

Wednesday 12th June 2019

(09:00-13:30 hrs and 14:15-17:00)

Leaders: Chris & Barbara Kightley and Brian Small



The highlight of our walk at Lakenheath was getting a stunning and prolonged view of Bittern at Joist Fen © Brian Small, Limosa

With heavy rain forecast, it was with some trepidation that we arrived in the car park at the Lakenheath Fen RSPB reserve for the morning's walk. However, for those that braved the morning walk it was actually relatively dry and we got some cracking views of Hobby, Reed Bunting, both Reed and Sedge Warblers, plus a stunning Bittern that was so good we could hardly tear ourselves away... The afternoon was much wetter, but the foolhardy souls that persevered did not go away empty handed as they saw Tree Pipit and Woodlark rather well.

As we gathered in the car park Song Thrush and Blackcaps greeted us and foregoing the introductory talk about the reserve, we stood by the pond at the back of the centre gaining views of a Cuckoo in a willow – for some their first view of this species this year. Juvenile Blue Tits and several Reed Warblers skulked about the bushes too, before we walked along the first section of track, picking up singing Whitethroats as we went, past the poplars and stood by a patch of reeds. Marsh Harriers hunted above the reeds and a pair of Tufted Ducks and Coots fed about the back of the pool. Reed Buntings sat atop the reeds – first a male then a female – giving us a chance to look at them with the 'scope, as did both Sedge and Reed Warblers. We watched and listened to the latter two species, enjoying their different songs.

A little further, and careful checking of the poplars produced the results as a Hobby was found perched in the open. It was exciting to see this dynamic species as it sat and watched us watching it; the neat face with white cheeks and black moustache, black-streaked underparts and rufous vent all showed well. Eventually it flew off into the trees. On another pool we found a Great Crested Grebe with young, plus a couple of Greylag families with lots of young! On a sedge-fringed pool we saw a Redshank whilst Lapwings displayed above a field beyond the railway line.

Butterflies were not liking the overcast conditions, but we saw a handful of Painted Ladies – part of the amazing influx this year. Finally, we reached the viewpoint across the westernmost part of the reserve and as we watched Marsh Harriers and another Hobby, a handful of Bearded Tits flicked across the reed tops – but blink and you missed them. However, saving the best 'til last suddenly a Bittern appeared in the reed fringes right in front of us and proceeded to show on and off for the next 20 minutes. Amazing views were had by all as it fed almost completely out in the open at times! Reluctantly, it was back to the centre and coffees; just as the forecast rain began to fall we had a quick check of the floods seeing another Redshank and handful of ducks but the rain set in...



Two families of Greylags and a photobombing Tuftie – the neck-collared FIJ is a local bird © Brian Small, Limosa

We wrapped up the morning's proceedings a little after 1pm and said our farewells to those who were done *BirdWalking* for the day. Those that remained ate lunch in the car park as the rain fell ominously more heavily, then set off for the short drive via Brandon to Thetford Forest.

A very select group of hardy folk parked up just north of the railway line at Santon Downham, from which our afternoon *BirdWalk* took us in the direction of Grimes Graves. The pine woodlands and sandy clearfell of Thetford Forest possess their own unique avifauna and, although the range of species is relatively narrow and birds are never numerous, with patience, we managed to eek out several of our target species in rather inclement weather. They say that into each life a little rain must fall; well today we had plenty to last a wee while, thanks...



A slightly wet Woodlark on a post as we approached Grimes Graves © Brian Small, Limosa

The first section of open landscape along the railway was quiet – a Yellowhammer was heard – but we were very busy getting wet! Cutting north into the trees we managed to find a Nuthatch and Goldcrest, but then were most pleased (and pleasantly surprised) to find a Tree Pipit perched atop a spruce. In the rain it waited for us all to get great views through the 'scopes, which were getting wetter and wetter, before heading off. The clearings close to Grimes Graves are now no longer 'clear', as the young firs are now pretty tall, but we could hear Willow Warblers singing from them and eventually saw one. Even better was a rather bedraggled Woodlark on a fence post; again, this sat patiently for us to watch it closely before it popped off to perch on a more distant tree.

There was no respite from the heavy rain, and having walked the track beside Grimes Graves, searching but failing to find Restart – though we did see Yellowhammers, a family of Stonechats, as well as a Tree Pipit making a very odd 'heep' contact call - we called it a day and set off back to the cars.

The return leg was just as wet and we stopped for more Stonechats and a pair of Woodlarks that flew above us, but that was it. It was odd that on an afternoon for ducks we didn't see any...



A treetop Tree Pipit in the gloomy light of Thetford Forest © Brian Small, Limosa

ANNOTATED LIST OF BIRDS

[n=66]

Pheasant – A couple in Thetford Forest
Greylag Goose - Several at Lakenheath, with a couple of nice families seen on one pool
Mute Swan – Noted at Lakenheath
Mallard - All looking a bit scruffy now
Gadwall - 4-6 seen Lakenheath, with handfuls flying about
Teal – One joined a Gadwall flock in flight at Lakenheath
Great Crested Grebe - 3-4 pairs Lakenheath, one with a striped juvenile
Bittern – Certainly bird of the morning as one was seen close up at Joist Fen
Grey Heron - 2 or 3 Lakenheath
Cormorant – Several in flight over Lakenheath
Marsh Harrier - Many pairs showing well at Lakenheath
Common Buzzard - 4+ at Lakenheath
Moorhen - A couple at Lakenheath
Coot - Lots of adults and white-bellied juveniles Lakenheath
Lapwing - Several Lakenheath
Curlew - Single bird in flight Lakenheath
Redshank – A couple at Lakenheath
Lesser Black-backed Gull - Adult over Lakenheath
Herring Gull - Ditto
Black-headed Gull – On the flask at Lakenheath
Stock Dove – Noted morning and afternoon
Wood Pigeon - Ditto
Collared Dove - Seen in Brandon
Cuckoo - One of Lakenheath's star birds, heard and seen throughout the morning
Swift – fair numbers in flight, but often distant
Hobby – Another of the morning's star birds, with cracking views of a perched bird as well as in flight
Kestrel - Just a couple
Great Spotted Woodpecker – Seen and heard, Lakenheath

Green Woodpecker - One yaffling near the reserve centre, Lakenheath
Jay – Heard, Thetford Forest
Magpie – Seen
Jackdaw - Numerous at Lakenheath
Rook - Many at Lakenheath
Carrion Crow – seen at Lakenheath and Thetford
Coal Tit - Singing at Santon Downham car park
Great Tit - Several
Blue Tit - Many young about
Swallow - Surprisingly scarce today, only 3 or 4 seen
Skylark - Heard near Grimes Graves
Woodlark – Super views of one then a pair at Thetford Forest
Cetti's Warbler - Heard at Lakenheath
Reed Warbler- Numerous Lakenheath
Sedge Warbler - Common Lakenheath
Chiffchaff - 2+ singing
Willow Warbler - A couple singing near Grimes Graves and also seen
Blackcap - Several heard singing Lakenheath
Garden Warbler – Seen and heard Lakenheath
Whitethroat - Many seen and heard Lakenheath
Bearded Tit – After a brief show, most saw them in flight at Joist Fen, Lakenheath
Goldcrest - Singing birds seen in Thetford Forest
Wren - Heard
Trecreeper – Heard only, Thetford Forest
Starling - Several Lakenheath
Blackbird - Several
Song Thrush – Heard at Lakenheath
Robin – Seen and heard
Stonechat - A handful of pairs one with well-grown young at Grimes Graves
Dunnock – Heard in Thetford Forest
Tree Pipit - Two near Grimes Graves
Pied Wagtail – A couple in flight at Lakenheath
Chaffinch – Seen and heard
Greenfinch - Heard singing at Lakenheath
Goldfinch - Several
Linnet – A couple in gorse near Grimes Graves
Yellowhammer - Several in Thetford Forest
Reed Bunting - Some real crackers at Lakenheath



Female Reed Bunting close to the first hide at Lakenheath RSPB © Brian Small, Limosa