

## NATURETREK DAY WALK REPORT

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**Suffolk: Minsmere RSPB reserve (Guides: David Walsh and Brian Small)**

**Saturday 17th February 2024**

### **Highlights**

- **Multiple sightings of Marsh Harriers including a 'sky dancing' male**
- **Superb close views of Bearded Tits at Island Mere**
- **Singing Woodlarks on Whin Hill**
- **A Bittern flypast (with another on the ground at dusk)**
- **A pair of Cranes in flight then feeding on south levels**
- **Goosanders and Avocets on the scrape**

We met in the car park at 9am and signed in at reception. It was mild, calm and bright and I decided to break with tradition and leave the scrape until the afternoon. Instead we strolled west along the trail past the work centre and were thrilled to see a male Marsh Harrier 'sky dancing' above us: what a start! Many of the common resident birds were in song, and we had prolonged looks at a Goldcrest right by the path.

We paused on Whin Hill to see what remains of the Springwatch studio and take in the impressive vista across the reedbeds towards Eastbridge. A Woodlark was singing above us; we managed to see it a little later. Lesser Redpolls and Siskins perched up in the alders and we saw both species through the scope, although the flock wasn't especially co-operative today, moving away into the wet woodland near the 'rhododendron tunnel'.

Another birdwatcher was seen moving at speed towards Island Mere so I went to investigate, and immediately alerted the group to follow. Bearded Tits were feeding right by the boardwalk, and we had incredible views at point blank range for several minutes, a real privilege. We then checked out the woodland as far as Scotts Hall, seeing a Peregrine high

above us, before returning to the hide. A Snipe was typically hard to spot in the reeds but was fun to see through the scope; we discussed why it 'bobbed'. On the water we enjoyed watching the Whooper Swans 'upending' to feed,



Eventually we tore ourselves away and potted along through south belt; it had clouded over and the woodland birds were quieter than earlier, but we managed to find a pair of Treecreepers. We were very fortunate to see a Bittern flying over the reeds from Bittern Hide; such sightings are at best irregular during the winter.

We were pleased to find the tearoom open after its recent refurbishment and enjoyed a variety of splendid fare; remarkably for this time of year it was mild enough to sit outside!

Recharged, we headed through the bushes and along north wall, making haste along the accessible walkway to east hide; it was good to reach shelter as the weather had deteriorated. The recent rains meant that the scrape was once again full to the brim. We were pleased to spot a couple of Avocets and enjoyed seeing the dabbling ducks in their pristine plumage; these included a small number of Pintail. A drake Goosander was seen well from the public platform; it would soon be joined by four redheads.

We continued along the dunes, past the sluice heading beyond the south levels before retracing our steps. We found a group of Barnacle Geese and noted a variety of gulls (including mega distant Kittiwakes on the Sizewell rigs). Suddenly two very large birds were spotted over the trees to the north-west: Cranes! Conveniently they headed towards us, showing wonderfully as they flew low in front of the trees before landing on the levels. Although they remained distant, the scope views were very respectable. Yet another candidate for 'bird of the day'.

The sea was quiet, although we were able to compare male and female Common Scoters. Ubiquitous Stonechats threatened to detain us but we were intent on returning for a cuppa before the tearoom closed. Some of us then returned to Bittern Hide, only to find the hoped for Hen Harrier was in fact at Island Mere! A wonderful Bittern walking across the open water was more than adequate compensation; we also saw numerous Marsh Harriers and a large group of Fieldfares heading to roost. At 5pm we declared at the end of an outstanding winter day's birding, much enjoyed by everyone.



**CHECKLIST OF BIRDS SEEN BY THE GROUP (H = heard only)**

Greylag Goose ( <i>Anser anser</i> )	Great White Egret ( <i>Ardea alba</i> )	
Brent Goose ( <i>Branta bernicla</i> )	Grey Heron ( <i>Ardea cinerea</i> )	
Barnacle Goose ( <i>Branta leucopsis</i> )	Western Marsh Harrier ( <i>Circus aeruginosus</i> )	
Canada Goose ( <i>Branta canadensis</i> )	Eurasian Sparrowhawk ( <i>Accipiter nisus</i> )	
Mute Swan ( <i>Cygnus olor</i> )	Common Buzzard ( <i>Buteo buteo</i> )	
Whooper Swan ( <i>Cygnus cygnus</i> )	Great Spotted Woodpecker ( <i>Dendrocopos major</i> )	H
Common Shelduck ( <i>Tadorna tadorna</i> )	Eurasian Green Woodpecker ( <i>Picus viridis</i> )	
Northern Shoveler ( <i>Spatula clypeata</i> )	Common Kestrel ( <i>Falco tinnunculus</i> )	
Gadwall ( <i>Mareca strepera</i> )	Peregrine Falcon ( <i>Falco peregrinus</i> )	
Eurasian Wigeon ( <i>Mareca penelope</i> )	Eurasian Jay ( <i>Garrulus glandarius</i> )	
Mallard ( <i>Anas platyrhynchos</i> )	Common Magpie ( <i>Pica pica</i> )	
Northern Pintail ( <i>Anas acuta</i> )	Eurasian Jackdaw ( <i>Corvus monedula</i> )	
Eurasian Teal ( <i>Anas crecca</i> )	Rook ( <i>Corvus frugilegus</i> )	
Common Pochard ( <i>Aythya ferina</i> )	Carrion Crow ( <i>Corvus corone</i> )	
Tufted Duck ( <i>Aythya fuligula</i> )	Coal Tit ( <i>Parus ater</i> )	
Common Scoter ( <i>Melanitta nigra</i> )	Eurasian Blue Tit ( <i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i> )	
Goosander ( <i>Mergus merganser</i> )	Great Tit ( <i>Parus major</i> )	
Common Pheasant ( <i>Phasianus colchicus</i> )	Woodlark ( <i>Lullula arborea</i> )	
Little Grebe ( <i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i> )	Eurasian Skylark ( <i>Alauda arvensis</i> )	H
Great Crested Grebe ( <i>Podiceps cristatus</i> )	Bearded Tit ( <i>Panurus biarmicus</i> )	
Stock Dove ( <i>Columba oenas</i> )	Cetti's Warbler ( <i>Cettia cetti</i> )	H
Common Woodpigeon ( <i>Columba palumbus</i> )	Long-tailed Tit ( <i>Aegithalos caudatus</i> )	
Water Rail ( <i>Rallus aquaticus</i> )	H Goldcrest ( <i>Regulus regulus</i> )	
Common Moorhen ( <i>Gallinula chloropus</i> )	Eurasian Treecreeper ( <i>Certhia familiaris</i> )	
Eurasian Coot ( <i>Fulica atra</i> )	Eurasian Wren ( <i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i> )	
Common Crane ( <i>Grus grus</i> )	Common Starling ( <i>Sturnus vulgaris</i> )	
Pied Avocet ( <i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i> )	Song Thrush ( <i>Turdus philomelos</i> )	
Eurasian Oystercatcher ( <i>Haematopus ostralegus</i> )	Eurasian Blackbird ( <i>Turdus merula</i> )	
Northern Lapwing ( <i>Vanellus vanellus</i> )	Fieldfare ( <i>Turdus pilaris</i> )	
Eurasian Curlew ( <i>Numenius arquata</i> )	European Robin ( <i>Erithacus rubecula</i> )	
Common Snipe ( <i>Gallinago gallinago</i> )	European Stonechat ( <i>Saxicola rubicola</i> )	
Black-legged Kittiwake ( <i>Rissa tridactyla</i> )	Dunnock ( <i>Prunella modularis</i> )	
Black-headed Gull ( <i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i> )	Pied Wagtail ( <i>Motacilla alba</i> )	

Common Gull (*Larus canus*)  
Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*)  
Great Black-backed Gull (*Larus marinus*)  
Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*)  
Great Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*)  
Great Bittern (*Botaurus stellaris*)  
Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*)

Meadow Pipit (*Anthus pratensis*)  
Common Chaffinch (*Fringilla coelebs*)  
Lesser Redpoll (*Acanthis cabaret*)  
European Goldfinch (*Carduelis carduelis*)  
Eurasian Siskin (*Spinus spinus*)  
Common Reed Bunting (*Emberiza schoeniclus*)



Photos: above, Jay and Long-tailed Tit by the car park; on following page, Stonechat on the beach, Dunnock singing by the car park and another of the excellent Bearded Tit by Island Mere

