

RSPB Bexley Group – walk – Foots Cray Meadows

Tuesday 6th December 2016 – 9.30-12.30

With fog forecast we were delighted to see 17 members (including 4 or 5 new to our walks) arrive at the car park for this winter walk. As it happened the murk soon disappeared and we enjoyed some lovely sunshine for the 3 hour walk.



Photo Brenda Todd



Photo Jay – Nicky Wilson

Beginning in the Old Stable Block car park gave us a chance to venture into parts of the meadows not visited on recent walks. After a brief introduction to the history of the meadows, and the Friends' Group, visitor/information centre, the possible origins of ring-necked parakeets and the development of the stable block into the luxury home it now is we wandered off towards the old Scout camp field. A nuthatch was heard (just) above the racket of dozens of parakeets: half a dozen jackdaws also made themselves heard. This corner of the meadows is the original stronghold of both species in the Borough. Other than the occasional robin and long-tailed tits not much was evident though the walk itself was very relaxed. We stood on the site of the former Foots Cray Place and observed the avenue of lime trees. Continuing along the edge to North Cray Wood more robins along with blackbirds, song thrush, blue and great tits and 2 or 3 jays were now observed.

Making our way towards the River Cray and Five Arches we detoured via the "new" ponds in the hope of something (teal/snipe) skulking around the edges. Sadly no luck but good to introduce members to these man made habitats within the meadows where in summer, dragon/damselflies abound.

Making our way along the Cray, more long-tailed tits, robins plus dunnock and wren were noted. A group of 12 moorhen were feeding on the grass away from the lake and much activity amongst the crows and black-headed gulls. Now the sun was shining and the reflections on the water at Five Arches made for some great photographic opportunities.



Black-headed Gulls



Photos Brenda Todd

As we stood (transfixed by the earth movement of a mole) we also had the chance to catch up with a greenfinch perched at the top of the willow, the pair of mute swans, more moorhens, coots, a couple of gadwall and a little grebe (two pairs and 3 individuals of the latter two species were seen further along). Sadly Mr (or Mrs) Mole failed to put its snout above the surface despite the mound of earth being left and the adjoining grass being tunnelled.

Continuing westward a little egret showed well, as did a fly by grey heron. A cormorant flew over and a great spotted woodpecker was noted atop a distant tree. Sadly as had been the experience all morning, as soon as the telescope was positioned anywhere near said species it decided to fly away – lesson to be learnt – don't use the telescope.



Photos Nicky Wilson Little Egret



Mute Swans

At Penny Farthing Bridge a grey wagtail was seen by some, the little egret landed briefly and not one but two kingfishers made a very brief appearance as they flew down river.

The final leg of the walk was across the meadows to the old pond in the corner by Rectory Lane but nothing to be seen on it though the pause in the walk did allow some to see a green woodpecker until it was pushed off by a carrion crow.

So, the walk came to an end, having enjoyed some good weather, good company and some interesting birds it was also an opportunity for many participants to find out aspects of the meadows that were previously unknown to them which is one of the main reasons for continuing the programme of local walks. Thank you all for turning out and look forward to seeing you again.

Ralph and Brenda Todd

6th December 2017.

Birds seen: Little grebe, cormorant, grey heron, little egret, mallard, gadwall, mute swan, moorhen, coot, black-headed gull, woodpigeon, kingfisher, green woodpecker, great spotted woodpecker, carrion crow, jackdaw, jay, great tit, blue tit, long-tailed tit, nuthatch, wren, song thrush, blackbird, robin, dunnoek, greenfinch, goldfinch. 28 species.