

Devon Birds- South Devon Group Bird Walk – Exminster Marshes – 13/12/21

16 birders took part in this, the last of our walks for the year, with surprisingly mild, but overcast conditions and no wind-in spite of what the Met Office forecasted! This meant that we were able to hear and see a lot of the smaller birds that fed alongside the footpath from the RSPB car park, which added to the spectacular total of **68 species during the 4 hour walk**.

As we walked along the path, a mixed flock of **Chiffchaff**, **tits** and **Bullfinch** moved ahead in front of us, fortunately not observed by the **Peregrine** which flew overhead towards the marshland. Scopes quickly became key to good observations, with a female **Marsh Harrier** perched on the far side, closely followed by another one, which startled the **Wigeon**, **Teal**, **Lapwing** and **Curlews** feeding by the ponds and 5 **Egyptian Geese** that flew over making loud honking noises. Further down the track the squeal of a **Water Rail** was accompanied by an equally strident call of a **Cetti's Warbler**, though as usual, they stayed well hidden in the reeds and hedges.

Even though we have had a reasonable amount of rain and the path was quite muddy, the water levels were surprisingly low. This enabled us to cross the usually waterlogged field, stopping by the stile to witness a beautiful **Kingfisher** dive into the pond and perch in full view, whilst it proceeded to knock the living daylights out of a fish, before swallowing it down whole, head first.

In the field, hundreds of **Canada Geese** greeted us as we walked across, together with a leucistic bird and, surprisingly enough, a **Snow Goose**, which was closely observed with key features duly noted. Reaching our furthest point at the Turf, (which was sadly closed!) we observed a wide variety of waders and feeding **Avocets**, while the tide gradually encroached, bringing them closer to us. A flock of **Knot** took a while to identify at extreme range, whilst **Mergansers** were more obvious in the river.

After walking back along the canal bank, the duck in the ponds became more easily identifiable and everyone enjoyed some great views of **Pintail**, **Wigeon**, **Teal** and other winter ducks. Then suddenly a **Redshank** appeared, closely followed by cries of –'it's a **Spotted Redshank!**' Cameras were very useful in the early identification of this relatively uncommon species, however when it was disturbed its 'chew-it' call was very clear.

The final stroll back down the road to a welcome lunch added a few more species to the long list, including an excellent view of **Redwings** and a **Great - Spotted Woodpecker**.

Nick and Sara D'Agorne

Species list below.

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|----------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|
| Snow Goose | Eurasian Coot | Western Marsh Harrier | Eurasian Wren |
| Brent Goose | Pied Avocet | Common Buzzard | Common Starling |
| Canada Goose | Eurasian Oystercatcher | Common Kingfisher | Redwing |
| Mute Swan | Grey Plover | Great Spotted Woodpecker | Eurasian Blackbird |
| Egyptian Goose | European Golden Plover | Peregrine Falcon | European Robin |
| Northern Shoveler | Northern Lapwing | Eurasian Jay | European Stonechat |
| Eurasian Wigeon | Eurasian Curlew | Common Magpie | Dunnock |
| Mallard | Black-tailed Godwit | Eurasian Jackdaw | House Sparrow |
| Northern Pintail | Red Knot | Rook | Pied Wagtail |
| Eurasian/Green-winged Teal | Dunlin | Carrion Crow | Meadow Pipit |
| Tufted Duck | Spotted Redshank | Coal Tit | Common Chaffinch |
| Red-breasted Merganser | Common Redshank | Eurasian Blue Tit | Eurasian Bullfinch |
| Common Pheasant | Black-headed Gull | Great Tit | European Greenfinch |
| Great Crested Grebe | Common Gull | Eurasian Skylark | Common Linnet |
| Common Woodpigeon | Herring Gull | Common Chiffchaff | European Goldfinch |
| Water Rail | Great Black-backed Gull | Cetti's Warbler | Common Reed Bunting |
| Common Moorhen | Great Cormorant | Long-tailed Tit | |
| | Grey Heron | | |