

Local BOC Bird Walk at Padworth Lane Gravel Pits, 25th March 2023

We met at the Butt Inn, as the sun came out. Led by Peter Driver we headed towards the canal, stopping to enjoy the flitting Greenfinches before turning right along Mill Lane. The Padworth Lane Gravel Pits are sandwiched between the river Kennet (south), and the Kennet and Avon Canal (north) with Mill Lane and Padworth Lane either side.



Mill Lane, lined with tall trees coming into bud, was fresh from the recent rain and alive with calls from: Great Tit, Blue Tit, Chiffchaff, Jackdaw, Carrion Crow and others. The fourteen strong group paused to watch a Mistle Thrush hop rapidly across a paddock, this was followed by the sighting of a Song Thrush. Further along, following its call, we spotted a Nuthatch, before leaving the trees to follow the edge of the "flooded wood" - a gravel pit with trees where more Chiffchaff were singing loudly.



We rounded the first pit and found the fast-flowing muddy coloured Kennet on our right, its ripples sparkling in the sun. Beyond it, the field sloped to Padworth House and College, large and cream coloured; the older manor house was altered in the Georgian and Victorian times.

On our left was the Padworth Lane Gravel Pit, where extraction stopped in 2010. It is owned by the Canal and River Trust and managed in partnership with BOC to protect habitat for ground-nesting birds including waders. Looking across its waters we could see a variety of duck including: "Tufties", Shoveler, Teal, Gadwall and Mallard, plus Great Crested and Little Grebe and on the far shore Canada and Greylag geese; but if the recently sighted Redshank and Goosander

were there, we missed them. This was not helped by an intruder we spotted paddling around

in the gravel pit on an inflatable, whose presence had probably sent many of the birds to feed elsewhere. However, we did see 40 species on our walk.

We left the lake walking down Padworth Lane towards the canal swing bridge. On our right were the impressive floods beside the twisting river Kennet. On the flooded fields we saw Little Egret and Mute Swan, and the beautiful tumbling displays of flashing white and black underwings of Lapwing.



Several small groups of Redwing flew overhead, and we took turns to peer down Peter's scope at a small flock of Fieldfare perched in the tops of a nearby tree. We then moved on to the canal where we saw a Treecreeper.

Crossing the swing bridge we made our way back along the towpath to Aldermaston Wharf, with a halt to search for an elusive Blackcap, whose song we heard in or beyond the hedge. We passed the newly re-opened canal side tearooms and the adjoining waterways museum. Returning to the road, we moved on for a drink at the Butt Inn (who had allowed us to use their car park).

For the full map see: <https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/media/original/39864-aldermaston-wharf.pdf>, or see the BOC entry <http://berksoc.org.uk/county-sites/padworth-lane-gp/>

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