

RSPB Bexley Group Walk – Crossness Nature Reserve and River Thames
Thursday 18th April 2019 – Leaders Ralph and Brenda Todd

A beautiful sunny morning greeted the 23 members and friends who joined us for a spring visit to Crossness Nature reserve – always good to see new faces and also to introduce members to a new destination.



Viewing the river and Protected area (Brenda Todd)



Black-tailed godwit (Nicky Wilson)

With high tide around lunch time we made the Thames our first port of call. Lots of exposed mud was soon disappearing under a rising tide. With little seen on the walk up the call overhead alerted us to two Mediterranean gulls – jet black heads and contrasting bright red bills – flying east. Where the river met the mud – dozens of black-headed gulls lined the foreshore. A few teal wandered around but it wasn't until we reached the outfall that teal, mallard and gadwall were seen in good numbers though much reduced from any winter visit. A pair of wigeon was found amongst the throng of ducks and three black-tailed godwits in various stages of plumage were seen well – that was about it. With nearly an hour already passed we returned to the reserve. A brief explanation of future Cory developments hopefully didn't depress too much and with some viewing the West Paddock from the screen, everyone eventually retired to the hide for a more elevated view.

Good to see lapwing defending territories against marauding crows whilst Shoveler, gadwall and mallard loafed around in the shallow waters.

After a brief rest, we ventured into the Protected Area with plenty of butterfly activity but not much in the way of birdlife – a reed warbler chuntered along, and brief glimpses were had of blackcap, chiffchaff, blue, great and long-tailed tits and pairs of tufted ducks and pochard quietly drifted away down a channel upon our approach. Everyone seemed to appreciate the peace and tranquillity of this mixed habitat – seems we might just have been a week or two too early for the variety and activity that can be experienced here.



Mediterranean gull (Ralph Todd)



Male wheatear (Ralph Todd)

It was now almost 12noon and Karen joined us for the last part of the walk – we had hardly covered much of the reserve at all. We decided to make our way to the exit stopping first near the gates to hopefully see/hear a skylark. Richard Keene spotted a single peregrine perched lower down on the Cory Incinerator and whilst we were getting everyone on to that an explosion of song in front of us indicated a skylark wanting to be centre of attention – what a wonderful sight and sound – hopefully not to be lost with the impending Cory Data centre development. Quite possibly a second bird took to the air but Nicky Wilson was looking elsewhere and found not one but two wheatear (male and female) in the paddocks behind the stable complex. What a wonderful end to what had been a rather quiet (birdwise) walk but wonderfully enjoyable nonetheless.

With thanks to Karen Sutton (Thames Water) for allowing vehicle access to the site and making the Protected Area, hide and toilets available to our group.

48 species of bird seen/heard

Birds seen/heard: Crossness Nature Reserve: Little grebe, grey heron, little egret, mute swan, greylag goose, Canada goose, shelduck, wigeon, gadwall, mallard, shoveler, pochard, tufted duck, kestrel, peregrine falcon, pheasant, moorhen, coot, lapwing, Mediterranean gull, black-headed gull, lesser black-backed gull, woodpigeon, sand martin, skylark, wren, dunnock, robin, wheatear, blackbird, Cetti's warbler, reed warbler, common whitethroat, blackcap, chiffchaff, blue tit, great tit, long-tailed tit, magpie, carrion crow, goldfinch, linnet, reed bunting, Plus Butterflies – peacock, small tortoiseshell, comma, brimstone, orange tipped, small white, green veined white.

River Thames: Cormorant, grey heron, shelduck, wigeon, gadwall, mallard, teal, moorhen, coot, lapwing, black-tailed godwit, herring gull, great black-backed gull, black-headed gull, common tern, dunnock, Cetti's warbler, carrion crow, magpie.

Ralph and Brenda Todd
April 2019.