

Pagham Harbour West Sussex (day trip)

Naturetrek Tour Report

18th February 2022



Water Rail



Wigeons

Tour report and images by Jonathan Mycock



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Species highlights (5+): Brent Goose, Marsh Harrier, Golden Plover, Avocet and Water Rail.

Summary of the day

Jonathan met the seven clients at 09.30, and after brief introductions the group set off.

Firstly, we took the trail behind the visitor centre, leading to Red Barn Ditch, where a Little Egret was fishing. After several minutes of viewing from different directions, a Water Rail was spotted, creeping along the edge of the stream. Upon reaching the saltmarsh at the NW end of the harbour, we had our first views of the wintering wildfowl – Mallard, Teal and Wigeon, the latter making their musical whistling calls. The tide was very high, and we watched a group of Black-headed Gulls catching small fish fry in front of us.

The new hide gave good views of the Siddlesham Pool opposite, where good numbers of Teal and Shoveler were roosting along the margins. The field behind held a flock of ca. 100 Wigeon, grazing the wet grassland, whilst in the shallow pool a group of Avocets were feeding by upending in a duck-like manner! Crossing the tidal creek, where some Coot were feeding, we walked alongside Long Pool, which held a lovely pair of Tufted Duck and a whinnying Dabchick. Behind us, above the arable fields, several Skylarks flew by, together with a few Meadow Pipits.

Further on we obtained views of the middle shore of the estuary, where a flock of ca. 30 Avocets were feeding, together with Oystercatchers, Curlew and Shelduck on the mudflats.

As the tide was very high at this point, there were many birds on the wing, displaced by the rising water. Hundreds of Brent Geese were flying to and fro to the north, whilst amongst the saltmarsh plants, a lot of noisy Redshank were feeding, together with several Curlew.

We had three or four sightings of hunting female Marsh Harriers, but it was difficult to know whether these were separate individuals or repeat views of one or two birds. We reached the lower part of the estuary in time for lunch, where the bird hide overlooking the saltmarsh and islands proved very convenient.

The tide was starting to turn, and as the edges of the mud were uncovered, flocks of Dunlin and Grey Plover flew back and forth. We also managed to spot a few Ringed Plover feeding along the sandy shore and occasionally flying around in a display flight. On one of the islands a group of Cormorants stood, some with their wings held out to dry in their 'Heraldic Pose'.

The sandy islands held a variety of gulls, including Black-headed Gull, Mediterranean, Herring and Great Black-backed, in increasing order of size! A walk down to the shingle beach proved rather bracing in the strong wind, but we were rewarded with a flock of Turnstones and a few Grey Plover along the tideline. On the sea three Red-breasted Mergansers and a Great-crested Grebe were fishing.

A total of 64 bird species were either seen or heard during the day.

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Avocet