

RSPB Bexley Group Walk – Foots Cray Meadows Thursday 26th September 2019

Led by Ralph and Brenda Todd

Never quite sure why our reports begin with a weather statement but after a Wednesday where it rained for much of the day and Thursday morning's forecast showing rain we wondered just what sort of person would turn out up for this walk or would we be alone. Well, now we know – 16 wonderful members, a couple of new members, mostly regulars and two (Rod and Ken) returning after over a year's absence – great to see you with us again.

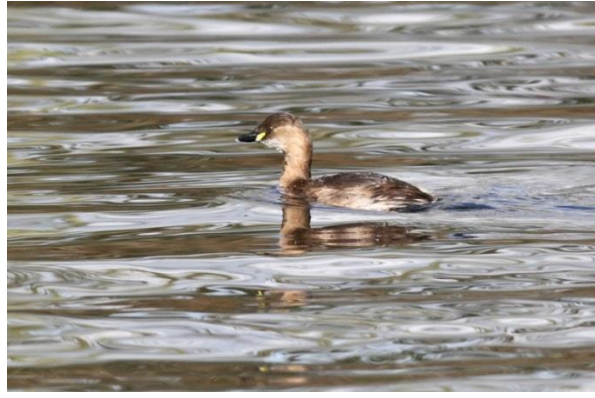
Having orientated newcomers with the layout of the meadows we headed of north, passing the allotments and Loring Hall playing fields, hopeful of some interesting bird life but rewarded with one black-headed gull, parakeet, a crow and 3 wood pigeons. It could only get better – and it did. A sparrowhawk caused havoc amongst a group of crows perched in a distant tree - it eventually flew over us to cause havoc somewhere else.



We had to look high but there was clearly evidence of house martin migration with 2 or 3 swallows around as well. Walking back south along the river the usual birds were seen/heard – jackdaw, small flocks of goldfinch, ever present ring-necked parakeet along with robins, blue and great tits. Of course dogs running into the river deterred the hoped for kingfisher and grey wagtail (brief view seen by some) and once again evidence of how much FCM is used by professional dog walkers as a group of 8 dogs was quickly followed by another 6.

We were alerted to a decent sized mix tit flock by the calls of long-tailed tits with at least one chiffchaff and a chaffinch amongst them. There was much interest in the fish in the clear flowing river – chubb was the conclusion.

Arrival at Five Arches engendered more discussion about out of control dogs when we learnt that both the female swan and a cygnet had been killed this year. There was a mixture of mallard, tufted duck, coot and moorhen distributed across the lake, some still in eclipse plumage. Wandering up to the edge where the islands provided cover for at least four little grebes including one striped head youngster, we had a brief workshop on adult/juvenile black-headed gulls. We were joined by local birdwatcher, Ian Stewart, who alerted us to the presence of a Cetti's warbler which, after a little patience was heard by all. A green woodpecker had been heard and a couple of great spotted woodpeckers flew overhead. A little egret flew upstream.



We decided to leave the river and follow the culvert (“a construction that allows water to pass over or under and obstacle” for those who asked and we were unable to fully explain). This route is not so often followed and is a much more overgrown part of the meadows. Great views of a preening great spotted woodpecker, more jackdaws and a couple of jays were seen.

Brenda tells me we did have a very short shower but so engrossed I must have been I didn't notice. Heavy, black storm clouds threatened so we slowly made our way back along the river to our cars. The final icing on the cake came courtesy of a pair of kestrels, perched, Darby and Joan fashion showing the size difference, the difference in feather markings and of course the beautiful blue/grey head of the male. We moved on and they still hadn't moved but we'd enjoyed great views through the telescope. Another sparrowhawk flew over the kestrels which was fitting for our final observation.

All agreed that it had been a most enjoyable walk; missing some common species and nowhere near the numbers of others we'd expect but nonetheless some really good sightings of other species.

Birds seen/heard: Little grebe, little egret, mute swan, mallard, tufted duck, sparrowhawk, kestrel, moorhen, coot, black-headed gull, woodpigeon, ring-necked parakeet, green woodpecker, great spotted woodpecker, swallow, house martin, grey wagtail, wren, robin, blackbird, Cetti's warbler, chiffchaff, long-tailed tit, blue tit, great tit, jay, magpie, jackdaw, carrion crow, starling, chaffinch, goldfinch (32).

Ralph and Brenda Todd
September 2019