

Fleet Pond & Lowland Heaths (Day Trip)

Naturetrek Tour Report

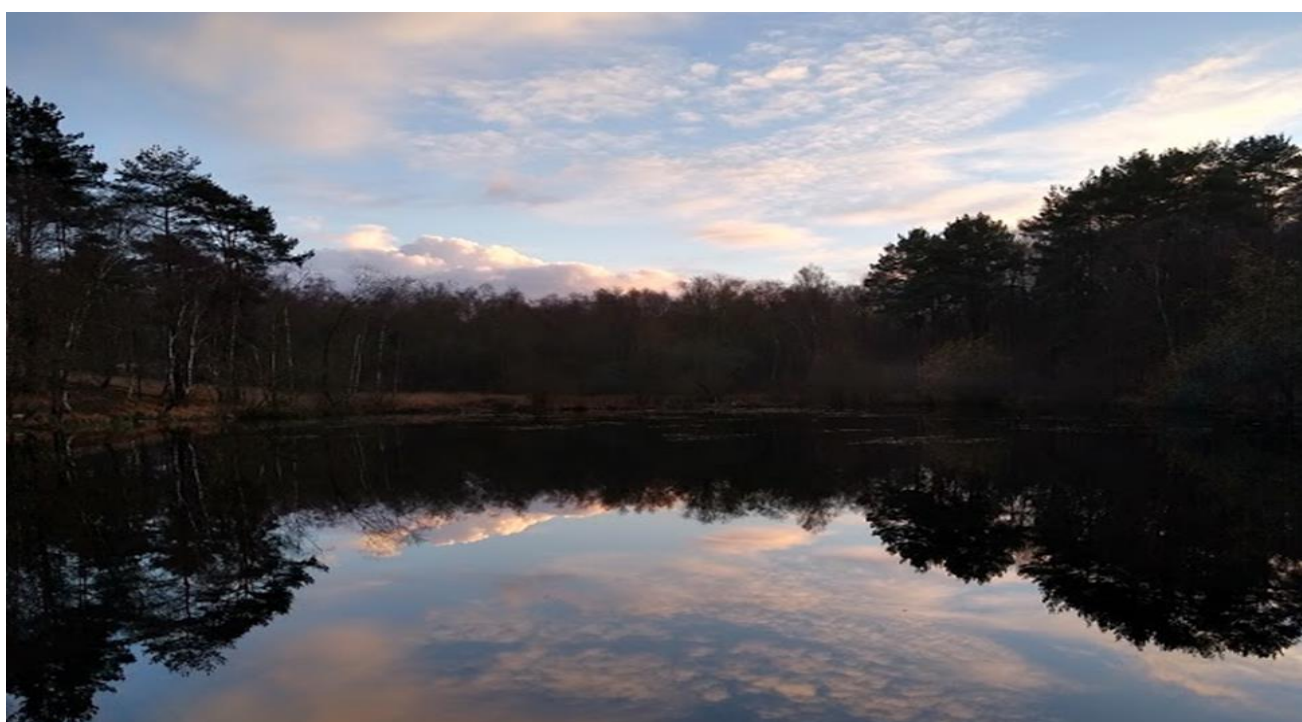
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Firecrest



Redwing



Report & Images compiled by Martin Pitt



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Summary

The day trips followed the same format, a morning walk around the largest freshwater lake in Hampshire, namely Fleet Pond and then an afternoon visit to the nearby restored Lowland heath.

The formation of Fleet Pond is shrouded in a bit of mystery but it is assumed to one of two fish ponds dug in the 12th or 13th Century on the headwaters of tributaries of the River Blackwater, that flows North-west and ultimately to the Thames. The whole area drains the lowland heaths that form part of the Thames Basin heaths SPA (Special Protection Area) but as any visit to Fleet Pond shows the remaining habitat here is jammed between the railway, MOD land, including Farnborough airfield, and the town of Fleet itself. Despite this it is one of the foremost wildlife sites in North Hampshire and is well managed by the community lead Fleet Pond Society.

Just over a third of the local nature reserve is the pond itself, however it forms an interesting patchwork of habitats from heath and succession woodland, through to alder carr. Around the pond a reedbed and a series of island provides a greater potential mix of species. A path enabled easy access to all of these areas and we spent the morning ensuring we covered each area carefully.

Four miles to the north is an area of dry lowland heath that has been restored to its former glory at Yateley. This habitat needs constant attention to maintain it in peak condition for the specialist flora and fauna. Although spring is the peak time for both birds and especially reptiles there is always something of interest on the areas of heather and flowering gorse, or around Wyndham's Pool.

Overall, we recorded 63 species of bird, 2 species of mammal together with an interesting mix of habitats and fungi, & plants, many of which are limited to lowland heathland – that most endangered of UK habitats.

Day 1

Tuesday 8th December

Thick fog greeted us as we arrived, but despite it swirling around for the first hour or so, it soon cleared to leave a clear sunny day. Before we left the car park, we could hear Redwings zipping over-head, and we paused to watch a Mistle Thrush defending a fruiting holly tree from all other birds. The first part of woodland includes mature oaks and is attractive to tit flocks, and so we soon found one dominated by Long-tailed Tits, however it was the Nuthatches whose noisy calls demanded attention. We headed down the boardwalk through the Alder carr and arrived at our first view of the pond at Sandy Bay, where only two cormorants could be seen on the island. A recent fish die-off had affected numbers on the pond itself. Water Rails could be heard calling, but as always seeing one was beyond us.

We headed down the Gelvert Stream to the far south of the reserve and to the Wood Lane Heath, a recently restored piece of damp heather dominated heath. Surprisingly a Dartford warbler called and showed tantalising glimpses in the heather. Whilst trying to get better views we found both a pair of Stonechat and a couple of Roe deer, evidence of the success of the conservation work. We headed further around the west side of the pond, and

here where the hollies dominate, we were able to find a couple of foraging Firecrests. The views of the pond are best from this side, but waterfowl numbers were low, however a flyover Marsh Harrier being mobbed by crows was a nice surprise. By Bookly stream, we watched the Siskin flock, probably 40 or so strong, feeding on the alder cones, their green/yellow colours glowing in the sunlight.

After lunch we headed across to Yateley Heath. The heath was remarkably quiet and it was noticeable how quickly dusk was coming in. We found a Green Woodpecker and a hunting Sparrowhawk. A few Herring gulls flew over, no doubt heading for the roost further up the Blackwater valley. And with that we headed to the car park and home.

Day 2

Wednesday 9th December

Another foggy start but again is gradually cleared but stayed overcast during the day. As on the previous day the Mistle Thrush was defending 'its' holly tree from all comers. The tit flocks were quieter, but we found a Stock Dove already staking its territory and a pair of Kingfishers were fishing the small stream on the edge of the Alder carr.

After yesterday's excitement at Wood Lane Heath, the area was very quiet today and we headed up the west side of the pond. Again, with a little effort, we managed to find Firecrest and a Red Kite flew over. Over-looking the pond itself, it was clear that a few more ducks were present and we managed to add Pochard and Gadwall to the ubiquitous Mallard and Tufted Ducks. A bit of commotion with a pair of Coots lead to us finding a Water Rail, for once standing out in view on the edge of the reeds.

The Siskin flock was again around Brookly stream and had grown to nearer 60 birds, but with the lack of sunshine viewing was not as good as the previous day. We headed back to the picnic area for lunch and then headed off to Yateley.

The heath was quiet again, but on concentrating on the heath areas with longer heather meant at least we had some response from a Dartford Warbler, even if it refused to show. Unfortunately, the Siskin and, strangely, a lone Fieldfare were only flyovers as well. With the light fading quickly, we walked back to Wyndham's Pool where the noisy pair of Egyptian Geese signed us off for the day.

Day 3

Thursday 10th December

The forecast for the day was always going to be difficult and with light rain and low cloud, the light was never going to show the area at its best. As on previous days, we started with the Mistle Thrush in the car park, although now nearly all the berries had gone from its favoured tree. A flyover Crossbill was a good start as well.

We moved on the singing Stock Dove which was still on station and found some treecreepers in the same area. However, there was no sign of yesterday's Kingfishers. In fact, apart from a number of Redwings around the fruiting trees and a couple of showy Great Spotted Woodpeckers the woods were very subdued.

The Siskin flock was still feeding on the Alder cones at Brookly stream, but they were in the tops of the trees and we stayed awhile to try and get better views. At least this pause enabled one of the local Firecrests to pop into view and work its way around us.

With viewing in the woods so difficult we spent a bit more time looking across the pond. The local Cormorants had increased to four, and Pochard were still present. A small group of Teal drifted into view and careful scrutiny of the gulls yielded four species, the most pleasing being the local scarce Common Gull.

After taking out lunch, we headed over to the heathlands and tried our luck. The weather was still overcast and the daylight drew in very early and with it any activity. Despite trying for Dartford Warblers, non could be found and with the temperature plummeting, we dodged the pair of Egyptian Geese on Wyndham's Pool and headed back to the cars for home.

Day 4

Friday 11th December

As expected, the Mistle Thrush had moved on as the tree was now empty of berries, but in the woodland there were still plenty of Redwings, although most were staying mainly hidden whilst they gorged on Ivy berries. We spent time trying to track the tit flock and ended up with a mix of species including treecreeper and Nuthatch, before adding the Stock Dove that was showing unseasonal interest in a nesting site.

On this circuit we came upon the Siskin flock before we got to the Brockly stream and they hung around at head height for a while, but still we couldn't find any of the Redpolls that had been around earlier in the winter. With a bit of effort and a false alarm with a Goldcrest, we managed to find one of the local Firecrests and it circled us for a while giving excellent views.

The wildfowl numbers on the pond itself showed little increase, but we now found Shoveler, Gadwall and Pochard to add to the mix. Again, the gull numbers were low, but at least the four species present made up in variety what was lacking numerically.

After lunch we headed over to Yateley and tried the heathland once again. It seemed that in the chill, the local Dartford Warblers were determined not to show, but more Siskin and at last a few Redpolls did show. We finished the tour with a showy male Stonechat, bring a bit of colour as night started to fall.



Fleet Pond

Checklist

	Common name	Scientific name	Trips	8	9	10	11
	Birds						
1	Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	✓	A		A	A
2	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	✓	A	A		A
3	Egyptian Goose	<i>Alopochen aegyptiaca</i>	✓	A,B	B	B	B
4	Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>	✓				A
5	Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>	✓		A		A
6	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	A,B	A,B	A,B	A,B
7	Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	✓			A	
8	Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>	✓		A	A	A
9	Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>	✓	A	A	A	A
10	Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	✓	A	B(H)		A
11	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓			A	A
12	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	✓	A	A	A	A
13	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	✓	B			
14	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	✓	A			
15	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	✓		A		
16	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	A			
17	Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>	✓	A(H)	A	A(H)	A(H)
18	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	✓	A	A,B	A	A,B
19	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	✓	A	A	A,B	A,B
20	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	✓	A	A	A	A
21	Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>	✓			A	A
22	Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	✓	B		A	A
23	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	✓			A	A
24	Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓		A	A	
25	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	A,B	A,B	A,B	A,B
26	Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>	✓	A	A	A	A
27	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓				A
28	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	✓		A		
29	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	✓	A	A	A,B	A
30	Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>	✓	A,B		B	
31	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	✓	A,B	A,B	A,B	A,B
32	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	A,B	A,B	A,B	A,B
33	Eurasian Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	✓	A	A	A,B	A,B
34	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	✓			B	
35	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓	A,B	A,B	A	A,B
36	Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>	✓	A	A	A	A
37	Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	✓	A,B	A,B	A,B	A,B
38	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓	A,B	A	A,B	A,B
39	Dartford Warbler	<i>Sylvia undata</i>	✓	A	B(H)		
40	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	✓	A,B	A,B	A,B	A,B
41	Common Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>	✓	A	A	A	A
42	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>	✓	A	A	A	A
43	Eurasian Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>	✓			A	A
44	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	✓	A	A,B	A,B	A,B
45	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>	✓	A	A	A,B	B
46	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓		A	A	
47	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	✓	A	A	A	
48	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	✓			A	A
49	Redwing	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>	✓	A,B	A	A,B	A,B

	Common name	Scientific name	Trips	8	9	10	11
	Birds						
50	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	A,B	A	A,B	A
51	Fieldfare	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>	✓		B		
52	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	A,B	A,B	A	A
53	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	✓	A			B
54	Duncock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	✓			A	
55	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	✓	A			A
56	Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	✓				A
57	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	A,B	A	A,B	A
58	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	A,B	A	A,B	A,B
59	Red Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>	✓			A	
60	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	✓	A		A	
61	Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>	✓	A	A,B	A	A,B
62	Lesser Redpoll	<i>Acanthis cabaret</i>	✓				B
63	Common Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	✓	A		A(H)	
	Mammals						
1	Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>	✓	A			
2	Grey Squirrel	<i>Sciurus carolinensis</i>	✓	A,B	A,B	A,B	A,B