



Somerset, 18-21 May 2017

Eighteen members enjoyed a weekend's birding in Somerset. This was only our second visit as a group to this area and as last time we stayed at The Winston Manor in Churchill, south of Bristol, and were well looked after by Andrew and Jane.

We met late Thursday morning at New Fancy Viewpoint in the Forest of Dean and highlights here included Raven, Common Buzzard, Red Kite, Blackcap and Siskin. We made our way down the road a few miles to RSPB Nagshead, where we had our lunch and then spent a couple of hours at the reserve where the highlights were Treecreeper, Goldcrest, Nuthatch, Jay and a couple of male Pied Flycatchers carrying food to nest boxes. We then made our way back to the motorway to travel south to Somerset and a late afternoon visit to Chew Valley Lake. There were hundreds of Swifts over the south end of the reservoir at Herriott's Bridge and other highlights included House and Sand Martin, an unseasonal pair of Goldeneye, Sparrowhawk, Barnacle Goose and Great Spotted Woodpecker. After checking in early evening at the hotel, we ate at a local hostelry.

After a hearty breakfast the group travelled down to the Levels to RSPB Ham Wall. This morning was probably the highlight of the whole weekend with stunning views of Hobby, Kingfisher, Blackcap, Garden Warbler, Cetti's Warbler, numerous flight views of Great White Egret, Bittern and Marsh Harrier, a drake Garganey and a flight view of Glossy Ibis. We returned to the carpark for a late lunch and after eating made our way across the road to Shapwick Heath NNR. On Meare Heath scrape we saw the Glossy Ibis again together with a group of Black-tailed Godwits, some in summer colour, together with further views of Hobby, Bittern, Marsh Harrier and Sparrowhawk plus Gadwall and Wigeon. On the way back to the hotel we stopped off at Cheddar Reservoir. This reservoir is very open and the wind was howling and the birds were few and far between but we saw a few Swallows and House Martins and picked up the third Sparrowhawk of our trip. We all had our evening meal again at some local pubs.

After another excellent breakfast on the Saturday we all made our way south to the new Wildfowl & Wetlands Reserve on the River Parrett at Steart. Highlights here included Wheatear, Short-eared Owl, Stock Dove, breeding Avocet and Little Ringed Plover, Yellow Wagtail, Kestrel and Peregrine. After lunch we moved on to RSPB Greylake where we had further views of Great White Egret, Hobby, Marsh Harrier plus Reed Warbler, Redshank and Common Buzzard. Our final port of call for Saturday was the Somerset Wildlife Trust reserve at Catcott Lows where the highlights were drake Garganey and Wigeon, Whitethroat and Marsh Harrier.

After yet another excellent breakfast on Sunday and saying our goodbyes to our hosts we returned to RSPB Ham Wall. Highlights of the morning included Marsh Harrier, Jay, Little Egret, Great White Egret, Cetti's Warbler, Sedge Warbler, Hobby, Garden Warbler and Garganey and a new bird for the trip, a day-hunting Barn Owl. There were loads of Damselflies and Chasers on the wing when we took a walk around one of the pools. After a late lunch we returned to Shapwick Heath where we saw yet another Sparrowhawk, Great White Egret, Hobby and 2 Cuckoos.

We ended up with 94 species over the weekend. The weather was pretty good most of the time, our accommodation was excellent and everyone enjoyed their weekend's birding together with good company.

Ray Evans

Somerset, 14th - 17th March 2019

Seventeen members enjoyed a weekend's birding in Somerset. This was our third visit as a group to this area and as the previous times we stayed at The Winston Manor in Churchill, south of Bristol. The hotel is now under new ownership but with a few small exceptions, we were well

looked after by Tim and Joe.

After a horrendous journey down the M6 with various incidents we met Thursday lunchtime at New Fancy Viewpoint in the Forest of Dean and following our lunch, highlights here included Goshawk, Raven, Common Buzzard, Siskin and Crossbill. Another highlight here was a pair of Adders sunning themselves on the edge of the path to the viewpoint. We made our way to Cannop Ponds where the best birds were 3 pairs of Mandarin and a lone Little Grebe. We then proceeded to RSPB Nagshead near Parkend. A short walk yielded a few woodland birds but nothing exciting. Having stayed at the Forest of Dean for the afternoon we abandoned our plans to visit Chew Valley Lake for another day and proceeded down the motorway to Somerset and our hotel. After checking in early evening, we ate at a local hostelry.

After a hearty (slightly late) breakfast the group travelled down to the Levels to RSPB Ham Wall. It was very windy but we did have some shelter along the old railway track, which is the main path through the reserve. Highlight of the morning were Great White and Little Egret, flight views of Bittern and Marsh Harrier, Red Kite, numerous Sand Martins, Cetti's Warbler, Chiffchaff, Black-tailed Godwit and various wildfowl. We returned to the carpark for a late lunch and after eating made our way across the road to Shapwick Heath NNR. On Noah's Lake we had point blank views of Great White Egret and the highlight of the day when eagle-eyed Denise spotted a Glossy Ibis and we were all treated to flight views of the bird. On the way back to the hotel we stopped off at Cheddar Reservoir. This reservoir is very open and the wind was howling with heavy drizzle and there was a dearth of birds but we saw a few male and female Goosander and one winter drake Scaup was with a group of Tufted Duck in amongst the hundreds of Coot but in driving rain we couldn't locate the Great Northern Diver that had been present all winter. The weather won and we called it a day and returned to the hotel. We all had our evening meal again at some local pubs.

After another excellent breakfast on the Saturday we all made our way south to the new Wildfowl & Wetlands Reserve on the River Parrett at Steart. The wind was blowing even harder on the Saturday and highlights were few and far between with Marsh Harrier, Kestrel, Skylark, Stonechat, Sand Martin and Reed Bunting being the best with a Roe Deer sheltering from the wind on one of the banks. After lunch we drove the short distance to Steart village where 4 male Wheatears were in a roadside field. We then drove to Chew Valley Lake and with the high wind making tripods unsteady, the highlights were further Sand Martins, 2 Swallows, Goldeneye, Pintail and Common Scoter. We then made a short drive to the dam end of Blagdon Lake where we saw one winter drake Lesser Scaup and a Common Sandpiper. We returned to the hotel and another hearty meal at the local pub.

After yet another excellent breakfast on Sunday and saying our goodbyes to our hosts we returned initially to Cheddar Reservoir. The forecast for the Sunday was meant to be better but the wind was still fresh up on the path around the reservoir. After a little time we located the Great Northern Diver and although it was distant everybody got to see it. We then drove back to the M5 and north to Slimbridge, WWT's flagship reserve, where we spent the rest of the day. Highlights here either side of lunch were Barnacle Goose, White-fronted Goose, Avocet, splendid close views of a Water Rail under some feeders, Common Crane (including un-ringed together with reintroduced birds), Sparrowhawk, Golden Plover, Knot and a big group of Black-tailed Godwits.

We ended up with 89 species over the weekend. The weather was pretty poor most of the time with high winds but we were lucky that the rain stayed off while we were birding. We just got very wet walking to and back from the pub in the evenings. Our accommodation was fine (with some issues) and everyone enjoyed their weekend's birding together with good company.

Ray Evans