

Waveney Bird Club

Hollesley, Boyton and Snape Feb 6th 2016

It is the policy of the small group that plans the WBC calendar of events to change around a third of them annually.

This trip was one of the new ones and – from a subjective point of view – coincided nicely with my intention to get to know some of the more southerly sites better in 2016. I've always found navigating the area south of Aldeburgh and east of the A12 a little tricky. The proof of this was a speculative visit to Hollesley the week before, on which I found Boyton, Shingle Street and Bawdsey before I discovered the left hand turn by the water tower before Hollesley village which takes you down to the reserve.

So others didn't go where I went, Steve and I went down early to bang the WBC signs into the verge next to the crucial bits of the journey.

The Hollesley site is a particularly well-planned piece of conservation. The wetlands and 'scrape' form a tidy pocket between the river wall, prison and village, with the scrape itself protected behind a predator-proof fence, which doesn't interfere with the views from a number of points around it.



The new viewing platform at Hollesley

It's starting to prove quite a hit with birds too, and a number of notable species have been spotted here.

Today's magnet was a Glossy Ibis, which had been present for a week or two, seen at a range of spots between Hollesley and Boyton.

The latest addition to the reserve is an observation platform on the mound; very recent, in fact, as it had only been completed the previous Thursday. By coincidence, a member of the construction team was present on this cold, blowy Saturday morning, watching with some trepidation to see if it would hold under the combined weight of 11 WBC members, plus mud.

If you're a bird counter and contributor to BirdTrack, sometimes your heart can sink at such numbers of Wigeon, Teal, Black-headed and Common Gull as this small site can hold. And just when you've stashed the abacus, there are the 800 or so Cormorant on the sand spit. But there, amongst the wall of white, black and grey in the middle of the gulls was a Caspian, so everything was ok.



Viewing the Scrape from the pillbox on the sea wall

Although most species of expected duck were present in varying numbers, waders were in shorter supply, and – with totals in the notebook – we tried to find the Ibis.

It turned out to be in the company of Curlews on the wet meadow to the south of the scrape, and although distance and light prevented really good views of it, there it was, consorting with its Fellows of the Curved Bill.

The wall and pillbox between the reserve and this meadow makes a top spot for surveying the reserve, and we picked out a small group of Ringed Plover before deciding to move on to site 2 at Boyton.



Across the marsh at Boyton

Not before a coffee stop at the café just by the high security wing of the prison though.

I'm a right ol' coffee snob, and judge everywhere on the quality of the espresso, and I'd have to say this was one of the best. A few of the party got into the sausage rolls too, which were more like the size of a pie and tasted fantastic. Make sure you visit if you go down to the reserve!

(Follow the signs for 'Coffee Republic' on the right as you come up from the reserve).

Either the wind had picked up, or we'd been protected from it at Hollesley, but out on the river wall at Boyton it was blowing more than somewhat. Although we didn't find the Hen Harrier reported regularly, there was the unusual sight of around 70 Mute Swan to the south. Planning the revolution, perhaps? When the newspapers are full of reports of swans carrying off toddlers in their talons and stealing your chips, remember you were warned here first!

Again, a great birding site, and perhaps better known to other WBC members than to me. However, this was not the weather to be out on exposed river walls, so we headed towards Snape, with a stopover planned at Iken to check if the Cattle Egret was in the mood for company.

And indeed, this was the case. I made two unsuccessful visits here in January, spending a total of around 4 hours looking for it. The subsequent two visits have resulted in almost instant sightings. We got out of the cars, and there it was, scuttling around the hooves of the herd of Redpoll cattle. (At this point I have to admit to taking loads of pics of it, but the wind, the zoom, the new camera and other excuses meant none were any good....)



The reedbeds and woods at Abbey Farm – and looking for the Little Owl

Numbers in the party were dwindling now, (with some hearing the call of the Six Nations opening weekend) and with just one unscheduled stop by a small flood pool on the way out of the village where David Elliott had spotted a Green Sandpiper, we headed towards Snape.

The site here is sometimes called Abbey Farm, and sometimes Botany Bay, located inland from the Maltings. Although not open to the public, we had been granted access for this visit by Dave Fairhurst, who also manages Hollesley.

Another fantastic wetland area, holding good numbers of duck, geese and a handful of Black-tailed Godwit, and – like Hollesley – you can just feel the potential in this reserve and the rough scrub and woodland around it. Almost the last bird of the day was Little Owl (heard but not seen), putting another year tick in the book.

Well, the predicted rain had held off until the journey home and the strong wind had not promised much for birding, but it had been a fantastic day. When you consider the number of reserves and protected areas stretching south from Benacre/Coverhithe, through Easton Bavents, Walberswick/Dunwich shorepools, the Dunwich and Westleton Heaths, Minsmere, Sizewell, North Warren, Slaughden, Hazlewood Marsh, Snape, Orfordness, Iken, Boyton, Hollesley, Bawdsey and on down to Languard, Alton Water, the Stour....this is the place to be a birder!

SPECIES LIST FOR HOLLESLEY: Total number of species 42

Black-headed Gull

Blackbird 2

Brent Goose (Dark-bellied) 1

Carrion Crow 1

Common Gull

Curlew 105

Goldfinch 6

Green Woodpecker 1

Greylag Goose 2

Jackdaw 8

Lesser Black-backed Gull 12

Magpie 1

Marsh Harrier 2

Mute Swan 2

Pintail 10

Ringed Plover 8

Shelduck 38

Skylark 1
Starling 80
Turnstone 2
Woodpigeon 20
Black-tailed Godwit (*islandica*) 1
Blue Tit 4
Buzzard 1
Caspian Gull 1
Cormorant 800
Glossy Ibis 1
Great Black-backed Gull
Grey Heron 2
Herring Gull 200
Lapwing 70
Little Egret 3
Mallard 32
Moorhen 1
Pied Wagtail (*yarrellii*) 2
Redshank 1
Robin 2
Shoveler 32
Song Thrush 1
Teal 17
Wigeon 250
Wren 1

SPECIES LIST FOR BOYTON: Total number of species 31

Black-headed Gull
Canada Goose 119
Cetti's Warbler 1
Curlew 48
Goldfinch 9
Greylag Goose 22
Lesser Black-backed Gull 2
Little Egret 6
Marsh Harrier 2
Mute Swan 97
Pied Wagtail (*yarrellii*) 2
Robin 4
Shelduck 22
Stock Dove 4

Wigeon 250

Wren 1

Blue Tit 2

Carrion Crow 2

Common Gull

Dunlin 7

Grey Heron 2

Herring Gull

Lesser Redpoll 1

Magpie 2

Meadow Pipit

Pheasant 1

Redshank 9

Rock Pipit 1

Starling 120

Teal 60

Woodpigeon 18

SPECIES LIST FOR IKEN: Total number of species 22

Avocet 38

Blackbird 2

Carrion Crow 1

Chaffinch 8

Dunlin 356

Green Sandpiper 1

Jackdaw 34

Little Egret 7

Redshank 90

Rook 16

Starling 4

Black-tailed Godwit (*islandica*) 67

Blue Tit 1

Cattle Egret 1

Curlew 45

Goldfinch 2

Herring Gull 2

Lapwing 5

Moorhen 5

Robin 2

Shelduck 22

Teal 8

SPECIES LIST FOR SNAPE AREA: Total number of species 29

Bearded Tit 6

Black-tailed Godwit (*islandica*) 24

Buzzard 1

Carrion Crow 59

Coot 14

Gadwall 82

Greylag Goose 6

Jackdaw 160

Lapwing 250

Little Owl 1

Magpie 4

Meadow Pipit 2

Rook 30

Shoveler 40

Wigeon 58

Black-headed Gull 45

Blue Tit 2

Canada Goose 18

Common Gull

Curlew 22

Great Black-backed Gull 1

Herring Gull 1

Kestrel 1

Little Egret 1

Long-tailed Tit 8

Mallard 40

Mute Swan 5

Shelduck 36

Teal 40