

Birdwatching – October 2020 – September 2021



Here is a record of the iU3A Birdwatching group visits from October 2020 through to September 2021, the end of the iU3A year. For more recent visits and future plans, go to our [web page](#)

Visits were less in this year due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

October 2020

Rye Meads: It was good to get back to this RSPB reserve following their reopening. However, soon we were less happy when we discovered that only three of the hides were open and these had such restrictive entrance limits that we didn't get into any. The other problem, not encountered previously here, was the number of mosquitoes around. For those in shorts (to appreciate the late summer sun) we were an attractive meal for them. Not getting into the hides meant we couldn't view some of the large lagoons and hence this limited our sightings. We were in two minds about turning back and giving up but we thought we would do the complete circuit, going through the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust's section. This proved to be a wise decision — the quantity of midges was less and we had our best sighting over this back section, including three (or was it four) marsh harriers swooping down and round. Then some saw the local Kestrel as well, so we ended with a respectable 20 species sightings. The meal deals at the local pub also changed it from a dubious start to a good day out.

November



Two Tree Island, Leigh on Sea: Luckily Essex is Covid Tier 2 also so we could travel out to this good birding location. We are never disappointed with Two Tree Island — it's only a question of how good it will be. The weather threatened rain but 10 of us set off from Leigh-on-Sea station along the creek to the bridge on to Two Tree. Even at this early point we always start to get a feel for how good the visit will be, and this time at the bridge we immediately spotted many teal, a couple of redshanks, an egret and a curlew. So things were

looking good. We knew the hot spot would be at the western end of the island at the lagoon so we tried not to linger too long on the way out; but the cries of the curlews and redshanks kept us popping to the creek bank to see what was there. Not the quantities we've seen in the past but still the variety. Reaching the lagoon we were not disappointed. Avocets, lapwings, greenshanks, snipe and godwits were all there. We managed to tear ourselves away and turned to head back. The Benfleet creek offered us good sightings of more curlews, a few sanderlings and some brent geese. Not to mention all the regular more normal sightings. Apart from a very light shower

the rain stayed away and the Golf Café was open to end the visit with a bacon roll. Bliss!

December

Walthamstow Wetlands: Although we were in Tier 3 we were keen to get out for some fresh air and it certainly was a bit breezy. As we were a bit early for the opening of the Wetlands we diverted to The Paddock on the other side of the road. This piece of overgrown ground has been through a bit of a makeover (either by local volunteers or maybe by local developers putting some money into this green space), and it seemed a good place for longtailed tits. In the Wetlands we didn't see anything spectacular but the count ended up as 26, which is quite reasonable.

January 2021

No visits (Covid)

February

No visits (Covid)

March

No visits (Covid)

April

Walthamstow Wetlands, April 2021: With the end of Lockdown 3 we were about to get out again. We kept it simple and just returned to this local reserve. But, as we were a biggish group all keen to get out and about again, we had a very good count. Many eyes make light works (or something).

May

Thurrock Thameside, May 2021: We always seem to get rain when we visit Thurrock. However, it was only a bit of drizzle this time. It's always something of a trek in from East Tilbury but we saw a few interesting things and heard lots more. There were plenty of swifts about and also house martins. While we'd expected the Centre to be still partly closed (due to Covid precautions) it was actually basically fully open, so that was a bonus. The tide was in however so we didn't see so many estuary birds as we have previously from the Centre, but the greenfinch on the feeder was a highlight. It was a smartish walk out before any more rain came in but our count kept creeping up, including a stonechat, ending in a healthy 30. Not bad!

Regent's Park, May: We always have a successful visit to this easy-to-reach destination. Of course there is the extra attraction of the foreign enclosure to see some more exotic or different birds. But even for British birds the count was a healthy 33.

June

Stoker's Lake, June: We headed out to Rickmansworth and Stoker's Lake. It's a bit of a trek to actually get there and disruption on the Met line didn't help. But it was a sunny afternoon and it was a pleasant stroll along the Grand Union canal to the lake. We found a quite tranquil spot on the north side this time. Nothing too startling spotted but with a count overall of 24. Certainly plenty of sounds but too much greenery now to spot where many of the songs were coming from.

Clissold Park and Abney Cemetery, June: From the main house we strolled down to the ponds and then on to Abney cemetery. Always an interesting place but not too good for bird spotting: too much growth between the headstones and mausoleums.

July

Fisher Green, Lee Valley, July: There is a new Discovery Centre at Fisher Green which we thought we'd go and take a look at, and see some birds on the way. From

Cheshunt station we were straight into the Lea Valley Park and we strolled to the centre. It is very smart with a tower to give good views over the scrape. From there after our picnic lunch we took a different route back to Cheshunt.

Brent Reservoir/Welsh Harp, July: Five of us went to this part of North London and we saw 24 species. It's a little bit of green and blue space tucked in between urban spread. We were lucky in that the first hide (before the bridge) was locked, but we met the key-holder on our return, and he let us (two, then three) in.

August

Olympic Park, August: Seven of us met at Highbury and took the Overground to Stratford where we decided we would begin by travelling to Bow Creek to catch the tide as low as possible. We didn't see wading birds at Bow Creek as the tide was too high (low tide was at 7.00am). Afterwards we returned to Stratford and visited the Waterglades area. Our one excitement was seeing a water rail in the water glades at Olympic Park, though no woodpeckers, which we have seen there before. The weather was mainly kind: we had a bit of rain at Bow Creek and then an extremely heavy shower when we were safely on the Jubilee Line.

Rainham, August: We were glad to get out, back to one of our favourite locations. Of course like all reserves at this time of year and with the reserve being shut for a long time there was a lot of foliage growth everywhere, making spotting a bit harder. However, we still made a count of 37 species, the water rail probably being the highlight. We thought we'd seen the marsh harriers, for they are often seen here, but in the end collectively decided we hadn't — just more gulls. On our way back to the visitor centre via the estuary we did get some good sightings of many avocets and black tailed godwits. A good ending to a good visit.

September

Woodberry Downs, September: five of us had a pleasant return visit to Woodbury wetlands. Four walked as a group and the fifth person, a late arrival, caught us up at the end and had the delight of seeing a green woodpecker, which the rest of us missed. Other highlights of the 28 species seen were reed and willow warblers and great crested grebe. We ended at the cafe, now open, enjoying coffee and cake to wish Alison T well for her move to Ireland.



Wanstead, September: on a glorious September day 11 of us went to this destination. We'd not been to Wanstead 'Park' before, only the 'Flats', which hadn't proved particularly rewarding; so it had been some time since the group visited Wanstead. Our leaders Janet and Alison (Alison's last before moving to NI) took us along the 'canal' and passed the perch, heronry and Shoulder of Mutton ponds. Great debate about the ducks. Teal at this time of year? Was it a water rail (or cross rail...)? We passed the grotto and the Temple (nothing remaining of the original manor house). Great photo framing of a heron, egret and swans. We'd heard that a hobby had been sighted but try as we could, only closely resembling pigeons were spotted. A good snack at the 'Hut' and then a stroll back to the station. We won't leave it so long before we return for another visit.