

## Birdwatching – October 2021 – September 2022



Here is a record of the iU3A Birdwatching group visits from October 2021 through to September 2022, 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 2021

**Two Tree Island, Leigh-on-Sea:** not the best time of year to visit with no migratory birds and too much foliage on the bushes. However, we enjoyed the trip and were glad to see that one of the hides had been rebuilt. There was plenty of what we did see teals, lapwings, even curlews — with a count of 23 species overall. The weather was also kind to us.



**Camley Gardens:** eventually this reserve has opened again after its major visitor centre refurbishment. A group of us were keen to see the new facilities and



hoped that the grounds hadn't been disturbed by the building works. We were not disappointed. It's a small space but you can lose yourself and not realise you are in the middle of a big city. The heron seemed oblivious to us. A place to pop into even if you have just 10 minutes to spare when at King's Cross.

### November

**Thurrock, Essex:** this always proves to be a slow burner of a visit. It starts slowly as we walk from Tilbury East, but our sightings slowly accumulate and we always end up with a high count. As we did for this visit. There weren't many ducks on the many gravel pits that we weaved around. Plenty of teal and tufties. Many goldfinches and long tailed tits. Some saw a kestrel briefly. Weather was cold but dry. Unfortunately the tide was in; it's always better when the tide is out and more mudflats exposed. On the way to the Centre identification (with the help from others) of a stonechat was a high spot. From the warmth of the Centre activity wasn't that great (apart from a greenfinch on the feeder) but many shelducks started to gather and appear as the tide ebbed. 34 was our final count as we walked out to Stanford-le-Hope.

### December

**Chingford, Connaught Water:** this was a pleasant walk via the Visitor Centre to

the lake at the edge of Epping Forest. As we walked through the Forest we spotted a few things but it was as we circumnavigated the lake that we saw most. Never before have we seen so many mallards! Or even mandarin ducks (18). But the highlights were spotting a pair of goosander and then a kingfisher. Service was a bit sporadic at the cafe but nevertheless we enjoyed the mince pies.

## January 2022

**Barnes Wetlands:** we hadn't been to this WWT reserve for a while and with Hammersmith Bridge still closed getting there is a bit trickier. However it was worth it — with 35 species being spotted. Reed bunting was possibly the rarest sighting. Lots of widgeon and teal. We'll not leave it so long until we return again.

**Brighton:** this was our our annual pilgrimage (excluding the Covid years) to see the starling murmurations. This year the weather was better than previous years, cold but no rain or high winds. To start the visit we all enjoyed a good fish lunch at the Regency then killed some time in the Lanes or otherwise, waiting for dusk. We waited patiently on the Main Pier as, first just a few, then more of the starlings, gathered and started their weird swooping dance. Apparently they do it as they love it. Or some say it's to build up body heat before they settle down for the night. Whatever the reason it is a spectacular sight. The numbers were probably down on previous years, and the duration also seemed shorter. However, still a remarkable sight. Within half an hour the sights were gone and they were all roosting and we headed for our home.

## February

**Walthamstow Wetlands:** we hadn't been here for a while but it proved to be a welcome return. The weather helped, a lovely clear day. Good to have new group members with us. The highlight was spotting the peregrine falcon — often seen here but not at our last visit. Great debate about a fleeting LBJ but we concluded it was a greenfinch (now on the amber at risk list).

**Stoker's Lake:** a nice sunny day for eight of us to visit Stoker's. We were rewarded with our highest spot count at this location — 31. Which included a goldeneye!

## March

**Thames Southside:** a new location for us to visit, this turned out rather well. We travelled to Abbeywood, and from there had a bit of urban walking but through parkland to South Mere. An interesting spot with some good ducks. From there it was a short further walk down to the Thames. Immediately we were presented with mudflats full of shelduck and teal in the tens, if not quite the hundreds, stretching as far as the eye could see. We moved east with a continual view of teal and shelduck. The old Victorian buildings of the Crossness Sewage Treatment plant proved an interesting backdrop whereas the new modern plant provided a constant whiff. However it also provided at one point a warm outflow which was a hot spot for birds and very close up for great viewing. The highlights here were godwits, curlew, oystercatchers, sandpipers apart from many types of ducks. After that we turned inland through Crossness Nature Reserve to Morgan's for lunch, then afterwards we walked out to Belvedere station. A count of 35 is by itself one of our record highs, but in addition the high numbers that we saw made it a great day out.

**Woodberry Downs:** we hadn't been back to our most local reserve for some time. And it actually was quite productive with 18 species being ticked off. Nothing too unusual but our first seasonal chiffchaffs and cetti's warblers. Even the humble dunnock caused a stir when we thought it might be something more exotic.

## April

**Walthamstow Wetlands:** due to disruption on the train line we didn't go to Rye Meads in April but instead diverted to Walthamstow Wetlands. However, it turned out

as a very good visit with 39 species being spotted — our highest count at this location.



**Rye Meads:** we'd failed to get to this RSPB reserve for our last visit due to travel disruption but we were keen to try again this time and catch the kingfisher at fledgling time. And we were not disappointed. We had to wait patiently for 40 minutes before suddenly



there was a quick flash of iridescent blue and a pose for us on a branch just in front of the hide. Well worth the wait. Thanks to Jenny for the photos. Even if we hadn't seen the kingfisher it would have been a good visit with 40 species spotted. A special welcome also to the two new group members!

## May

**Regents Park:** strangely a low turnout but for those attending a good visit with 37 different birds including a woodpecker and a rare visitor, not seen for two years there, an Iberian Chiffchaff — we came across a small group of twitchers who'd rushed to see and hear it and pointed it out to us. How about that!

**Rainham Marshes:** this day was hot, but with a bit of a northerly breeze, so was perfect. Rainham is always a good visit but this time proved particularly successful with 45 species spotted. Whitethroat was a good spot but also nice seeing the marsh harriers dive bombing the gulls.

## June

**Woodberry Downs:** we returned for our monthly local visit to our most local reserve. The highlights at this time of year are terns and reed warblers — many noisy reed warblers! With the number of them, these normally elusive birds could be spotted, unlike the Cetti's warbler which as always was heard but not spotted. Always a good stroll with a good cafe at the end.

## July

**Regent's Park:** the hot weather meant a change of plan and a visit back to Regent's Park.

**Brent Reservoir:** we tried again to reach the Welsh Harp and this time trains were running. Not many came, possibly due to the very hot weather. One hide was locked but the other (in the North end) was open. A reasonable range of 'spots' was achieved.

## August

**Fisher Green, Cheshunt:** on a very hot day, we returned after a year since our last visit, to the Lee Valley. We started from Cheshunt and weaved our way to the Discovery Centre at Fisher Green. Never the best time of year (too much foliage) and with the heat the birdlife, sensibly, was hiding in the shade. However we still had a reasonable count and it was very tranquil. But after our picnic at the Discovery Centre it was time for the humans to head for shade as well with another weave through the various paths and canalside back to Cheshunt.

**Thurrock Thameside:** never the best time of year for birdwatching we thought as we set off from East Tilbury — a hot day, loads of vegetation, no migratory birds —

but it turned out rather well. It's a bit of a trudge in, over three miles, but we passed some interesting old gravel pits (with low water levels following the drought) with great open skies. Having reached the Reserve Centre for refreshments we were initially disappointed as the tide was in. However it was on the turn and as the water level quickly dropped we were soon viewing avocets, shelduck, egrets, in great quantities. A count overall of 37 was quite a surprise but shows what can be achieved even at this time of year. It could have been higher if we'd been able to verify the various sightings of birds of prey. We would have then added a falcon, buzzard and sparrowhawk.

## **September**

**Woodberry Downs:** our local visit this month was to this favourite reserve. Water levels still seemed low as we strolled around the reservoir. Not too many woodland birds were spotted but a good range of ducks, including many grebes (small and great crested). There were also many pochards (reminding us of Chris's work on their migration paths) but with widgeon also there, providing an identification challenge.

**Crossness:** we returned to the south side of the Thames and used the new Elizabeth line to get quickly to the start point at Abbeywood. We walked through Southmere Park to see the ducks on the Mere, then cut down to the Thames Path on the estuary. The tide was out so we were greeted with the sight of many birds feeding on the mudflats. Not only were there many shelducks and lapwings but also many godwits. We strolled along east past Crossness pumping station (holding our noses) before turning inland through Crossness Nature Reserve to the pub for a late lunch then home. A good count of 36 including sparrowhawk and kestrel. We even beat the rain home.