheatear, robin, Cetti’s warbler, chiffchaff, meadow pipit, pied wagtail, starling, goldfinch, linnet, reed bunting, house sparrow. (46 species)

Ralph and Brenda Todd



Photograph Brenda Todd