

# Waveney Bird Club

## Hollesley and Boyton

Feb 5th 2017

In 2016, the Hollesley/Boyton WBC trip featured a wind that could remove vital organs, blowing over river walls, making eyes run and dropping tears on optics. But we still had a right good time and some good birds at these great south Suffolk sites.

A year later, and a misty morning in the Waveney valley, which seemed to lift as we headed for the rendezvous at the RSPB Hollesley car park to meet up with Dave Fairhurst, warden for the RSPB's south Suffolk reserves, who would be leading us between here and Boyton.

Of course, linear walks need a bit of planning, requiring vehicles at both ends. Just as we'd sorted the vehicles, drivers and numbers to get us from Boyton back to Hollesley, the latecomers arrived, throwing the advanced maths into some confusion....but we got there, and those of us left behind guarding the scopes got onto a gloriously plumaged Peregrine, sitting conveniently in a tall tree.

And slowly, it disappeared as the mist descended again, taking the temperature down a few notches as the sun lost its battle with visibility, just as the 20 or so WBC members re-assembled.

But birders are optimistic folk (apart from one or two we could mention...) and with a 'glass half full' attitude, we set out for the scrape. It has to be said that Hollesley is a wonderful birding site, and one that deserves a lot more attention, combining wet meadows, dykes and reeds with the scrape, protected behind badger-proof fencing.

Dave told us it had been sold off by the prison more than 15 years back, and management of the grazing land had brought it to this varied wetland habitat. A recent addition has been the viewing platform, allowing a full view of the scrape itself, at this time of year packed with Wigeon, Teal, Mallard, Pintail, Gadwall, Shoveler, Greylags, Canadas and host to an often noteworthy gull roost.

Waders included Redshanks, Black-tailed Godwit, Curlew and Dunlin, while Ringed Plover and Ruff occupy the adjacent wet meadows.

As we moved between the platform and the river wall we paused by the meadow edge, where Water Rail regularly feed with Moorhen out in the open; eventually a total of 5 were located, tail-ticking their way round the wet reed edges.

Further up, the track rises to meet the wall protecting the marshes from the River Alde, separating Hollesley from the southern tip of Orfordness – a good place to practice counting Cormorant, should you ever want to do it. You can sit up here and scan most of the reserve, which is what we were doing just at the time 10 Tundra Bean Geese accompanied by one White-fronted whiffled down onto the meadows between the wall and the prison buildings.

One rather obliging Bean sat up on an island on the scrape with Greylags, allowing comparisons on size and head/bill shape and colour. The river wall comprises the start of the walk through to Boyton, along the edge of the Alde and round along the Butley River – much amusement as a Mute Swan picked up the speeding current down towards the sea, looking like it was motorised. Hope it wasn't planning a return journey, as all the poise and grace would have evaporated.....

The path snakes out, with great views all around, particularly of the shape-shifting shingle bank of Orfordness. A Yellowhammer sat up in the top of a tree, as Skylarks decided it was time to get going, fluttering and singing above us in the cold breeze that had driven off the earlier mist.

Moving up to the bend where the Butley and Alde join lies a more recently-acquired (by the RSPB) field which is yet to be developed and left wild, invaded by wild mustard. It holds a winter flock of up to 600 Linnet, almost mummerating as they moved about the seed heads.

Dave Fairhurst mused on the future of this corner – whether it should be flooded to create more marsh, or left as a wild patch to service over-wintering passerines.

There are Bearded Tit here too, in the reeds along the point where the Butley runs into the Alde – just quick flashes of ones and twos in this wind though.

This point constitutes the boundary between Hollesley and Boyton as the path moves inland and up towards the flood which is home to all the usual suspects, duck-wise.

However, on the other side of the path we found a small flock of Pink-foots, half-hidden behind a reed-fringed dyke.

The WBC cars virtually took over the small parking area at Boyton – but then they were gone, whisking the party back to Hollesley, where there were reports of a Glaucous Gull now on the scrape, and relatively easily-found from the platform.

So to lunchtime. By pre-arrangement, the café located up by Warren Point (and which does one of the best espressos in Suffolk!) had prepared chilli/lentil dhal and rice as a WBC special. If you're down this

way, you really ought to stop off here for a break – a really good little caff.

With Dave's WBC-leader duties over, those who weren't departing for the Italy-Wales rugby match (or other family commitments) headed down to Bawdsey for a walk up towards Shingle Street from East Lane, with the target of Short-eared Owls, Purple Sandpiper and whatever else we could get.

Visibility was now pretty good, but it hadn't got any warmer. We scanned the pools and the sea, getting onto Red-throated Divers and Scoter, Rock Pipits and the usual assortment of winter wildfowl, while Steve P explained the habit of Gadwall 'mugging' Coots when they return from a dive with a mouthful of weed. Look out for this – it's more common than you might think!

We took the track in the direction of Shingle Street – not particularly a good afternoon for passerines, but we eventually spotted a couple of Short-eared Owls, one slowly checking out a reed-fringed dyke, showing that long-winged flappy flight, that looks like it momentarily pauses at the extremities...I only noticed this earlier in January, but haven't seen it in Barn Owls or Tawnies.

The Purple Sandpipers were more elusive, but we did eventually get onto two on the return walk.

The light – which had been pretty inconsistent all day – was now at a premium and it was time to cut and run.

This area of Bawdsey, Hollesley and Boyton is definitely a top one for birding. It's a rare time that one or other of these sites doesn't produce something interesting, whatever the weather. If you don't know it particularly well, you should get down there – but wrap up warm!

*Paddy Shaw*

# BirdTrack

Recording birds across Britain and Ireland



## HOLLESLEY MARSHES

## SIGHTINGS FOR Sunday, 5 February, 2017

Barn Owl	1	Barnacle Goose	7
Bean Goose (Tundra)	11	Black-headed Gull	1200
Black-tailed Godwit (Islandica)	6	Blackbird	6
Blue Tit	4	Brent Goose (Dark-bellied)	8
Buzzard	1	Canada Goose	110
Carion Crow	4	Cetti's Warbler	1
Chaffinch	1	Collared Dove	2
Common Gull	23	Cormorant	400
Curlew	14	Dunlin	18
Dunnook	3	Egyptian Goose	2
Gadwall	35	Glaucous Gull	1
Goldfinch	7	Great Black-backed Gull	7
Great Spotted Woodpecker	1	Great Tit	2
Grey Heron	2	Gray Plover	3
Greylag Goose	186	Herring Gull	380
Jackdaw	85	Kestrel	4
Lapwing	186	Lesser Black-backed Gull	24
Linnet	2	Little Egret	1
Long-tailed Tit	2	Magpie	6
Mallard	6	Marsh Harrier	2
Meadow Pipit	13	Moorhen	16
Mute Swan	1	Oystercatcher	1
Peregrine	1	Pheasant	6
Pied Wagtail (yarellii)	1	Pintail	16
Redshank	8	Reed Bunting	1
Ringed Plover	3	Robin	4
Rook Pipit	2	Rook	140
Ruff	7	Shelduck	38
Shoveler	62	Skytark	11
Snipe	8	Song Thrush	2
Starling	14	Stock Dove	8
Stonechat	2	Teal	460
Turnstone	1	Water Rail	6
White-fronted Goose (European)	66	Wigeon	2800
Woodpigeon	88	Yellowhammer	1
Total number of species		70	



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## EAST LANE, BAWDSEY, POOLS AND BEACH

## SIGHTINGS FOR Sunday, 5 February, 2017

Barn Owl	1	Black-headed Gull	900
Canada Goose	3	Carrión Crow	4
Cetti's Warbler	1	Collared Dove	8
Common Gull	80	Common Scoter	40
Coot	17	Cormorant	600
Gadwall	34	Golden Plover	40
Great Black-backed Gull	15	Greylag Goose	8
Herring Gull	332	Kestrel	1
Lapwing	270	Lesser Black-backed Gull	3
Linnet	48	Little Grebe	6
Mallard	6	Mediterranean Gull	1
Mistle Thrush	1	Moorhen	2
Mute Swan	85	Pheasant	1
Pied Wagtail (yarrellii)	1	Purple Sandpiper	2
Red-legged Partridge	1	Red-throated Diver	5
Redshank	2	Rock Pipit	3
Shelduck	3	Short-eared Owl	2
Shoveler	18	Stonechat	3
Teal	8	Tufted Duck	41
Turnstone	3	Woodpigeon	6
Total number of species		40	













