

Birdwatching – October 2017 – September 2018



Here is a record of the iU3A Birdwatching group visits from October 2017 through to September 2018, the end of the iU3A year. For more recent visits and future plans, go to our [web page](#)

October 2017



Walthamstow Reservoirs — we thought a return to this reserve would be good since it was now officially open. However, the opening publicity, half term and glorious weather meant the place was rather busy. Nevertheless the five of us managed to dodge the cyclists and the toddlers and spot 24 species, not including the ones heard but not seen. The peregrine falcon was on his perch on the pylon and gave us a good

aerial display chasing away some magpies. It was collectively decided that the possible common terns were just juvenile black-headed gulls. The restored and open Engine Room was mobbed, so after a quick look round the northside reservoirs, we retired to the Ferry Inn — which was also mobbed!

November 2017

Stoker's Lake — There were two of us only on this cold but lovely sunny day. We walked anticlockwise round the lake to avoid having the sun shine directly into our eyes. We saw 25 different birds including Siskin, Red Kite, Long-tailed, great & blue tits, Gadwell, Shoveller, Pochard, Wigeon, Tufted, Crested Grebe, Tern (and no doubt other small birds we couldn't see well enough to identify). We were pleased about the Siskin (hope I'm correct), long-tailed tits and Pochards in particular — they looked great in the sunshine.

Woodberry Wetlands — we returned to our local reserve for this local visit. The posted sightings lists showed promise — a long list including "6 types of visiting gulls", several warbler types and a peregrine falcon. Alas we didn't see nearly as many varieties as on the list but it did give us a good challenge of trying to identify between the types of gulls we could spot. Black Headed and Lesser Black Backed were fairly easy but the Greater Black Backed and the Yellow Legged were argued over without a conclusive conclusion. Of course this is the joy — shared learning and a growing appreciation. The sun came out briefly but the coffee stop at the end was appreciated.

January 2018



Two Tree Island — we cancelled this visit in December because of poor weather but we were rewarded by a cold sunny clear day in January. The visit was truly remarkable and may rank as our best ever visit — despite the cold. We last visited this reserve in Essex back in July 2016. We were lucky last time and saw a great variety of wading birds. Again we saw a great range — and quantity — of birds. As soon as we reached the bridge onto the island we could see many teal on the

mudflats. We must have seen nearly a hundred of these by the end of the day. Then as we walked along the north side of the island we spotted the first curlew. While again by the end of the visit we'd seen so many curlew it started to lose some of the wow factor, for some this was the highlight of the day. To see them wading, in flight, and calling was great. The next inspiring sight was an avocet — so evocative. Lapwings were the next sighting with one in particular parading with its green plumage sparkling in the low sun.

By the time we got to the lagoon on the west end we'd already felt the visit had been a great success but then we came to the lagoon — a mass of curlews, lapwings, teal, shelduck, sanderlings, godwits, etc, etc. We could have stayed there forever watching the sight but the cold drove us on — then we discovered the hide overlooking the lagoon. We nipped in there, more to get some respite out of the wind, than seeing more of the lagoon, but lucky we did — we were rewarded by the sight of hundreds of knots



flying in and tentatively landing on islands in the lagoon. Easily spooked they would then take flight, flashing white then black as they banked in the wind and landed again. Another amazing sight. We had to give up and drag our way back — and head for some warmth at the café on the way back to the station. Not finished yet — from there we then saw a green woodpecker — then a kestrel hovering just above the garden. This took us to a count of 30 species for the day, our highest day's score for self-spotting. Overall probably one of our best day visits ever.

February

Otmoor — in a very cold February day we set off hoping to see Starling murmurations at this RSPB reserve. Last time we visited Otmoor two years ago we were rewarded with amazing sights of this phenomenon. This time there were 10 of us and again we could only reach the reserve with the help of three members who, with their cars, could pick us up from Islip station. After a good pub lunch at the Talkhouse we reached the reserve in bright, but cold, sunshine. Right from the beginning at the feeders just along from the car park, we started to



see many species — including a Bullfinch close up. Half way out over the moor toward the best site for the promised murmurations there was a good hide. This gave us a chance to warm up a bit and have a rest. It's a popular spot and well placed to spot many tits and finches in the hedgerows and ducks on the ponds. We approached the viewing site as dusk descended — as did our body heat — but with no murmurations. We did enjoy watching a marsh harrier hunting along the reeds. It was then a choice of sticking to base plan, quitting, and heading for our planned train, or hanging on a bit longer hoping for a murmuration. We seemed to want to wait but then with no sighting & cold mounting we all headed back to the cars, but not in time to reach the originally planned train time.

So a day of mixed fortunes. While we didn't see any real starling murmuration we did

achieve a species count of 37 — so pretty good and most people seemed satisfied with that. A special thanks to Jane, Sue & Robert for making this trip possible.



Walthamstow Reservoirs — on this bitterly cold day some brave souls still ventured out to this month's local outing. Not our first visit since this was 'opened' with increased visitor facilities but this time we nearly had the place to ourselves. I think the birds were feeling the cold as well — so not too much out and about. But we still managed to see 27 species. We joined in with the locals in search of a scaup (!!) — well we didn't know what it was either until we looked it up. Much like a tufted duck. We saw many of them but not the elusive

scaup. A good selection of herons and cormorants on view and time to improve our spotting skills between black-headed and black-backed gulls.

March

Woodberry Downs — we returned to our most local reserve. A small group of us managed on this sunny day to spot & identify 28 species and failed to name one 'LBJ'. A pleasant outing. Thanks to Janet Drake for leading this one!

Rainham Marshes — a clear spring-like day, but still coolish. A reasonable count by our own efforts — 33. The highlight was probably the four marsh harriers in the air at the same time.



April



Regent's Park — our local visit this month was a return to Regent's Park. We were initially thrown as the first part of the lake we approached was full of non-indigenous birds. Our books or apps on British and European birds failed to help us identify any of the species we spotted. At last we managed to figure out one — as a red crested pochard — not to be confused with the more normal pochard.

Trent Park — a bit of a cold wet day meant most of the birds stayed away not to mention the bird watchers! However for the four brave souls who ventured out we certainly heard a lot — but didn't see too much. If you add in what we think we heard then the species count would have nearly doubled! But within what we actually saw the highlight of the day was the kestrel. We came out at the Oakwoods end for a change with a chance to see the ongoing progress of the restoration of Hertford House.



May



Rye Meads — this was a very successful visit. I suspect that it was the potential to see kingfishers that got the high number of members to turn out. And they were rewarded! Not only by an extensive performance at the Kingfisher hide (even the kestrel's actions were a sideshow), but with a number of other 'firsts' — at least for some of our members. These included sighting of a little ringed plover and a grey plover. At the Warbler Hide, while all seemed quiet at first, sightings of Reed Warblers & Reed Buntings made it worth the extra trek to this hide. Our total sighting list for the visit came to a very healthy 34 — certainly making it near our top 'best visits'. What more could you ask for — other than then a pub right at the end offering remarkably good 'Senior' meal deals.....

June

Two Tree Island — On a glorious day we set off for Leigh-on-Sea. Last time we had visited here in January 2018 it had been a very successful visit — judged one of our best — but it had been bitterly cold. This time the variety and quantities were not as great. But we still saw some wonderful birds. The swifts were plentiful despite their general decline in numbers and we saw the delightful avocets amongst other species.

July

Victoria Park — a new destination for us. It's a glorious park with ponds and wood surrounds. Nothing remarkable but our count of 21 shows it was reasonable — for a mid-day, mid-summer visit.

August



Barnes, WWT London Wetlands — postponed until August because it was too hot in July for this visit. We've not been here since January 2017 so it was well overdue for a visit. Our species count (35) matched that of our visit here. But the particular types were different. We had two 'specials' this time — a green sandpiper and a hobby. Both were highly obliging and each paraded in front of our hide for some time to give us a very good viewing.

September 2018

Woodberry Downs — nothing too exciting this visit. The great debate was if we could see a yellow-legged gull. These had been sighted here so we were keen to spot a rarer yellow-legged one amongst all the gulls we could see. We think we did!

Rainham Marshes — on a glorious autumn day we enjoyed a sunny walk round the reserve. We weren't enough to get a guide so we were, as usual, dependent on our own knowledge, but we managed OK. The reeds were quite high at this time of year and the warblers had all left, so it was the water birds that we were looking at. It was also a good time for dragonflies and damselflies, the ruddy darter being prominent in particular. We had been told to look out for black tailed godwits, avocets & kestrels, but we weren't doing so well



until nearly the end of the circular tour, when a kestrel decided to put on a hovering display for us and dropped on to a nearby post, so we could confirm our identification. We then turned out of the reserve to the Thames estuary to find on the mudflats the so far missing godwits & avocets. Success at last! Not the highest count for this favourite reserve but still a good count and a lovely day out.