



Devon, Thursday- Sunday, 16-19th May 2024

Seventeen members enjoyed a weekend's birding in Devon, our first time down there for over 10 years. We stayed at The Cliffden Hotel in Teignmouth, where we were well looked after by Joe and all the friendly staff.

Having travelled in sunshine we met, late morning on the Thursday, at RSPB Ham Wall on the Somerset Levels to be greeted by rain but it petered out fairly quickly. This is a fine reserve and highlights here included Garden, Cetti's and Willow Warbler, Chiffchaff, Blackcap, Great White Egret, Little Egret, Red Kite, Marsh Harrier, Hobby, Common Crane, and numerous flight views of Bittern from Viewpoint 1 and we also heard Cuckoo. Other highlights were thousands of Four-Spotted Chasers, with the sunny spells having triggered a large emergence, and we also had 3 or 4 Grass Snakes basking in the warm sunshine in the stonework under the old rail bridge. We had a late lunch and returned to the motorway to resume our journey to Teignmouth. After checking in at the hotel we all enjoyed a lovely meal there in the evening and a few of us after eating, ventured up the road to Ideford Common where we saw a couple of male Nightjars.



Cetti's Warbler, Ham Hall



Four-spotted Chaser, Ham Hall



Cirl Bunting, Labrador Bay

After an excellent buffet breakfast on the Friday the group travelled west to RSPB Labrador Bay. On arrival at the carpark a sea mist drifted in from the Channel but this cleared after a while, the highlights here included Cirl Bunting, for which the reserve is renowned, Skylark, Gannet and Linnet. We then carried on to Slapton Ley but problems with traffic around Newton Abbot and Totnes put paid to us all arriving together. On arrival we parked at The Memorial Carpark at the east end of the Ley and had our lunch. Our first bird was a partially summer-plumaged Great Northern Diver on the sea about 200-300 yards out and seen well in the telescopes. We walked out to the bridge between Upper and Lower Ley and highlights here included more Hobby, Whitethroat, Chiffchaff, Bullfinch, Sedge, Reed and Cetti's Warbler and a Common Lizard. We moved to the other carpark at the Torcross end where we saw Pied Wagtail, our first House Sparrows of the trip, Tufted Duck and Greenfinch and the butterfly enthusiasts found a newly arrived Painted Lady. We travelled back from Slapton to Ideford Common (after more traffic hold-ups) where a walk on the heath gave us Stonechat, Dartford Warbler, Siskin, Goldcrest and Tree Pipit. The group dispersed to eat their evening meals and later a few of us again ventured back to Ideford for the Nightjar. There seemed to be more churring males on the Friday than the previous night.



Chiffchaff, Slapton Ley



Hobby, Slapton Ley



Reed Warbler, Slapton Ley

Another hearty cooked breakfast was the order of the day on the Saturday and we then set off east to RSPB Aylesbeare Common, the other side of Exeter. We ended up in further traffic hold-ups because the Devon Show was on, and unfortunately the showground is east of Exeter. We all arrived eventually and a walk on the heath at the reserve yielded more excellent close views of Dartford Warbler, Stonechat, Yellowhammer, Linnet and 4/5 Common Crossbill. We moved from there back across the river to RSPB Exminster Marshes and had our lunch. After lunch we started walking along the railway side of the reserve but the sky looked ominous and a thundery shower had us high-tailing it back to the cars. We sat out the rain in the cars and then moved up the road to the fisherman's car-park at the canal end of the reserve and highlights here included Garganey, Common Sandpiper, Little Egret, Shoveler and Common Buzzard. Our final destination for the day was a few miles along the river to Dawlish Warren where a short sea-watch gave us another Great Northern Diver, Common Scoter, Gannet, Shag and Rock Pipit. Highlights on the reserve included more Stonechat and excellent telescope views of Cirl Bunting together with an overflying Sparrowhawk, with Sanderling, Dunlin, Ringed Plover and Eider for those that ventured down to the estuary and river mouth. The group dispersed again for their evening meals and most met up back at the hotel for a couple of beers to cap the day.



Common Crossbill, Aylesbeare Common



Dartford Warbler, Aylesbeare Common



Dartford Warbler, Aylesbeare Common

After our last excellent breakfast and saying our goodbyes to the staff, some people moved on first thing and the remainder of us travelled to the Ottery River Regeneration Project at Budleigh Salterton, where they have created a breach for the incoming tide to ingress. This project has only recently been completed and we all thought that it will take a few years to develop and mature. We took a walk along the west side of the area (together with many dozens of others) and the few highlights were Little Egret, Grey Heron, Whimbrel, Oystercatcher and many large gulls. There is an Osprey nest erected in a tree at the NE end of the reserve but even though there had been Osprey sightings in the previous few weeks, sadly we didn't see one. More people left us to move on and the few of us left went to Mudbank Lane at Exmouth overlooking the estuary. Unfortunately, the tide was out and there was a dearth of birds, just a few large Gulls, Little Egret and Curlew out at the river's edge. We did, however, find a National Trust café and coffee and ice creams were the order of the day. Early afternoon the group disbanded and some left for other destinations but a few of us came home.

We ended up with 92 species over the weekend. The weather was pretty good generally, sunny but with the odd shower. Our accommodation was excellent with good breakfasts and everyone found other excellent venues for their evening meals. The traffic was pretty horrendous on the middle two days but the journeys on the motorways there and back were pretty uneventful. Everyone enjoyed

their weekend's birding together, with lovely company, and I'm sure it won't be as long again before we return to Devon.

Ray Evans