

A Carpet of Oystercatchers?

Alison Hodge

Well no! A check indicated that a group of oystercatchers is called a “parcel”! However, we decided that the large numbers of oystercatchers along the tide line at Hilbre Island looked like a large dark carpet with bright white flashes and red flecks. So “a carpet of oystercatchers” it was for the day!

This discussion took place in September, when 20 of us visited the three Hilbre Islands at the mouth of the Dee estuary, a couple of miles off the coast at West Kirby. We travelled there and back by train, and careful planning meant that we arrived with the tide already in the distance across the firm sand, so we set off briskly towards Little Eye and, later, on to Hilbre Island itself.

The weather was kind to us. Good clear conditions all day, with plenty of sunshine and a cooling breeze. The group divided, with binoculars and cameras at the ready, to explore the flora and fauna of the area. The islands are of sandstone, attractively ranging in colour from dark purple-red to light creamy yellow, even with some blue streaks. We found many wild plants including bell heather, rock sea spurrey, rock sea lavender, pellitory of the wall and Danish scurvy grass. Birds included oystercatchers, little egrets, scoters, curlews, bar-tailed godwits and skuas.

The seals that many wished to see proved quite elusive but eventually large numbers were seen across the bay on a sand bank toward North Wales, the wind carrying their plaintive calls across to us.

Our 2019 Walks Programme

Neil Edwards

1. This year’s walks programme kicked off with an early morning start at The Knapp and Papermill Reserve on May 3rd. The group was guided by Garth Lowe, who identified bird calls and pointed out the varied habitats provided by the reserve: orchards, meadows, river and woodlands. In all, 32 different bird species were noted with particularly good views of the dippers on the Leigh Brook.

As an extra bonus, Garth took the group to see the nest box in his garden, where pied flycatchers had laid two eggs at the time, although more were expected. Neither of the adult birds were seen but the experience was much appreciated (six young successfully fledged a few weeks later). The morning was rounded off with a well-earned hot drink and bacon roll at the Alfrick Community Centre.

2. Our second walk began at the Bluebell Inn at Barnards Green on a hot day in mid-July, guided by Malvern Hills Trust warden Simon Roberts. He initially led the group along the southern verge of the road towards Guarlford with frequent stops to discuss interesting trees and identify numerous butterflies. Simon also explained the historical development of the local area from medieval times to the present day. We turned into Wood Street, the old drovers’ trail towards the Wyche cutting through the Hills, and identified trees such as wild service, spindle, sessile oak and Turkey oak. Our final point of interest was the horse drinking trough on Guarlford Road, where a nearby mound marked the original position of the famed ‘Friar’s Elm’, depicted in the painting by G P Yeats circa 1890.

3. Our next walk in early August focussed on butterflies in the Monkwood nature reserve, led by West Midlands Butterfly Conservation Chairman Peter Seal. As a prelude, Peter explained that during the 1950s the then owners, the

Harris Paintbrush Company, clear-felled large areas and planted quick-growing non-native trees to produce timber for brush handles. This action re-created traditional coppicing conditions and woodland wildlife thrived. Then in the 1980s the site was jointly purchased by the Wildlife Trust and Butterfly Conservation who together reduced the numbers of non-native trees and widened rides to create a mixture of shaded areas and open sunny conditions, which now provide plenty of food plants for butterflies. Meadow vetchling and bird’s-foot trefoil are plentiful, supporting the growing population of wood white butterflies that were successfully re-introduced to this reserve in 2016. Silver-washed fritillaries and common blues were also seen in good numbers, and dragonflies and darters were much in evidence near the ponds.

4. Our final walk in early September took us to the base of Swinyard Hill on Castlemorton Common, where Nigel Hand led the group in search of the four reptile species that still inhabit the Malvern area. We threaded our way through bracken, gorse and brambles, stopping at various locations to check under matted sheets, one of which harboured a fine young grass snake. Nigel explained the creature’s clever self-defence mechanism; if caught, it releases a very pungent secretion – it gave a very definite demonstration! Once on the open track, common lizards were seen at various intervals, basking on the grassy verges before quickly diving for cover in the undergrowth. Bloody-nosed beetles and bush crickets were also in evidence along our pathway. Whilst searching in vain for an adder or a slow-worm, Nigel provided an extremely informative commentary on natural predation and the urgent need to protect habitat.

The National Memorial Arboretum and Croxall Lakes

Jim Bullett and Beverley Shrubbs

(16th October) After arriving at the NMA and making our way to the Chapel, we first took part in the Daily Act of Remembrance including the last post and two minutes silence, which was followed by an introduction to the site.

The group divided and each had an excellent guide. We were led through the tree-covered landscape to some of the significant parts of the Arboretum including the Royal Air Force area, the Royal Navy area, the various areas for Armies that have served with the British Army and the very poignant ‘Shot at Dawn’ memorial. The Burma Railway and the Stillbirth and Neonatal Death Memorial Garden were also visited by one group. The guided tours ended at The Armed Forces Memorial, which honours those members of the Armed Forces (Regular and Reserve) who were either killed on duty while deployed on designated operations or as a result of terrorist action since the end of World War II.

After lunch we took a short trip to the nearby Croxall Lakes where notably we saw several great crested grebes, a great white egret and a large group of lapwings. The weather for the day was excellent, giving ideal conditions for exploring both the Arboretum and the lakes.

Contributions

Please send any ideas or contributions for future Newsletters to the editor alison.uren@gmail.com or phone 01684 567819



Worcestershire Wildlife Trust

Winter 2019

Malvern Group

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Indoor Meetings 2019/2020

Indoor Meetings are held at the **Eden Centre, Grovewood Road WR14 1GD**. It's just behind the Malvern Spa Hotel and there is plenty of street parking. Usual time 7:30pm on the first Thursday of each month. Adults £2.50 with refreshments included (except on March 5th). Non-members of the Trust are very welcome. The next five meetings are:

December 5th: Malvern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
David Armitage, AONB Officer

January 2nd: Adventure on Puffin Island – seabird tales from the Inner Hebrides
Matt Williams, conservationist and wildlife photographer

February 6th: The Changing Fortunes of British Carnivores
Lizzie Croose, Vincent Wildlife Trust

March 5th: Britain's Wildlife – ups and downs, vanished species and new arrivals
Brett Westwood and Stephen Moss – see advert for more details. (Tickets need to be purchased in advance - £15 in person from our meetings or £15+booking fee online at www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/whats-on)

April 2nd: Beavers in the Forest of Dean – natural habitat engineers
Rebecca Wilson, Forestry England

Outdoor Events 2020

Full details of all 2020 Walks and Trips can be found on the enclosed booking form and on the website. Walks are organised by Neil Edwards 01684 564288. Trips are organised by Margaret Vernon 01684 565079. Booking is essential.

March 12th: Lower Pertwood Organic Farm, Wiltshire
Cost £18. Limit 15.

April 4th (and possibly 5th): Great Bustard Project on Salisbury Plain, and Hawk Conservancy Trust at Andover
Cost £42 including entries. Limit 15.

April 22nd (and possibly 23rd): Ancient Tree Walk at Savernake Forest, Wiltshire
Cost £22. Limit 15.

April 29th at 7.30am (2.5 hour walk): Bird Calls at The Knapp with Steve Bloomfield. Limit 15.

More walks and ambles are organised at short notice and other information is occasionally circulated to our email group. If you are not on our list and would like to be, then please send your email address to malverngroup@live.co.uk so that you can be kept informed. You can unsubscribe at any time.

March – Special Lecture

Design by creativeskewey.co.uk

Photo by Nick Upton © Cornwall Wildlife Trust

Britain's Wildlife
ups and downs,
vanished species and new arrivals

Thursday 5th March 2020 7.30pm
Book-signing in the foyer from 6.30pm onwards
Eden Centre, Grovewood Road, Malvern WR14 1GD

Tickets: £15 from Malvern Local Group indoor meetings (cash or cheque), £15 + booking fee www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/whats-on

From beavers to bee wolves, harlequins to herons, British wildlife is changing rapidly. Join Malvern Local Group in welcoming Tweet of the Day authors **Brett Westwood** and **Stephen Moss** who will guide you through some of the losses and gains of our wildlife.

Kenfig Nature Reserve

Brietta Pinder

On a fine sunny day in July we travelled to Kenfig Nature Reserve in South Wales. A warden escorted us for two hours and pointed out many of the interesting plants that grow in the dunes and wetlands. The grassy areas were covered in orchids: southern marsh, common spotted, bee, fragrant, pyramidal and marsh helleborine. After much searching we found the highlight of the reserve, the rare fen orchid. It is a tiny orchid, yellow-green in colour and very difficult to see, but in one spot we found several hundred in fresh condition. Careful conservation efforts at the reserve have greatly increased their numbers in recent years. Other unusual plants seen in the same area were moonwort, marsh pimpernel, marsh pennywort and skullcap.

After lunch on the beach we walked back to the visitor centre, enjoying many other species on the way including abundant viper's bugloss and evening primrose.