



THE OBSERVER

SECOS Newsletter

Promoting and fostering the study of ornithology by observation, research and record keeping

Short Weekend - East Yorkshire - 9-10 June

'Midges and Bluster' Trip

This Newsletter describes the SECOS Short Weekend trip to East Yorkshire from 9th to 10th June 2024. The trip was based on a scheduled itinerary. There were no unscheduled local twitches. The weather was mostly sunny with occasional drizzle at Fairburn Ings. At Bempton Cliffs, there were very strong winds. A species list is shown on the last page.

Day 1: Sunday 9th June

RSPB Fairburn Ings

Overview



The Fairburn Ings reserve is located between the villages of Newton and Fairburn, near Castleford. It is bordered by Newton Lane to the north and the River Aire to the south. The name "ings" derives from Old Norse, meaning "damp or marshy land that floods."

The area has a rich history of coal mining, which caused subsidence and led to the formation of open water and marshland in the early 20th century. Designated as an official bird sanctuary in 1968, Fairburn Ings was initially managed by volunteer wardens until the RSPB took over in 1976. One-third of the site has been reclaimed using 26 million cubic metres of colliery spoil. Today, the 650-acre reserve features a diverse landscape including open water, woodland, marshland, wet and dry meadows, heathland, reedbeds, and scrub.

Observations

Around the visitor centre and car park, we observed whitethroat, goldfinch, woodpigeon, and blue tit, while chiffchaff was heard. We then decided to follow the Roy Taylor trail (marked green on the trail map), which offered excellent panoramic views of the reserve.

At the 'Big Hole' pool, we recorded pochard, tufted duck, moorhen, coot, lesser black-backed gull, and jackdaw. A small party of swifts flew overhead. Further along the path, we spotted a single red kite and heard several willow warblers singing. Although green woodpeckers have been seen and heard around the grassy areas adjacent to the path on previous trips, we were unlucky this time.

At the pool at the top of the hill, we added grey heron, black-headed gull, and mute swan to our list. A bittern was briefly seen flying above the trees before disappearing from view. We also spotted a pair of little grebes with three juveniles. In and around the reedbed, we heard a reed bunting, several reed warblers, a Cetti's warbler, and a sedge warbler singing. We had a good view of a bittern as it flew over the path. A common tern perched on a post, and we heard a cuckoo, tawny owl, and great spotted woodpecker. A few hirundines (house martin, sand martin, and swallow) flew overhead.

A juvenile spoonbill landed on the near side of Spoonbill Flash. Its relatively small, spoon-shaped yellow bill, unlike the larger, predominantly black bills of adults, was noted. We pointed our scopes towards some cattle on the far side of Spoonbill Flash and were rewarded with a cattle egret perched on the back of one of the cows. Further along the path, we added Canada goose, greylag goose, shelduck, gadwall, mallard, shoveler, and great crested grebe to the day's list. Around The Moat, many little egrets and cormorants were perched in the trees. Two spoonbills and a cattle egret flew along The Moat, and a great white egret was seen.

Wykeham Forest Raptor Watchpoint

Overview

The Raptor Viewpoint is located approximately 2 miles north of the village of Wykeham, situated along the A170 Pickering to Scarborough road. This viewpoint offers spectacular views over the Troutsdale valley, extending to the forests of Dalby, Langdale, and Broxa. The valley is a regular flyway for passing raptors.



Observations

We squeezed our cars into a small, very crowded car park. Blackcap and chaffinch were singing, and we spotted a siskin. A male crossbill was singing at the top of a conifer, followed later by a female crossbill in the same tree, suggesting they had a territory in the area.

From the car park, a short walk through a coniferous wood led us to the viewpoint. A willow warbler was observed flying back and forth to the brambles in front of the viewing area, likely tending to a nest. While we did see common buzzards, there was no sign of the honey buzzard. Raptor watching demands a lot of patience and time. Unfortunately, we were plagued by swarms of biting midges. Some members returned to their cars to apply insect repellent, but even the usually reliable Skin So Soft was ineffective.

Turtle doves breed in the forest, so we returned to the car park and walked a short distance along the lane towards the old nurseries, searching for them in the clearings alongside the lane. Although we did not see or hear any turtle doves, we enjoyed good views of a singing tree pipit and a yellowhammer briefly perched on a post. Skylark and song thrush were singing, and a distant kestrel was spotted. Returning to the car park, we were once again attacked by clouds of midges, which even managed to get inside the car. We drove away with the windows open to clear them out!

Hotel

We stayed overnight at the Premier Inn Bridlington Seafront, a relatively new hotel located at the north end of town. We dined at the adjacent Cookhouse & Pub restaurant.

A short walk to the seafront before breakfast rewarded a few people with sightings of turnstone, oystercatcher, gannet, kittiwake, black-headed gull, and herring gull.

Day 2: Monday 10th June

RSPB Bempton Cliffs

Overview

Bempton Cliffs hosts around half a million breeding seabirds on its chalk cliffs. The surrounding grassland, woodland, and scrub provide habitat for many smaller bird species.



Observations

We waited in the visitor centre for a few minutes for the rain to stop before heading down to the cliff-top footpath. The bluster made it difficult to walk and extremely challenging to use telescopes. From the superb viewing platforms, we gazed at the dramatic seascape: high cliffs battered by the wind and thousands of seabirds. Puffins made abortive attempts to land on the cliffs, which were covered with large numbers of guillemots, razorbills, kittiwakes, and a few feral pigeons. Many more birds dotted the sea below. Gannets flew back and forth, seemingly unaffected by the wind. A fulmar nested on a ledge while another stiff-winged fulmar

soared close by. We spotted a 'bridled' guillemot with a distinctive white eye ring and a thin white line extending behind the eye. This variant is not considered a subspecies but an example of dimorphism. Although shags are known to nest on these cliffs, we did not see any during our visit.



We walked further north along the cliff-top footpath searching for corn buntings but without success. The wind close to the cliff edge was very strong. Sylvia and Elaine clung to each other to avoid being blown over! The noise of the wind made it nearly impossible to hear any birds.

Occasionally, small birds hurtled through the air, carried by the wind and seemingly out of control. Despite the challenges, we recorded reed bunting, skylark, black-headed gull, swift, raven, meadow pipit, and a juvenile kestrel, but no corn buntings.



Back at the visitor centre, several members watched over the area of rough grass and scrub. We recorded corn bunting, linnet, whitethroat, jackdaw and heard greenfinch and siskin. A few tree sparrows were seen around the visitor centre, and many more could be heard in the bushes. Some were using the special nest boxes erected for their benefit, while others chose to access the roof space of the visitor centre by squeezing under the solar panels and then under the roof tiles.



There's no mention of this 'modern accommodation' in the Collins Bird Guide.



Mike and Jackie stayed for another half an hour at Bempton where an RSPB volunteer showed them some seabird eggs. In the photo, top to bottom, are puffin, guillemot and gannet eggs.

RSPB Blacktoft Sands

Overview

Blacktoft Sands is located on the south bank of the River Ouse, where the waterway widens into the Humber Estuary. The habitat consists of grazing marsh, willow and hawthorn scrub, intertidal reedbed, and mudflats.

Observations

A small flock of tree sparrows was observed feeding on the ground under an empty bird table. Along the footpath from the visitor centre, a reed bunting was seen, and blackcap, reed warbler, and wren were singing.

At First Hide, male and female marsh harriers were seen hunting over the reedbed. Later, a marsh harrier food pass was observed, and two hobbies displayed their agility and precision, darting and swooping through the air in a mesmerising aerial dance. A pair of pochard with juveniles were on the pool. At Townend Hide, we saw pochard, mallard, teal, tufted duck, little grebe, and coot with juveniles on the pool. At Singleton Hide, we added gadwall, shelduck, grey heron, little egret, mute swan, cormorant, oystercatcher, and house martin to the site list. A spoonbill flew across the reserve. At Reedling Hide, a lesser black-backed gull flew over. Near the visitor centre, a Cetti's warbler announced its presence with its explosive song. Before departing, we heard a single chirping house sparrow in the car park.



Thank you

We thank the 22 members who participated in the East Yorkshire weekend, with a special mention to the 6 newcomers joining a weekend trip for the first time. The trip was a wonderful mix of fantastic locations, superb birdwatching experiences, and enjoyable camaraderie with fellow enthusiasts!

Credits – Narrative & Images

Fairburn Ings: RatedTrips.com

Jackdaw: Sylvia Jarvis

Wykeham Watchpoint: Mike Tonks

Seabird Eggs: Jackie Donovan

Kittiwakes: Mike Tonks

SECOS Group: Sylvia Jarvis

Gannets (2 photos): Mike Tonks

Narrative: Mike Tonks

Species List



89 species were seen/heard during the trip.

Green text indicates **10** new species that have been added to the 2024 SECOS Field Trips Total, which is now at **160** species.

Canada Goose	Razorbill	Magpie	Robin
Greylag Goose	Puffin	Jackdaw	Dunnock
Mute Swan	Fulmar	Rook	Starling
Shelduck	Gannet	Carrion Crow	Song Thrush
Shoveler	Cormorant	Raven	Blackbird
Gadwall	Bittern	Great Spotted Woodpecker	Tree Sparrow
Mallard	Grey Heron	Coal Tit	House Sparrow
Teal	Little Egret	Great Tit	Pied Wagtail
Pochard	Great White Egret	Blue Tit	Meadow Pipit
Tufted Duck	Cattle Egret	Skylark	Tree Pipit
Moorhen	Red Kite	Swallow	Chaffinch
Coot	Common Buzzard	House Martin	Bullfinch
Little Grebe	Marsh Harrier	Sand Martin	Greenfinch
Great Crested Grebe	Kestrel	Swift	Goldfinch
Oystercatcher	Hobby	Cetti's Warbler	Siskin
Turnstone	Tawny Owl	Chiffchaff	Common Crossbill
Spoonbill	Feral Pigeon	Willow Warbler	Linnet
Black-headed Gull	Woodpigeon	Blackcap	Yellowhammer
Herring Gull	Stock Dove	Common Whitethroat	Reed Bunting
Lesser Black-backed Gull	Collared Dove	Sedge Warbler	Corn Bunting
Kittiwake	Pheasant	Reed Warbler	
Common Tern	Cuckoo	Goldcrest	
Common Guillemot	Jay	Wren	