

Limosa

BirdWalk #103 | Potter Heigham Marsh

Thursday 24th May 2018

**Potter Heigham Marsh, Norfolk
Thursday 24th May 2018 (09:00-13:00hrs)
Leaders: Brian Small, Barbara & Chris Kightley**



A male Marsh Harrier passed over as we stood on the Weaver's Way footpath © Brian Small, Limosa

A cloudless deep blue sky contrasting with the lime-greens of fresh spring foliage greeted us as we met at Potter Heigham church for our 103rd BirdWalk this morning. A fine total of 73 species included several star birds: eight Cranes were seen in flight, with one located on the ground; at least three Hobbies; Wood Sandpiper and a handsome summer-plumaged Grey Plover; Marsh Harriers and Common Buzzards; 68 Black-tailed Godwits and 18 'Tundra' Ringed Plovers - and to top it all, Spoonbill and Great Egret, plus several Swallowtails about the reedbeds. By the time we had finished we had all caught the sun...

Space for parking was at a premium, but soon all cars were jigsawed together. As we waited a number of Orange-tips danced along the flowering verges and Holly Blues skittered about the leaves; Blackcaps and a Chiffchaff sang, whilst overhead Swifts screamed and Goldfinches and Greenfinches jangled. A distant Buzzard, mobbed by Jackdaws ducked behind a tall hedge and was gone, whilst over Potter Heigham village a gathering of House Martins was pleasing to see. An early Hornet cruised along the lane like a drone – the first of several this morning, but we were soon at a gap in the hedge checking for raptors. At the back of a beanfield a male Marsh Harrier sailed along defying gravity, several more Buzzards were picked out and two Hobbies chased unseen dragonflies, then Chris spotted the first five of eight Cranes that came along in quick succession. Even at a distance they have a distinctive shape, and though they dropped down below the treeline, another two came much closer and showed the plumage well; the last singleton seemed to drop into the fields we would be visiting, so we hoped to find it on the ground...

Beyond the church, the duckpond had a lively family of very young Mallard ducklings and its mother, Swallows perched on roadside wires and a male Pied Wagtail perched on the roof of a house. A well-kept garden held a small number of chattering, dust-bathing House Sparrows and a Dunnock jumping about on the lawn. About a cluster of farm buildings, several Stock Doves chased about in display, their smaller size and deeper purple-grey colours separating them from the more numerous Wood Pigeons. Finally we reached the end of the road and were able to look out over the fields.

In the fields Greylag Geese with well-grown goslings gathered in a cluster and more Swallows and Swifts flew about the open skies. A wheezy Yellowhammer sang distantly and was eventually tracked down and seen briefly in the hedgerow; likewise a couple of elusive Whitethroats blurted out their jangle of notes before one was found. Great and Blue Tits followed the line of Oaks that lined the track along which we

LIMOSA, West End Farmhouse, Chapelfield, Stalham, Norfolk NR12 9EJ (UK)

TEL: 01692 580623 | 580624 • EMAIL: info@limosaholidays.co.uk • WEB: limosaholidays.co.uk

walked, but Chris had found the Crane in the field and all eyes were quickly trying to focus on the bird as it lifted its head up and down in the long grass. Scanning the landscape produced a number of Buzzards and large gulls picking up thermals, more Marsh Harriers and three Gadwall that chased noisily about; more unusual were Avocets and Grey Plover, but the reason for them being here was about to be discovered.

We reached the area of recently 'scraped' pasture of Potter Heigham marshes that has created a series of large open, shallow lagoons where good numbers of Black-headed Gulls have quickly settled to breed, as have Avocet and an array of wildfowl. On the first pool, amongst the numerous Mallard, we found a couple of Wigeon, Shoveler, Gadwall and several Mute Swans; waders included Black-tailed Godwits, Ringed Plovers, two Dunlin and territorial Redshanks. We found a couple of now-expected Little Egrets, but, as we walked along the track to get closer views and better light on the birds, an unexpected Great Egret flew a circuit of the marsh showing off its yellow bill and all dark legs and feet. A small wader that flew low across the water and disappeared from sight went unidentified, but looked interesting. In moving we could see the Ringed Plovers and black-bellied Dunlin more clearly, but it also offered a view of other pools, on which we found a solitary Wood Sandpiper – alongside a Redshank, its dainty size and long legs were most apparent - three whinnying Little Grebes, Great Crested Grebes as well as Coots and Moorhens. Amongst the tussocky grass behind us we spotted a Chinese Water Deer, two Brown Hares, glossy green Lapwings, Oystercatchers and an Egyptian Goose flew in.

The final pools, best viewed from the Weaver's Way footpath, held a good number of duck, including Tufted Duck and Common Pochard, more Great Crested and Little Grebes, and amongst the roosting Cormorants Chris found an immature, pink-billed Spoonbill. Common Terns, Marsh Harriers and Egyptian Geese all flew over us as we stood, while jaunty Reed Buntings perched atop the bushes and Cetti's, Sedge and Reed Warblers sang from the bushy reedbeds by Heigham Sound – the latter three only occasionally showing. However, the highlight here were the three or four Swallowtails that skimmed the reeds and flowers by the bank – for some, their first chance to see these in the UK.



A Chinese Water Deer peers at us from the long grass – there is surely a Crane hidden in there too! © Brian Small

As we walked slowly back past the pools – looking for things beginning with 'G' – we found that the numbers of Black-tailed Godwits had risen to 68 (all seemingly Icelandic birds) and that a handsome adult Grey Plover was feeding on a large patch of dry mud – and looking very splendid with its black belly and silver-spotted back. The allure of coffee was clearly great and we did not dawdle too much as we headed back to the village – the sight of yet more Hornets detaining a few.

The coffees and cakes were very much enjoyed and it was good to look round and see the red faces that had caught the sun. As we chatted and caught up on news, a family party of Long-tailed Tits came past and a Blackbird sang from the trees.

BIRD LIST (n=73)

Canada Goose – several on the fields
Greylag Goose – many with large young
Mute Swan – many on the pools
Egyptian Goose – one in the fields then three flew over
Common Shelduck – one flew in to the marsh
Gadwall – several
Eurasian Wigeon – two males on the first pool
Mallard – many with young
Northern Shoveler – on and over the pools
Common Pochard – several pairs either diving on the bank
Tufted Duck – again several pairs
Common Pheasant – heard calling but not seen
Little Grebe – heard then seen on two pools
Great Crested Grebe – three pairs about the pools
Eurasian Spoonbill – an immature with roosting Cormorants
Grey Heron – one distantly in flight
Great Egret – one flew past and did a circuit of the marsh before dropping out of view
Little Egret – three on the pools
Great Cormorant – at least 10 roosting on the last pool
Western Marsh Harrier – several about the marsh – most males
Common Buzzard – many seen in flight
Common Moorhen – several about the edges of the pools
Eurasian Coot – seen on the first pool
Common Crane – a good total of eight included an initial party of five
Eurasian Oystercatcher – a pair in the fields
Pied Avocet – several pairs on the pools
Northern Lapwing – good numbers about the fields and also arguing with gulls and corvids on the pools
Grey Plover – heard and seen in flight, but it an adult on the deck was much appreciated
Common Ringed Plover – 18 on the pools, all darker and long-winged migrant *tundrae*
Black-tailed Godwit – 68 of the form *islandica*
Common Redshank – several pairs, with display often seen
Wood Sandpiper – one on the second pool
Dunlin – two tired adults with the Ringed Plovers spent most of their time asleep
Black-headed Gull – many breeding birds about the marsh
Great Black-backed Gull – one amongst the Cormorants
Herring Gull – many in flight over the fields and soaring
Lesser Black-backed Gull – the commonest large gull
Rock Dove – feral birds about the village
Stock Dove – a couple of pairs about farm buildings
Common Wood Pigeon – many in the fields and trees
Eurasian Collared Dove – a pair collecting twigs at Potter Heigham
Common Swift – several over the village and fields
Common Kestrel – one distant bird hovered over the reeds – this species seems to be struggling...
Eurasian Hobby – three distant birds catching dragonflies
Eurasian Magpie – one about a farmyard
Western Jackdaw – good numbers over the fields and trees
Rook – one or two in flight
Carrion Crow – several about the marsh, both in flight and on the ground
Blue Tit – seen and heard
Great Tit – seen and heard in the trees down to the marsh
Eurasian Skylark – several singing over the fields
Barn Swallow – fair numbers about the last houses of the village and over the fields
Common House Martin – likewise, but mainly over the village
Cetti's Warbler – heard (and almost seen) at the Weavers Way footpath
Long-tailed Tit – a family flitted along the hedge as we drank coffee

Common Chiffchaff – heard and seen briefly near the church
Sedge Warbler – heard and seen briefly perched in the reeds
Eurasian Reed Warbler – heard but only seen briefly in flight
Eurasian Blackcap – seen only
Common Whitethroat – two heard, one of which was seen briefly
Eurasian Wren – heard at several places
Common Starling – just one in flight
Common Blackbird – two or three seen
European Robin – several seen in the gardens
House Sparrow – seen in the gardens dustbathing
Dunnock – seen and heard
Pied Wagtail – a few singles in the village plus on/over the marsh
Common Chaffinch – several seen and heard
European Greenfinch – plenty about the trees by the church
Common Linnet – one flew over the village early in the walk
European Goldfinch – seen and heard in flight by the church
Yellowhammer – one male in the fields
Common Reed Bunting – several about the reeds near the Weaver's way path

MAMMALS

Brown Hare
Chinese Water Deer

BUTTERFLIES & DRAGONFLIES



Four-spotted Chasers were seen commonly this morning in the bright sunshine © BirdWalker Sue Harper

Swallowtail
Peacock
Small Tortoiseshell
Red Admiral
Large White
Small White
Orange-tip
Comma
Holly Blue
Speckled Wood

Four-spotted Chaser
Black-tailed Skimmer
Common Bluet
Azure Bluet
Common Bluetail
Large Red Damsel
Hairy Hawker



A couple of Egyptian Geese chase about over the reeds of Heigham Sound © Brian Small



The colours of spring: fresh Oak leaves against a deep blue sky © Brian Small