

Waveney Bird Club

Ditchingham Hall Estate, Good Friday 2015

Whether you're a Christian, or whether you're a birder, or whether you're both..... there's no doubt that the time around Easter is a signal for a period of transformation.

Whether it actually happens or not on that particular weekend is not the issue; the clocks have gone forward, so the Time Gods have dictated that it is 'British Summer Time', but I think in the year 2015 they might have jumped the guns a bit...

It was still cold. The wind was still from the north. The forecast was for occasional rain, followed by rain of the non-occasional variety.

But – the Good Friday WBC walk isn't really about that. The Brecks trip had obviously been a blinder, and had served as a great 'curtain raiser' to the outdoor season.

So here we were; all green lights on, and off into Spring, whatever it turns out to be. The great thing about the start of the season is exactly that – you don't know how it's going to be. A sudden southerly wind and a flood of early migrants, or continuing cold with little 'windows of opportunity' with all our summer visitors coming in one at a time. Judging by this Good Friday, the latter seemed more likely.



All the things we do....

The other great thing about membership of this particular club is occasional access to some of the estate environments managed for nature.

We've already been out to Heveningham once for the Conservation Day, and have the BioBlitz looming in May, and now a chance to walk the paths and tracks around Ditchingham Hall, just outside Bungay. And a good turn-out too; Steve and I turned up what we thought was early, but the flock had already assembled, in spite of the lousy forecast.



As it turned out, the rain kept off, and in the company of the Countess Ferris and Nick Clitheroe (Head Gamekeeper) and his amazingly well-trained dog, we walked up between hedgerow and woodland.

The power of these walks as a 'survey machine' can't be underestimated. If you have 20+ birders moving in a phalanx, there's not much going to escape going into the book. In this regard, WBC walks are an invaluable tool, not only to estate owners, keen to know the health of their management techniques, but also to the BTO and the county recorders.



Ditchingham Hall is a case study of how agriculture, environment and other country pursuits (including shooting) can be managed to the benefit of all concerned. Grey Partridge releases and management of field margins to encourage breeding are coupled with stringent penalties for any member of a shooting party who kills an 'Englishman.' These are the concepts of balance that have become so skewed elsewhere, and which require pressure from groups such as Campaign Against Raptor Persecution (CARP).



Primrose bank

But this is digression. Here we are, all togged up, making our way round the estate through woodland (and beautiful and rare wet wood areas), past last year's buzzards' nests (*see that for use of apostrophes?*), being checked out by Mr and Mrs Red Deer, past 'banks of sweet primroses' and cowslips, debating the differences between mistle thrush and blackbird song, listening for the 'garden gate' sound of bullfinch and the 'two-three' bounce of chiff-chaff..... it's a very pleasant way to spend a cold morning.



My money's on No. 6....

And so, down to the lake – another blend of ornamental and environmental. Grey wagtails, little grebes, gadwall, teal, little egret etc. desport themselves just below the hall itself.

And suddenly, you're back in the warm – in the "Beaters Retreat", with a bacon roll, a cup of tea and a roaring wood stove; and a barn owl hunting the field opposite to top it all off. And all this before a lot of folks have even got out of bed.

That's what's great about birding.



DITCHINGHAM BEATER'S RETREAT SIGHTINGS FOR Friday, 3 April, 2015

Barn Owl	2	Black-headed Gull	39
Blackbird	10	Blue Tit	15
Bullfinch	3	Buzzard	4
Canada Goose	5	Carrion Crow	2
Chaffinch	12	Chiffchaff	8
Coal Tit	2	Collared Dove	3
Common Gull	4	Coot	3
Cormorant	2	Dunnock	5
Egyptian Goose	2	Feral Pigeon	12
Fieldfare	75	Gadwall	2
Goldfinch	4	Great Spotted Woodpecker	4

Great Tit	2	Green Woodpecker	3
Grey Heron	2	Grey Partridge	2
Grey Wagtail	2	Greylag Goose	26
Herring Gull	1	House Sparrow	2
Jackdaw	55	Jay	3
Kestrel	1	Kingfisher	1
Lapwing	2	Lesser Black-Back Gull	3
Little Egret	2	Little Grebe	3
Long-tailed Tit	4	Magpie	4
Mallard	13	Marsh tit	2
Mistle Thrush	2	Moorhen	6
Mute Swan	2	Nuthatch	3
Oystercatcher	2	Pheasant	35
Pied Wagtail (surrellii)	2	Red-legged Partridge	12
Redwing	14	Robin	14
Rook	35	Shelduck	2
Skylark	4	Songthrush	3
Sparrowhawk	3	Starling	10
Stock Dove	13	Swallow	1
Teal	4	Woodpigeon	48
Tufted Duck	18	Yellowhammer	4

Wren	5	Treecreeper	2
TOTAL:		66	