

Waveney Bird Club

The Brecks

2 April, 2017

Although the events planning committee tries to vary the programme by at least a third year-on-year, this trip is one of the 'gotta-be's' in the WBC calendar.

The Brecks represent a major change of diet for those of us who spend most of the time on the Suffolk coast and provide a range of environments you would otherwise have to go some distance to find – and that goes for the birds too.

So, we met up at 7am in the car park at Lynford Arboretum on what was a chilly but gorgeous morning, with the promise of some warmth later. Slanting sunlight through the blend of coniferous and deciduous grand old trees and early spring birdsong in branches coming into leaf. Plenty of Goldcrests about as we assembled, but all attempts to find a Firecrest while we waited were futile.

So we headed onto the track, down towards the bridge, with open grass areas, woodland and hedges around us.

The Brecks this year seems to have attracted more than its fair share of Brambling – flocks were calling all around us, as they had done on a recent trip to Santon Downham. I can't say I've heard this before – most Brambling have been in ones or twos – not numbers like this, or this particular call.

A sudden moment of excitement as a couple of Crossbills flew across us, to be followed shortly after by top views on the other side of the track – a perched bird, conveniently situated in one of the few small willows growing through a rough pasture.

Only a few metres further on, we hit the main target – Hawfinch. They were roughly in the same trees as I'd seen them last year, and the party gathered round those who'd brought their scopes down.

Mission accomplished – more than making up for the three hours trudging around Sotterley unsuccessfully looking for one two months back. A bonus on the return leg was a small group of late Fieldfares, perched in the top of a distant tree.

Next stop was Santon Downham for the Lesser-spotted Woodpecker – and the toilets in the Forestry Commission car park.

Of course, moving 20 or so people around various locations takes a certain amount of time, which presented an opportunity to get ahead of

the game and get down to the river – or at least the small path on the Suffolk side, leading up towards the church. There were multiple Firecrests in here – possibly 5 or 6, without having to go too far up. By the time the group assembled, one particular individual was making a real show of it, bouncing impatiently on the outer branches of a nearby tree.

There always seems to be something ‘angry’ about a Firecrest, in a way that Goldcrests don’t seem to be. I remember getting a picture on Orfordness of Mike Marsh with both in the hand – the docile, gentle face of the Goldcrest against the wild-eyed, aggressive ‘what’re you looking at?’ attitude of the Firecrest.

Time marches on, however, and we had to leave them to their territorial sort-outs and head up the river.

The flight calls of a couple of Mandarin were rewarded almost instantly with a pair moving serenely across the river just beyond the road bridge. Although the drake is a stunning bird, I get a slight twinge that there’s something ‘not quite right’ seeing them on the Norfolk/Suffolk border – a bit too much, perhaps, like Ring-necked Parakeets in huge flocks in Windsor Great Park. Like they’re from too far away for it to feel natural.....or too colourful...or something like that.

So, the Great Snake of WBC moved in single file up the river, towards the Pecker Zone. You know you’re nearly there when you see the sign, requesting you to keep on the path etc. It’s a shame that such a sign is necessary – perhaps genuine fieldcraft needs to make a comeback.

A small group of birders moved back down the track on our arrival, having not seen the Lesser Spot and muttering about not having a chance now because there was ‘too much noise.’ I positioned myself between the WBC group (almost silent) and this group of four (the mutterer now relating birding tales at some volume) – and who was rewarded with the bird? WBC 1, Mutterer 0. Home win and three points. A small diversion up towards the railway track on the return journey was enlivened by a small and brief raptor-fest, with Buzzard, Sparrowhawk and a possible sighting of Goshawk in quick succession, followed by calling and flying Lesser Redpolls. I thought I heard a brief burst of Woodlark song, but I usually do. A really good burst has eluded (or eluelueluded) me so far.

Taking our lives in our hands against the various forms of lycra-clad performance cyclists, we headed back along the road to the cars and the lunch break at Lackford Lakes.

It was warming up nicely now, and Lackford is a popular spot, with its pushchair-friendly paths and multiple hides and many family groups making the most of it. We gave it a couple of hours and pleasant enough it was, with Nuthatches particularly very audibly evident, along with a few Blackcaps.

Then it was time for one last site, out on Cavenham Heath for Stone Curlew. We didn't need to move too far along the wide, rutted track through the heath itself before Andrew Green and Steve P picked up the same three birds from different angles and some distance apart. As usual, fairly motionless, although a Buzzard fly-over caused a brief moment of alertness, before one bird quietly got up and hid itself behind some vegetation, tired of the scope paparazzi's attention.

No Woodlark unfortunately, but views of a Stonechat – apparently not too common out here.

The day was coming to a close, but not before a walk out to the lake and a scan through the surrounding fence from one of the few breaks in vegetation. Over the Tufted Duck and Little Grebe floated a Marsh Harrier – again, an unusual sighting here.

So that was it – except there were two Grey Wagtail just below the weir on the way back.

Another great day in the Brecks, and thanks for Stevie Howell and Andrew Green for the leadership.

Apologies for not presenting a full bird list, as I don't have one – yet. I hope the highlights are adequately reflected in the report.

Any errors or inaccuracies in this are purely the result of not paying enough attention to what was going on.

Paddy Shaw



Tea break at Lackford - how civilised.....



Stone Curlew - apologies to proper photographers







