

Joint BOC/NDOC trip to Titchfield Haven, 6th February 2023

This was an NDOC day, to which BOC had been invited. In the event, 24 people turned up, so to relieve pressure on the hides etc, we split into two groups, with Gray Burfoot taking the BOC contingent for a short session on Brownwich Cliff before visiting the interior of the site. We met the others back at the car park for lunch and shared notes. After a bit of sea-watching, we then visited the east side hides while they tackled the inner reserve.

To say the conditions were perfect is no exaggeration. Sea-viewing was clear for a long way out and the water flat. Many of the birds we found were Great Crested Grebe, as well as the odd Cormorant, but over the day there were regular views of Eider. Others species reported included: a small flock of Common Scoter; a single Slavonian Grebe; and a Great Northern Diver, this last quickly lost in the glitter on the water. There were a few Brent Geese from time to time, but our best views of those had been of a small flock grazing behind Brownwich Cliffs.

The shingle beach produced two small flocks of Sanderling, while the harbour had its usual contingent of Turnstone, Gadwall and Mallard.

From the various hides there were plenty of ducks, waders and gulls. Most of the gulls were Black-headed. There were a few Common Gull, but just odd representatives of Herring and Lesser Black-backed. Wigeon, Teal, Shoveler and Shelduck were fairly plentiful. A great crowd of Lapwing and Oystercatcher obscured just two Avocet, a handful of Black-tailed Godwit and a few Dunlin. A distant Raven was also reported by some as we identified a few raptors further up the valley.

Later in the day there were just two Curlew on the marshy grass at the inner end of the site near the Panhandle, where, from time to time one of two Marsh Harrier would sweep around on the lookout for the unwary among the many birds that sprang into the air at their approach. The presence of at least one Buzzard and one Kestrel kept things lively. We also watched a Fox stalk some wary Canada Geese from a sedge-rimmed gully. It was all fascinating but there were no big dramas.

As for the smaller birds, they were not that numerous: we saw a couple of Skylark behind the cliffs and two Stonechat on the marsh, but the star turn was the tiniest bird of the day. As we left Meadow Hide, a Firecrest entertained us for several minutes as it foraged on bare branches of a willow. It was just too lively for my camera skills, but we all agreed that we all had the best possible views of that super little bird.

We made contact with NDOC to exchange notes before we left, and some of them joined us at the Bridge Street car park at Titchfield for Gray's 'guaranteed' Barn Owl. And there they were in a split oak just as they were last time we tried. One set off to hunt while we watched. Meanwhile in the nearby pool there were several beautiful Pintail. There was also a gathering of Pied Wagtail on fence structures, with many more feeding among a flock of goats on a nearby slope: it seemed to be a pre-roost gathering. A fly-by Buzzard and a Stock Dove were our last sightings there,



Barn Owl © Ray Reedman

but as we packed our gear a Green Woodpecker called just once and Song Thrush sang us out with a lazy, early-season song.

It was good to be part of another combined outing of this sort. It was also good to welcome along a newly-joined couple and to be out with so many old friends, including two who were back to activity after spells of bad health. A day like that is a dose of medicine in itself.

Thanks to Bob Lyle and his gang for their hospitality and thanks also to Gray, both for his chauffeuring and for his impromptu organisation of our part in the day.

Ray Reedman