

Waveney Bird Club  
Minsmere, May 2015

Ah, Minsmere! The Suffolk coastal birder's spiritual home! I still can't remember if this or Cley was the first reserve I was thrown off. These days you're more likely to be greeted by an affable character in an RSPB fleece with a membership pack in his/her hand than an angry bloke on a tractor, but that's the changing face of conservation for you.....and it was an awfully long time ago...

And so, some \*\*years later, I joined the other 12 WBC members in the reserve car park, in bright light and a brisk SW wind, with just a hint of chill on it. And, as usually happens, the bird list started moving up like a pinball machine immediately. If you ever do a shift as a bird lister, try and get a late one. Getting up to around 50-60 in May at Minsmere is a work of clerical hysteria; moving from 60-90 a more sedate affair altogether.



The Away Team....

We compiled the birds seen by the various members on the way in, including nightingale, turtle dove, barn owl and red-legged partridge, before moving under the cloud of sand martins onto the reserve itself. The north bushes kept the tally rising with the usual woodland edge varieties, including singers that have now become part of the soundscape like blackcap and chiffchaff.

Steve and Andrew were leading, and – through sheer persistence and raptor-like vision – pulled out a single stone curlew from the field

between the north wall and visitors' centre, before we headed down the sonic pathway between reed and sedge warblers, reed bunting, beardies and Cetti's warblers, with bitterns booming from undetectable sites in the reeds.

The sea was fairly quiet as it can be at this time of year, so we didn't waste much time watching it, and headed along the front towards East Hide. A Cetti's was hollering his warning about Col Gadaafi (that's how I hear it, anyway!) right by the gate, and as Andrew and I went through, up he jumped to a top bramble. He stared at us, and we stared at him – you can't really move a muscle at these times, or call out to anyone else, but a rare eye-to-eye close up with one of the great elusives. And then he was gone, and we could breathe again.



Pity the poor solo birder, thinking he'd have a quiet early morning down at Minsmere – perhaps a slow contemplation of the sluice from the hide. Now he's got 13 WBC members for company. Still, he should look on the bright side, as the assembled company 'called the birds.' A common sandpiper decided it was all too much, and left the scene fairly early, while kittiwakes collected nest material before heading off with a muddy beakful to the nest site on the rigs off Sizewell.



Debating the composition of string.....



Do you have a hobby?

Waders were fairly thin on the ground, but we caught dunlin in their summer suits, ringed plover, turnstone, blackwits and a solitary greenshank, with a couple of bitterns flying high topping the rarity list. Off again, to head down just south of the sluice and check Lucky Pool, the chapel field and the levels.

Scanning the skies Steve got onto a hawking hobby, while Keith got a distant glimpse of the great white egret shifting feeding grounds – causing much debate about the chemical composition of ‘string’ as no-one else had got it at the time. He was right, though, as we found out later.....

A single spoonbill feeding in the distance was perhaps the other highlight.

Our route then took us along the south path, with the note-book tally starting to ease up a bit. Andrew spotted two little gull heading east towards the sea, before we realised we were in the middle of SERIOUS hobby activity. Were there 8? Or 9? The damn things just wouldn't fly slow enough to tell, but we reckoned in the end there were 9 (or maybe 10?)

We got in the ‘Wildlife Explorer’ hide to settle down a bit, and a hobby shot over the water, chasing a butterfly, which looked like one of the whites. Now, these things can catch dragonflies and swifts, but it couldn't get this little white flapping insect, which evaded the claws three times by my count, almost imitating the hobby's mastery of acrobatics. They were hawking across the woods and reeds around Bittern Hide, so we headed up that way.

The hide was – as expected – pretty full, so myself and a couple of others took up position beneath it, where we had brilliant, brilliant views of the bird I now reckon to be the champion of the air. Watching their swift-like swoops and the virtual halt in the air while food is passed talon-to-mouth, and the sudden acceleration again with a couple of clipped wing beats was for me one of the best birding moments of the year. What they were eating I don't know – one seemed to have something the shape of a bumble bee, and while there were hairy dragonflies in evidence, there wouldn't have been enough to keep these chaps going. They were also probably gobbling up clouds of insects rising from the reedbed, but how they could change direction mid-flight and at full speed was a revelation.



Once bittern, twice shy....

The next venue was Island Mere – again, fairly popular, and again I chose to stay outside, so what the others saw, I don't know. Outside, there was the occasional glimpse of bearded tit, and some stunningly-coloured male sticklebacks in the water below, with shoals of females around them and a future few weeks of solitary parenthood ahead of them. Mr Stickleback doesn't trust Mrs Stickleback anywhere near his offspring.

Coming towards the end, we climbed Whin Hill past Chateau Springwatch, to have a last scan across the reserve – and there, in the company of a little egret just to provide some scale, was Keith's great white egret, in full view! String stuffed back into the pocket.....

Thinking that was a great bird to end on, we started heading back to the car park – but it wasn't over. A nightingale was singing deep in the scrub, accompanied by a goldcrest, somewhere up above.



Helen – not really trying.....



Spring colours at Whin Hill

I know one of these field trips is one day going to be a struggle to make anything text-wise from, but it certainly wasn't this one – or any of them so far this year. 90 species in about 7 hours has got to be rated as pretty good!

Thanks again to Steve and Andrew for the excellent leadership! And to the hobbies for an unforgettable birding hour.

**Post-script:** Steve P had been leading a BTO bird i.d. course, so hadn't joined us for the main course. However, on completion, we returned to the East Hide in the company of Suffolk's 4<sup>th</sup>-best gull man, John Grant, to see what the dipping sun brought in.

Not part of the WBC tally, but we ended up with Caspian gull, little ringed plover, little tern, whimbrel and yellow-legged gull to end the day.

A slight furrowed brow of how you could be out for 13hrs (my day having started at 6.30) and not see a starling though.....I hope it's just because they are all en famille at the moment.

*The species list below is presented with the BTO i.d. code for those of you who may like to get familiar with this much quicker way of listing.....*

### **Minsmere May 10<sup>th</sup> – Species List**

<b>Name</b>	<b>BTO</b>
Nightingale	N.
Red-legged Partridge	RL
Chiffchaff	CC
Willow Warbler	WW
Blackcap	BC
Chaffinch	CH
Wren	WR
Whitethroat	WH
Sand Martin	SM
Swallow	SL
Greylag Goose	GJ
Canada Goose	CG

Lapwing	L.
Bittern	BI
Carrion Crow	C.
Stock Dove	SD
Shoveler	SV
Avocet	AV
Barnacle Goose	BY
Moorhen	MH
Pheasant	PH
Woodpigeon	WP
Redshank	RK
Cetti's Warbler	CW
Reed Warbler	RW
Sedge Warbler	SW
Reed Bunting	RB
Bearded Tit	BR
Herring Gull	HG
Little Egret	ET
Kestrel	K.
Cuckoo	CK
Goldfinch	GO



Greenfinch	GR
Magpie	MG
House Martin	HM
Swift	SI
Pied Wagtail	PW
Turtle Dove	TD
Great Tit	GT
Blue Tit	BT
Long-tailed Tit	LT
Coal Tit	CT
Blackbird	B.
Stone Curlew	TN
Common Sandpiper	CS
Common Tern	CN
Turnstone	TT
Coot	CO
Gadwall	GA
Lesser Black-backed Gull	LB
Great Black-backed Gull	GB
Buzzard	BZ
Tufted Duck	TU

Black-tailed Godwit	BW
Marsh Harrier	MR
Heron	H.
Kittiwake	KI
Mallard	MA
Dunnock	D.
Ringed Plover	RP
Greenshank	GK
Grey Plover	GV
Dunlin	DN
Mute Swan	MS
Spoonbill	NB
Oystercatcher	OC
Little Grebe	LG
Skylark	S.
Wigeon	WN
Jackdaw	JD
Hobby	HY
Great White Egret	HW
Linnet	LI
Cormorant	CA

Great-crested Grebe	GG
Robin	R.
Water Rail	WA
Sparrowhawk	SH
Barn Owl	BO
Mistle Thrush	M.
Treecreeper	TC
Garden Warbler	GW
Green Woodpecker	G.
Goldcrest	GC
Teal	T.
Great-spotted Woodpecker	GS
Little Gull	LU
Black-headed Gull	BH
Common Gull	CM
Shelduck	SU
<b>After Hours'</b>	
Whimbrel	WM
Little Tern	AF
Yellow-legged Gull	YG
Little Ringed Plover	LP

Caspian Gull	YC
<b>Mammals</b>	
Red Deer	
Stoat	
Grey Squirrel	
Rabbit	
<b>Butterflies</b>	
Brimstone	
Small Copper	
Green-veined White	
Large White	
Peacock	
Orange Tip	
Speckled Wood	
<b>Others</b>	
Adder	
Stickleback	