

NATURETREK DAY WALK REPORT

Suffolk: Minsmere RSPB reserve (Guide: David Walsh)

Friday 15th March 2024

Highlights

- **Cracking views of Adders by the pond, including a 'Black Adder'!**
- **Mediterranean Gulls and Avocets on east scrape**
- **A range of pristine dabbling ducks to compare and enjoy**
- **A pair of Woodlarks feeding on Whin Hill**
- **Marsh Harriers skydancing at Island Mere and close from Bittern Hide**
- **Stone Curlews in sunshine on Westleton Heath to finish**

We met in the car park at 9am; it was breezy but sunny, with showers forecast for later in the day. Having signed in at reception, we headed to the pond area and had amazing views of three Adders on the sunny bank in front of the Sand Martin cliff. They were still warming up, but relatively active. We were particularly pleased to see one of the rare black form.



The first of umpteen Chiffchaffs was seen and heard nearby, always an encouraging sign that spring is on its way. Having strolled along north wall, we made use of the new accessible walkway which took us to east hide. For the last few months the water level has been extremely high, so it was a great relief to find that, finally, the islands on east scrape were

visible once again. We enjoyed looking at Wigeon, Teal, Shoveler, Gadwall and Pintail; dabbling ducks always look superb at this time of year. We also found Turnstone, Dunlin, Black-tailed Godwit, Redshank, Oystercatcher and, best of all, a number of Avocets just back from having spent the winter on the local estuaries. The highlight for many was seeing a summer plumage Mediterranean Gull; it looked magnificent through the scope.



We briefly looked at south scrape before heading through the dunes to a point from where there is a good view over south levels. Here we noted Little and Great White Egrets and a single Curlew. As we potted back towards the sluice I pointed out the 'Kittiwake hotel' out to sea and wondered if the decoys would attract the real thing this year!

We popped in to south hide and the wildlife lookout on our clockwise circuit. The path from the sluice to the visitor centre was open, for the first time since October, although it remained wet in places. Bitterns were booming behind us but always at some distance. In the woodland we had great views of a Treecreeper, then headed back to the visitor centre for a break; many of us topped up our packed lunches with provisions from the café. The new chairs and tables were well received although we had to seek shelter when the first shower of the day appeared.

Suitably recharged, at 1pm we headed along the entrance road and paused on Whin Hill to see what remains of the Springwatch studio and take in the impressive vista across the reedbeds towards Eastbridge. A pair of Woodlarks was spotted feeding on a ploughed area and we had prolonged views of this highly sought-after species; this was a real bonus! The wet woodland near the 'rhododendron tunnel' produced several Siskins and a confiding pair of Marsh Tits.

We spent a while at Island Mere and noted Tufted Duck and both Little and Great Crested Grebes, the latter displaying. A Common Snipe showed splendidly once we had managed to locate it. The wind stopped any Bearded Tits from showing themselves, but the Marsh Harriers were clearly loving the conditions. Two Red Kites appeared above us as we made for Bittern Hide where a pair of Marsh Harriers called and showed at point blank range. Bittern would remain 'heard only' for most if not quite all of us today.

I decided that there was time to do something different so we headed back to our vehicles and drove the short distance to Westleton Heath. It immediately began to rain, but after a short delay it brightened up and became calm and sunny. We found a number of singing Stonechats; Dartford Warbler and Little Owl would remain species for another day.

Remarkably we found no fewer than seven Stone Curlews enjoying the warmth, my first of the year; the light was perfect.



Just after 5pm we declared and went our separate ways at the end of a top day on the Suffolk coast. We had tallied a large number of species, including some special ones, and seen the majority of them very well.



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

Greylag Goose (<i>Anser anser</i>)	Great White Egret (<i>Ardea alba</i>)	
Barnacle Goose (<i>Branta leucopsis</i>)	Grey Heron (<i>Ardea cinerea</i>)	
Canada Goose (<i>Branta canadensis</i>)	Western Marsh Harrier (<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>)	
Mute Swan (<i>Cygnus olor</i>)	Eurasian Sparrowhawk (<i>Accipiter nisus</i>)	
Common Shelduck (<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>)	Red Kite (<i>Milvus milvus</i>)	
Northern Shoveler (<i>Spatula clypeata</i>)	Common Buzzard (<i>Buteo buteo</i>)	
Gadwall (<i>Mareca strepera</i>)	Eurasian Green Woodpecker (<i>Picus viridis</i>)	H
Eurasian Wigeon (<i>Mareca penelope</i>)	Common Kestrel (<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>)	
Mallard (<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>)	Eurasian Jay (<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>)	H
Northern Pintail (<i>Anas acuta</i>)	Common Magpie (<i>Pica pica</i>)	
Eurasian Teal (<i>Anas crecca</i>)	Eurasian Jackdaw (<i>Corvus monedula</i>)	
Tufted Duck (<i>Aythya fuligula</i>)	Rook (<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>)	H
Common Pheasant (<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>)	Carrion Crow (<i>Corvus corone</i>)	
Little Grebe (<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>)	Coal Tit (<i>Parus ater</i>)	
Great Crested Grebe (<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>)	Marsh Tit (<i>Poecile palustris</i>)	
Feral Pigeon (<i>Columba livia</i>)	Eurasian Blue Tit (<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>)	
Common Woodpigeon (<i>Columba palumbus</i>)	Great Tit (<i>Parus major</i>)	
Eurasian Coot (<i>Fulica atra</i>)	Woodlark (<i>Lullula arborea</i>)	
Stone-curlew (<i>Burhinus oedicnemus</i>)	Eurasian Skylark (<i>Alauda arvensis</i>)	
Pied Avocet (<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>)	Common Chiffchaff (<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>)	
Eurasian Oystercatcher (<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>)	Cetti's Warbler (<i>Cettia cetti</i>)	H
Northern Lapwing (<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>)	Long-tailed Tit (<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>)	
Eurasian Curlew (<i>Numenius arquata</i>)	Eurasian Treecreeper (<i>Certhia familiaris</i>)	
Black-tailed Godwit (<i>Limosa limosa</i>)	Eurasian Wren (<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>)	
Common Snipe (<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>)	Eurasian Blackbird (<i>Turdus merula</i>)	
Common Redshank (<i>Tringa totanus</i>)	European Robin (<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>)	
Ruddy Turnstone (<i>Arenaria interpres</i>)	European Stonechat (<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>)	
Dunlin (<i>Calidris alpina</i>)	Duncock (<i>Prunella modularis</i>)	
Black-headed Gull (<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>)	Pied Wagtail (<i>Motacilla alba</i>)	
Mediterranean Gull (<i>Ichthyophaga melanocephala</i>)	Meadow Pipit (<i>Anthus pratensis</i>)	
Herring Gull (<i>Larus argentatus</i>)	Common Chaffinch (<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>)	
Great Black-backed Gull (<i>Larus marinus</i>)	Common Linnet (<i>Linaria cannabina</i>)	
Lesser Black-backed Gull (<i>Larus fuscus</i>)	European Goldfinch (<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>)	
Great Cormorant (<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>)	Eurasian Siskin (<i>Spinus spinus</i>)	
Great Bittern (<i>Botaurus stellaris</i>)	Yellowhammer (<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>)	H
Little Egret (<i>Egretta garzetta</i>)	Common Reed Bunting (<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>)	