



Trip to Donna Nook and Humber Estuary (or Lyndon saves the day)

Report by Keith Falconer

The journey to Grimsby was protracted by another failure of the minibus engine management system. Lyndon coped with it with his usual efficiency and it was reorganised swiftly with Lyndon, Andy and Dave travelling home by taxi and using their cars for transportation for the rest of the trip. We are all tremendously grateful for this service, which enabled us to see two wildlife spectaculars: a thousand grey seals with their pups at Donna Nook and many thousands of plovers, both green and golden, flying over the shining mud of the estuary.



Grey seal and pup. Keith Falconer

The sights and sounds of the seal colony were memorable: with the hundreds of human visitors corralled behind a strong fence, on the other side, within a few feet, mother seals were giving birth, suckling their pups and having noisy altercations with their neighbours. Big brown bull seals lurked nearby waiting for a chance to mate, whilst barrel shaped pups were starting to lose their white coats and had perhaps already been abandoned by their mothers. Surprisingly there was little smell, and the afterbirths were being cleaned up by greater black-backed gulls.

Elsewhere, we saw flocks of brent geese, flocks of teal, fields full of mute swans, roe deer, whilst the sight of red breasted merganser, a fox, hare and barn owl were unexpected. Numerous marsh harriers hunting across saltmarsh – three at once. Far Ings NNR was an impressive base for Lincolnshire WT but bearded tits and bitterns proved elusive. However, a robin feeding from my hand added to the fund of memories of a trip that might not have happened but for Lyndon's resolution of the crisis.

Many thanks are due to Dave and Andy for driving and Sheila and Jane keeping the rest of us in order!

Trips and Walks 2023

See our website for full details of trips & walks.

Trips:

Booking essential. Contact **Lyndon Knott 01905 455222**. On one day trips please bring a packed lunch. We sometimes stop for fish and chips on the way back.

Saturday April 22nd to Tuesday April 25th: Anglesey. Four days and three nights. Departure time to be notified. Full but reserve list operating.

Saturday May 6th: Wrexham Quarries. North Wales WT sites: Minerva & Marford Quarries. Depart Splash 7.30 am. Full but reserve list operating.

Friday May 19th – Sunday June 4th, The Burren (Co Clare) and Connemara (Galway coast). Two nights in Dublin, one week in Ballyvaughan, Co Clare, visiting the Burren and Inishmore island and one week at Clifden, Co Galway, visiting Connemara, Inishbofin and Clare Islands. Departure times to be notified. Full but reserve list operating.

Thursday June 8th: Barbury Castle and Fyfield Down. Depart from the Splash at 7.30 am.

Thursday July 13th: Cothill. Five reserves around the village of Cotham, nr Abingdon, Oxon. Depart from the Splash 7.30am.

Sunday October 22nd: - Tuesday October 24th: The Great Fen & Welney. Three days and two nights. Visiting WWT Welney and exploring The Great Fen. Departure times to be notified. Full but reserve list operating.

Walks:

For more information and to book your place (booking essential), phone **Neil Edwards on 01684 564288**.

Wednesday April 26th: Lower Smite Farm, led by Steve Bloomfield. Meet at 10.00 am.

Thursday May 11th: Eastnor Deer Park, led by Cherry Greenway. Meet at 10.30 am at Woodshed Café directly opposite Castle gates.

Saturday June 10th: Dragons & Damselflies at Ripple Pits, led by Andy Warr. Meet at 10.00 am at The Fisherman's carpark at the end of Ferry Lane from Uckinghall village.

Wednesday July 26th: Butterflies at Monkwood, led by Dominique Cragg. Meet at 10.00 am at the reserve carpark.

Other walks and trips may be arranged at short notice and advertised via the Malvern Group email list and website: www.malverngroupwwt.org.uk. To be on our mailing list, contact malverngroup@live.co.uk

Indoor Meetings, what's coming up:

Indoor Meetings: 7:30 pm on the first Thursday of the month at the Lyttelton Rooms, Church Street, Malvern, WR14 2AY. Adults £2.50. Children free. All welcome.

March 2nd: Kate Wollen: Assistant Ecologist. West England Forest District. *Forest of Dean Beavers; the story so far.*

April 6th: Alice Dean. Unlocking the Severn project. *The Role of Citizen Scientists in Local River Monitoring.*

May 4th: Richard Newton. Leader, U3A Natural History Group. *Great Malvern's Woodford Meadow.*

September 7th: Rosemary Winnall MBE. Wyre Forest Study Group. *Marvellous Molluscs.*

Sandy Badlands.

Andy Harris, WWT Northern Reserves Officer, addressed our February meeting.

For centuries, our sandy heathlands have been dismissed as wasteland, their poor soils were of little agricultural use and they were feared as haunts of highwaymen and bands of robbers. Today, their environmental value and their unique wildlife are seen as something to be treasured.

Andy Harris, the Trust's Northern Reserves Officer, explained how the Trust was helping to reverse the decline in the county's heathland. In Worcestershire, 90% of our heathland has been lost to development or simply left to revert to low quality woodland. Andy described a 10-year management and restitution project that is being carried out on The Devil's Spittleful and Rifle Range nature reserves, the latter owned by Wyre Forest District Council, where scrubby woodland is being cleared, the heath is being grazed by cattle and sheep to prevent unwanted new growth (eg. of silver birch) and traditional heathland plants like bell heather are being replanted. Recently, the experimental movement of soil and seeds from other heathland areas to the reserve has seen a rapid new growth of heathland species.



The Devil's Spittleful nature reserve. Andy Harris



Classic heathland with heather and a mosaic of scattered trees, copses, bare ground, grass and scrub. Andy Harris

Recently extended by the purchase of Dropping Well Farm, the reserve accounts for the largest area of heathland in the county. Skylarks, yellowhammers, woodlarks, tree pipits, cuckoos and the increasingly rare nightjar have been seen, together with common lizards, great crested newts and more than 20 species of butterfly.

The Devil's Spittleful is great for bees, wasps and ants that burrow in the sandy soil. Notable species include the black mining bee *Andrena nigrospina*, a colony of *Lasius fuliginosus*, ants and the hornet robber fly *Asilus crabroniformis*. The reserve is also a paradise for fungi enthusiasts, with over 140 species including pine wood mushroom, oyster mushroom and liberty cap.

A boat trip on the River Exe

Report by John Denham

We left Exmouth for a three-hour trip on Devon's River Exe aboard The Pride of Exmouth, accompanied by Devon WT's Dave Smallshire, an avid local birdwatcher. He proved a knowledgeable and entertaining guide and contributed much to our highly enjoyable day. The boat offered excellent viewing from two decks and we were soon treated to thousands of birds on the mudflats on both sides of the river. Waders of many kinds, including curlews, black-tailed godwits and redshank were seen in abundance, together with brent geese and several common gulls perched on buoys. Large numbers of ducks included teal and a good number of pintails.

Highlights of the day were seals, seven in all, apparently a good number on the estuary. First, three grey seals lying on a pontoon, one almost completely black. Dave told us that bulls are often dark but this one was exceptional. Later we saw four common seals, an adult and three well grown pups. As we moved further upriver, we saw more waders including avocets, godwits, dunlin and several greenshanks. Then, one of our best sightings of the day, a close-up view of a spotted redshank, one of only two recorded in the county this winter.



*Spotted redshank in winter plumage.
David Tipling/2020VISION*

Later, a snow goose was glimpsed, peeling off from a skein of Canada geese. There were huge numbers of lapwing, grey and golden plovers, the latter living up to their name by turning great areas of mudflats into gold, despite the lack of sun. As we returned, a female ruff, relatively uncommon here, was spotted and several of our members saw two Egyptian geese on the wing. A memorable trip!