

RSPB Bexley Group Walk – Southmere Lake, Thamesmead former Golf Course and Thames Foreshore Tuesday 22nd March 2022 – Leaders Ralph and Brenda Todd

What a gorgeous sunny spring morning as 15 members joined us for our first ever group visit to Southmere Lake and the former Thamesmead golf course. Surrounded as we were by feral pigeons, mute swans and Canada geese we decided on a quick getaway making tracks to the northern end of the lake. A brief description of the history of the lake and the recent works undertaken by Peabody/Thamesmead Nature Forum preceded some great close views of pairs of tufted duck and pochard, the drakes of each looking resplendent in the sunshine. Good to see pairs of pochard (a rare UK breeding bird now) and raising hopes for our walk on/around the Thames marshes. We spotted the swift nest boxes on the tall apartment blocks and hoped for some success when these annual summer visitors arrive. The reed beds and areas designated for fishing and wild birds proved quite productive including at least one nesting coot and a pair of great crested grebes – maybe some successful breeding there as well.



Southmere Lake Photo Brenda Todd



Tufted Duck Southmere Lake Photo Harry Halstead



Pochard Southmere Lake Photo Nicky Wilson



Former Thamesmead Golf Course Photo Brenda Todd

Passing the horse paddocks the hoped for early wheatear didn't materialise although a small tortoiseshell and brimstone butterfly were good to see.

We made our way up on to the Ridgeway for another brief history lesson and good views through the 'scope of a singing chiffchaff. We were soon making our way along the narrow path to the golf course where at least five brimstones were glowing brightly – the yellow really standing out in the sunshine.

There wasn't much in the way of small birds on the now overgrown but wonderfully wet course. The prospect of more butterflies and dragonflies in a few weeks' time should entice some of us back. One member, a former user of the golf course, enhanced the walk with descriptions of the various, greens/fairways and obstacles befalling the optimistic golfer. Cetti's warblers (2 or 3), chiffchaffs and occasional chaffinch were noted. Whilst discussing the "club house" two long-tailed tits looked as if they might be prospecting a summer home, a great spotted woodpecker was spotted by some of the group, then a

green woodpecker “yaffled” in the distance. The more common blue and great tits, wrens and robins all made brief appearances or gave a taste of their songs.

Over half way through the morning walk and we arrived at the Thames Path with its views over the river – now at very low tide. Nonetheless it did provide a highlight and rarity in the form of a single dark-bellied Brent goose, presumably one that had lost the flock it should have been migrating north with. Good views were had of this plus around 20 shelducks, 50 plus teal, a couple of gadwall, single oystercatcher, black-tailed godwit, redshank and two curlew. Gulls were well represented with a few black-headed and single figure herring, plus lesser and great black-backed all feeding along the shoreline. The hoped for common (harbour) seals were not loafing where they often are so a return visit will have to be made.

Walking back to the car park greenfinches were heard as was a common buzzard. The advance group learnt upon arrival at the car park that the rear guard had seen three buzzards and a sparrowhawk in the air together – oh well, some of us would just have to be satisfied with the single kestrel seen earlier for our raptor quota for the day.



Dark-bellied Brent Goose Thames Photo Harry Halstead



Buzzard over the Ridgeway Photo Nicky Wilson

The weather certainly helped make for a successful walk, as do some good birds as indeed does good company – all major factors for today's enjoyable outing to a site that I'm sure will be visited again before too long. It certainly looks good for a summer walk for butterflies and dragonflies. Watch this space – or at least the Facebook page.

Thanks to all who attended and we look forward to meeting again at a future walk.

Birds Seen/Heard: Southmere Lake and Golf Course: Great crested grebe, grey heron, mute swan, Canada goose, greylag goose, Egyptian goose, mallard, tufted duck, pochard, common buzzard, sparrowhawk, kestrel, moorhen, coot, black-headed gull, stock dove, wood pigeon, collared dove, ring-necked parakeet, green woodpecker, great spotted woodpecker, dunnoek, robin, Cetti's warbler, chiffchaff, long-tailed tit, blue tit, great tit, carrion crow, magpie, starling, chaffinch, goldfinch, greenfinch. 34 species seen/heard. Thames Foreshore: Great crested grebe, cormorant, grey heron, dark-bellied Brent goose, shelduck, gadwall, mallard, teal, redshank, oystercatcher, curlew, black-tailed godwit, black-headed gull, herring gull, lesser black-backed gull, great black-backed gull. 16 species seen.

46 species seen/heard across all sites. Plus – terrapin, small tortoiseshell, brimstone, small white, peacock butterflies and grey squirrels.

Ralph and Brenda Todd

22nd March 2022

Next Field Trips – booking essential contact Ralph Todd on rbtodd@btinternet.com

Saturday 9th April 2022 - Sevenoaks Wildlife Reserve (Kent Wildlife Trust)

09:30-12:30 (Car Trip) Group size 15 booking essential – see above.

Meet main reserve car park Bradbourne Vale Road, Sevenoaks TN13 3DH/

TQ521563 Café and toilets on site. There is a car parking charge by phone/RinGo (no cash) of £2.50.

Tuesday 12th April 2022 – Southmere Lake and Crossness Southern Marsh

09:30-12:30 Group size 20 booking essential – see above

Meet Lake car park near Thamesmead Library/Bazalgette Way SE2 9AN. Nearest facilities are in Sainsbury's Abbey Wood (next to the station).