

BOC Walk: Little Marlow Gravel Pit, 10th March 2022

Ten BOC members - a mix of old and new hands – gathered on a distinctly spring-like mild and sunny morning. It was a real pleasure to feel that we were at last back to something like normality.

As we gathered, a Song Thrush was singing nearby and another greeted us in the field to the north of the lake, but both stayed well-hidden. Meanwhile the sky seemed full of Red Kite - Brian counted 25 - and there were three Buzzard up as well. A huge flock of Woodpigeons was feeding on far side of the field and Robert spotted a few Stock Dove before they flew off. The odd Skylark was also recorded.

There were other species singing too, notably several Chiffchaff, to me the true herald of spring. As I tried to locate one of those, the binoculars picked up a Long-tailed Tit with nesting material in its tiny beak. Later there was a Brimstone butterfly on the wing. It really did seem like spring!

All around the lake margins there was plenty of evidence of other familiar song birds, which included the distinctive voice of the Nuthatch and the wheeze of a few Greenfinch. The thin warble of a Goldcrest was so close that we were almost startled. While we followed the movements of more than one of them, we discovered a silent male Blackcap. The canopy also held a couple of Great Spotted Woodpecker and echoed at least once to the yaffle of a Green Woodpecker.

The lake, of course, was the focus of a lot of attention. The most striking feature was the island heronry, where there were at least seven nests and about 20 tenants. There were even more Cormorant and far more of their guano-trimmed nests. My impression was that the Heron are now somewhat out-gunned on that site.



Cormorants © Ray Reedman

There was an assortment of winter ducks still present in small numbers, including Shoveler, Gadwall, Teal, Tufties, Wigeon and Pochard, but there were also two pairs of very handsome Shelduck. Mute Swans, Canada, Egyptian and Greylag Geese were all represented by a few individuals.

However, the spit was white with gulls, mostly Black-headed and most of those already living up to their name. There were just a few larger gulls of various ages and I was hoping that a recently reported Caspian Gull might still be around. As we scanned from the east bank, Robert drew in a sharp breath and almost whispered his find. We all then hastened to pay close attention to the end of the spit where an Iceland Gull stood out as it preened; a body covered

to the wing tips and tail in white. It was a vision that we had just not anticipated. With a short black-tipped bill, a hint of dove grey on the mantle and pinkish legs, it appeared to be a second-winter bird. I managed a record shot which gives at least a passable impression.

When we were able to tear our eyes away from the rarity, the supporting cast included a few Herring Gull and Lesser Black-backed, plus the odd Common Gull, but we seem to have overlooked a near-adult Yellow-legged Gull in all the excitement, because that was picked up and reported later. Behind the gulls was



Iceland Gull © Ray Reedman

a scattering of Lapwing, as well as a few Coot and Moorhen, the odd Pied Wagtail and the like. At least one Reed Bunting was seen in the reed screen behind the spit.

Other species were seen over the lake in the course of the walk – a Sparrowhawk, a Kingfisher and a couple of Grey Wagtail. Of course, it is normal in a group walk for each person to miss some birds, but a straw poll of four participants gave a group tally of about 54 species, which seems quite impressive for a March morning.

Ray Reedman