

## Pennington Marshes, October 2010

It was 10.10.10 and I suppose we should have arranged to start at 10 a.m. But by that time, a dozen or so of us were already enjoying a breezy day in the marshes. A grey start soon gave way to beautiful sunshine, the contrast symbolising the changing season which would be reflected in the day's birding.

Flocks of Starlings, Goldfinches and Greenfinches were very active over the scrub and grazing marsh. A number of Swallows were hawking over the area for most of the day, together with a few House Martins. Other small-bird activity during the day included a distant flock of Linnets and plenty of Meadow Pipits, but careful checks found us both Rock and Water Pipits too. The odd Grey Wagtail and a few Pied Wagtails were appreciated, but we were somewhat surprised to find a late Yellow Wagtail among the cattle, especially one without a tail! Less surprising were several passage Wheatears.

The sea-watching was not too productive, though there was one very active and elusive Red-throated Diver to confuse with two feeding Cormorants.

There were plenty of the more common ducks in the pools, though the odd Pintail drake in partial eclipse proved a challenge and a good find. There were only modest numbers of Brent Geese, which were easily outnumbered by Canada Geese, whose grazing-neighbour was a Roe Deer.

Waders were a better bet generally: one of the pools by the path produced a male and a female Ruff, as well as long views of a Water Rail. Around the grazing marshes were several Curlews and Little Egrets. On a rising tide, the off-shore shingle-bars sported an assortment of Great Black-backed Gulls, Grey Plovers, Ringed Plovers, Oystercatchers, Knot and Dunlin, with eight Avocets making a brief touch-down. The patch of shingle beach near the breakwater produced several Turnstones and one Sanderling. The pools were even more rewarding, because among the larger numbers of Black-tailed Godwits, Redshanks and others were a few Greenshanks and one juvenile Little Stint.

But the best came almost at the end of the walk, as we returned from the Keyhaven pools. A flock of Golden Plovers had landed in a pool which we had watched earlier. As we stopped to scan them I noticed that one stood out from the others. The most obvious feature was that it was in a later stage of moult than the rest, with shadows of its summer patterns still visible. But it seemed to have a more slender build too. I had seen plenty of American Golden Plovers on the other side of the Pond and the alarm bells started ringing. The difference was obvious to everyone else. Seen through the scope, the ground coloration of the mantle was distinctly greyish-brown, rather than the bright gold of the surrounding birds. I couldn't believe my luck when the bird raised its wings to show a greyish under-wing shading which was much darker than that shown by one of its neighbours. Moult plumage is not covered well in reference books, but I could find nothing in them that evening to change my initial diagnosis. It had been a very lucky find to conclude a pleasant day out.

*Ray Reedman*