

**RSPB Bexley Group Local Walk – Sidcup Place, Garden Shaw and horse paddocks – Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> February 2018 Led by Ralph and Brenda Todd**

A birdwatching walk under threat from the beast from the east. If we'd listened to the forecast we'd have stayed in bed - as it was the nine members who braved the -3 degrees and joined us at The Star Sidcup Place were greeted by two mistle thrushes and nine redwings perfectly illuminated by glowing sunshine as they picked their way amongst the leaf litter on the adjacent lawns (the birds not the members). Given one of the main objectives is an introduction to local open spaces, both well-known and those lesser known this proved to be extremely successful given over half attending hadn't been before.



Photograph Brenda Todd



Redwing – Ralph Todd

After such a good start and under blue skies we wandered eastwards down past the children's play area towards Foots Cray – a dozen or more woodpigeons, a few carrion crows and magpies fed on the open grassland and a fox ambled across a little further down. Few small birds were initially seen but a single lapwing flapped high across in a westerly direction, soon followed by 8 more – an obvious cold weather movement. As we approached the rear gardens of the Warwick Road houses blackbirds plus blue and great tits became evident.

Now leaving the mixed wood/scrub and open grass we took footpath 161 past Warwick Road Allotments to the constant sound of children's playtime in the local school. It was here that the birdlife picked up considerably, especially once past the Cray Wanderers Football pitch and overlooking the horse paddocks below Queen Mary's Hospital. Lots of blackbirds, a couple of song thrushes and a few redwings were feeding on the ground, two dunnock were pairing up and jackdaws circled overhead. Greenfinches could be heard and eventually three flew off. Chaffinches were constantly moving between trees but the highlight was undoubtedly the 3 or 4 lesser redpolls hanging upside down giving reasonably good views for everyone.



Lesser Redpoll – Nicky Wilson



Song Thrush – Ralph Todd

Having looked across the Foots Cray Playing fields towards B&Q/Coca-Cola giving everyone their bearings we retraced our steps as a second flock of fieldfares flew over south – all five thrush species seen. The ponies were keen to say hello, probably in hope of some additional food. We noticed one, close to the fence

entangled around its neck by a long piece of fence wire. This understandably caused us some distress and with the aid of a piece of Rod's Kit-Kat, Julie's crisps and Brenda's walking pole Rod was able to release the poor beast (not from the east) from possible tragedy. A very good deed done.

Now, 70 minutes after we began this walk, thick grey clouds leadened the sky, small flakes of white stuff began to fall so we continued retracing our steps back to Sidcup Place open grassland. A grey heron and a common gull drifted over. Skirting the woodland towards the hospital we heard great spotted woodpecker but by the time we were in viewing distance we were in near blizzard like conditions so hurried back to the car park, via the Sidcup Community Garden.

A shorter walk than usual (1¾ hours) and one well worth doing and by common consent to be arranged again for the spring time. The temperature had now risen to a dizzy -2 degrees but the snow had eased off a little. We hope that everyone (including the six on public transport – another good reason for local walks) made it home before any further deterioration in the weather. Thanks to Nicky Wilson for use of Lesser Redpoll image.

**Birds seen/heard (h)** – Grey heron, lapwing, black-headed gull, common gull, woodpigeon, ring-necked parakeet, green woodpecker (h), great spotted woodpecker (h), dunnoek, robin, blackbird, fieldfare, song thrush, redwing, mistle thrush, long-tailed tit, blue tit, great tit, jay, magpie, jackdaw, carrion crow, starling, house sparrow, chaffinch, greenfinch, goldfinch, lesser redpoll (28 species seen/heard).

Ralph and Brenda Todd  
February 27th 2018.

**Next walk** – Foots Cray Meadows (Five Arches) and Upper College Farm – Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> March Meet Leafield Lane off North Cray Road 9.30 -12.30