

Bexley RSPB Group Walk: Crossness Nature Reserve, Tuesday 31st May 2022

Leaders: Ralph and Brenda Todd with Karen Sutton (Thames Water Nature Reserve Warden).

A walk that was fully booked once again demonstrates the popularity of this Thames Water riverside nature reserve. Perhaps we might have expected a little better weather for the last day of May, overcast skies, cool breeze and threat of rain late morning fortunately didn't put anyone off. We assembled with the sight of a hovering kestrel nearby and a grey heron circling two or three times over us before heading off. We began by wandering back along the access road listening to both reed and, briefly, sedge warbler. A buzzard was spotted sitting in a distant Elder bush - later two birds were seen flying around together. Vegetation growth in the Lagoon field was evidence of recent rains although much of the reserve (West Paddock and ditches) were completely dry. A group of duck loafed on the ditch edge: mostly drake mallard (beginning to show their eclipse plumage) with one drake gadwall and a pair of tufted duck. The Great Breach lagoon held a pair of mute swans, tufted ducks and single shoveler (drake) and little grebe.



Image
Brenda Todd



Common Tiger Hoverfly
Image Nicky Wilson



Azure Damselfly
Image Honor Wheeler

The dipping pond here had no visible dragon/damselflies other than a waterlogged blue-tailed damselfly that couldn't be revived. A peregrine was spotted over the Cory incinerator chimney shortly joined by another - good to see the pair still around.

It was still a bit cool as we walked up to the river. Buff-tailed and red-tailed bumblebees were seen on the blackberry flowers. A couple of small tortoiseshell butterfly plus single small white and a green hairstreak were also seen. Karen found a recently deceased common shrew which was admired by all, especially the younger members of the group. Another was seen a little later and we did wonder if the recent very cold nights might have been their downfall.



Image
Karen Sutton



Goldfinch
Image Nicky Wilson



Thick-legged Flower Beetle
Image Honor Wheeler

It was still nearly four hours before high tide but it was rising quickly. On the exposed mud it was mostly shelduck and black-headed gulls with a single oystercatcher and herring gull amongst them. From the outfall

about 20 gadwall, four or five cormorants, three common terns and a single common sandpiper were added to the list.

Flocks of noisy starlings were ever present with linnets and goldfinches also more noticeable along the riverside shrubbery. Returning to the Protected Area (PA) it was once again insects that caught the attention with seven-spot ladybirds, thick legged flower beetle and one of the green lacewings gaining most of our attention.

Within the PA we finally heard the cuckoo; a chiffchaff seemed to be busy collecting food in between giving us its song which had to compete with lesser whitethroat, Cetti's warbler and greenfinch. A great diving beetle was seen on the dipping pond with a few azure and blue-tailed damselflies also present. Investigating various locations for lizards or slow worms proved inconclusive although Karen was able to show us a rare blue beetle (*Helops caeruleus*). We concluded the walk by gathering in the hide where only coot was visible. Karen had undertaken further investigations and was able to bring two rather large slow worms for all to see at close quarters, again much appreciated by the group and especially the younger members.



Chiffchaff
Image Nicky Wilson



Common Carder Bee
Image Honor Wheeler



Common Sandpiper
Image Honor Wheeler

All too quickly our three hours had passed, perhaps not so many birds seen (many only heard) as might be expected or hoped for but a good selection nonetheless. The abundance of other wildlife, particularly insects, was much enjoyed. We considered ourselves very lucky to have had Karen with us for the morning and we thanked her for her knowledge and hospitality in allowing us to park within the reserve. We also considered ourselves fortunate to have stayed dry, especially as within 30 minutes of our meeting ending the heavens opened with torrential downpours.



Image
Karen Sutton



Great Diving Beetle
Image Honor Wheeler



Blue Beetle
Image Karen Sutton

Thanks to all those who attended and to Karen, Nicky Wilson and Honor Wheeler for use of images

Birds Seen/Heard: Little grebe, cormorant, grey heron, mute swan, Canada goose, shelduck, gadwall, mallard, shoveler, pochard, tufted duck, buzzard, kestrel, peregrine falcon, pheasant, moorhen, coot, oystercatcher, common sandpiper, black-headed gull, herring gull, common tern, woodpigeon, cuckoo, swallow, wren, dunnoek, Cetti's warbler, reed warbler, sedge warbler, lesser whitethroat, whitethroat, blackcap, chiffchaff, blue tit, great tit, magpie, carrion crow, starling, greenfinch, linnet. (41 species).

Ralph and Brenda Todd

31st May 2022

Next local walks/Car trips: Booking essential

Saturday 11th June – New Hythe/Leybourne Lakes led by George Kalli

Saturday 18th June – Butterfly walk Holly Hill Open Space led by Martin Burke

Saturday 9th July – Stodmarsh Led by Tony Banks

Saturday 16th July – Butterfly walk East Wickham Open Space led by Martin Burke.

Full details can be found on www.rspb.org.uk/groups/bexley or www.facebook.com/RSPBbexleylocalgroup