

## Bexley RSPB Field Outing to Rainham Marshes RSPB Reserve Saturday December 14<sup>th</sup> 2019

Gathering in the car park for a 9.30 start it was wonderful to hear the chatter of 30 plus house sparrows, a single Cetti's warbler called, song thrush, sparrowhawk, chaffinch and greenfinch were seen by some.

It has been customary for us to begin our reports with a summary of the weather. Cold and very windy should suffice! Showers were forecast. 21 members turned up for a pre-Christmas (or post Social evening) walk. We entered the Visitor Centre in sunshine and exited the other side onto the reserve in rain – how did that happen? Undeterred we gathered at the lookout point overlooking Purfleet Scrape to enjoy stunning views of more pintail than we've seen on previous winter visits, scores of wigeon grazing around the pools and lots of calling teal, loafing around the pool edges. A single grey heron sat, hunched up looking pretty miserable as herons often do in such weather – we were much happier. Nonetheless, plans for an anti-clockwise wander were soon changed having spied the heavy dark grey clouds approaching from the west so we quickly walked towards the Purfleet hide.

The Rainham photographers were already ensconced into their favoured positions and probably didn't appreciate the presence of 23 enthusiastic birdwatchers enjoying the wildfowl in such wonderful light – is there ever a better light than backlit against a dark grey, almost black cloud base? Images were being fired off 10 to the dozen as flights of shoveler and teal crashed on to the pool immediately in front of us. A buzzard was seen perched on a distant gatepost - almost certainly feeding – better viewed through the telescopes. A couple of curlew fed on the raised banks.

From here on it was a case of fingers crossed as the threatening showers passed us by but the strong, cold wind made for a quickening step to the next hides. The walk was enhanced by a mixed flock of fieldfare, redwing and starling – with the two thrush species providing some relatively close views and again sometimes in brilliant light conditions.



Curlew Nicky Wilson



Brenda Todd



Fieldfare Martin Burke

The hoped for bearded tits in the reedbeds were non-existent, as were almost all small (and many larger) birds due to the very high winds. With many of us rushing towards the Shooting Butt hide others lingered by the viewing platform to check out the Target pools and Butts scrape. The aerial displays of a few hundred lapwing, illuminated beautifully with the sun behind us is, surely, one of nature's great sights. Closer inspection showed there were two ruff in amongst the flock - found more easily when the flock landed in front of us. Less gulls were around with a few common amongst the black-headed and occasional lesser and greater black backs. Feeding on the nearby islands 3 or 4 skylark, similar numbers of pied wagtails and a single meadow pipit. A female stonechat tried to feed amongst the wildly blowing reeds/grasses.



Lapwing Nicky Wilson



Snipe Martin Burke

The Shooting Butts hide did indeed provide much respite from the harsh weather. Tony Banks distributing chocolate goodies was much appreciated as were the haribos from Martin Burke. We had good views of gadwall, tufted duck and the challenge of finding the two snipe both sleeping between a lapwing and wigeon – telescopes eventually gave everyone the view they failed to get through binoculars.

Following the northern boardwalk, passing the Aveley Pools viewing platforms, proved just a little too challenging for most as we now had the sun in our eyes as well as the fierce wind so the Ken Barrett hide provided the next resting spot but few birds to enjoy. With the paths passing the Cordite Store closed it was a detour around the woodland trail with just the odd blue tit and goldfinch showing themselves.

As we reached the children's rock climbing area a stunning rainbow appeared across the reserve and a curlew appeared at the bottom of it. That was probably a fitting end to what had been a challenging three hour walk, enjoyed in excellent company with some fantastic views of wildfowl and lapwing in brilliant light. The group had seen 50 species between them. It was great to have Ben with us whose young eyes picked up so many of those 50 whilst also counting the high speed trains roaring past (26 in the first 2 hours for those interested).

Birds seen: Cormorant, grey heron, greylag goose, Canada goose, shelduck, wigeon, gadwall, teal, mallard, pintail, shoveler, pochard, tufted duck, marsh harrier, sparrowhawk, common buzzard, kestrel, pheasant, moorhen, coot, lapwing, ruff, snipe, curlew, black-headed gull, common gull, lesser black-backed gull, herring gull, great black-backed gull, woodpigeon, collared dove, kingfisher, skylark, meadow pipit, pied wagtail, dunnoek, stonechat, blackbird, fieldfare, song thrush, redwing, Cetti's warbler (heard), blue tit, magpie, carrion crow, starling, house sparrow, chaffinch, greenfinch, goldfinch. (50 birds seen/heard).

Ralph and Brenda Todd  
December 15<sup>th</sup> 2019



Can you see the rainbow? Brenda Todd