

The Somerset Levels

Naturetrek Tour Report

15 - 17 February 2010



Starling roost by Mark Bretherton



Starling Roost by Catherine Strong



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Tour report compiled by Marcus John



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Day 1

Monday 15th Feb

The group met on Monday evening in the lounge of the Swan Hotel, a charming old coaching inn in the centre of Wells, close to famous Cathedral. After a brief introduction (including a warning about the weather forecast!) we enjoyed an excellent dinner in the award-winning restaurant.

Day 2

Tuesday 16th Feb

On our first morning we visited Shapwick Heath Reserve (Natural England) where we visited two hides, one overlooking the wide expanse of Noah's Lake, the other with views across the reedbeds of Meare Heath. There was an interesting variety of birds, particularly on the lake; the highlights included a Bittern and two Marsh Harriers. Amongst the commoner wildfowl we found several Bewick's Swans, a Long-tailed Duck and a Smew.

After a substantial pub lunch, we drove across King's Sedgemoor to the RSPB reserve at Grey Lake. Here the wildfowl were present in spectacular numbers. Wigeon and Teal dominated but there were also good numbers of Pintail and Shoveler, including superb drakes in pristine breeding plumage. We also enjoyed very close views of dozens of Common Snipe.

We finished the day at Ham Wall RSPB reserve and as dusk fell we witnessed a spectacular roost of perhaps 100,000 Starlings. The flocks were harassed by several raptors including two Peregrine Falcons, forcing the Starlings into coordinated aerial acrobatics.

Day 3

Wednesday 17th Feb

After another delicious breakfast, the second day started with a walk through reedbed and atmospheric carr woodland in a different part of Shapwick Heath. Sadly, we did not locate the rather elusive otters, though we found otter slides and spraints along the path. We did enjoy superb views of a family of Whooper Swans amongst the commoner wildfowl.

After another good lunch at the Ashcott Inn and with the rain closing in, we decided to take a slow drive across the wet grassland of Tealham and Tadham Moors, where we saw good numbers of Lapwing and Mute Swan, though the hoped-for Barn Owls did not materialise. Finally, the group returned to the Swan Hotel with a real taste of the reeds, willows, wet woodland and flooded fields that combine to create the unique environment of the Somerset Levels.

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Birds

	Common name	Scientific name	Feb 2010	
			16	17
1	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	✓	✓
2	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	✓	✓
3	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓
4	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	✓	✓
5	Great Bittern	<i>Botaurus stellaris</i>	✓	
6	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	✓	✓
7	Whooper Swan	<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>		✓
8	Bewick's Swan	<i>Cygnus columbianus</i>	✓	
9	Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	✓	✓
10	Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	✓	
11	Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Anas penelope</i>	✓	✓
12	Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>	✓	✓
13	Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	✓	✓
14	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓
15	Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>	✓	
16	Northern Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>	✓	
17	Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>	✓	
18	Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>	✓	✓
19	Common Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>	✓	✓
20	Eurasian Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	✓	✓
21	Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>		
22	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	✓	✓
23	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓
24	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓	✓
25	Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>	✓	
26	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	✓	
27	Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	✓	✓
28	Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>	✓	✓
29	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	✓	✓
30	Common Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	✓	✓
31	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	✓	✓
32	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	✓	
33	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	✓	
34	Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>	✓	✓
35	Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	✓	✓
36	Black-headed Gull	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>	✓	✓
37	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓
38	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	
39	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	✓	
40	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	✓	✓
41	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	✓	
42	Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba yarrellii</i>	✓	✓

	Common name	Scientific name	Feb 2010	
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43	Northern Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	✓	✓
44	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	✓	✓
45	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	✓	
46	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	✓	✓
47	Fieldfare	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>	✓	✓
48	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓
49	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓
50	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>	✓	
51	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	✓	✓
52	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	✓	✓
53	Coal Tit	<i>Periparus ater</i>	✓	✓
54	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓	✓
55	Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	✓	✓
56	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>	✓	✓
57	Eurasian Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>	✓	
58	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	✓	
59	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓
60	Eurasian Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>	✓	✓
61	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	✓	✓
62	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓	✓
63	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓
64	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	
65	Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓
66	European Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>	✓	✓
67	Lesser Redpoll	<i>Carduelis cabaret</i>	✓	
68	Eurasian Siskin	<i>Carduelis spinus</i>	✓	
69	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓
70	Common Linnet	<i>Acanthis cannabina</i>	✓	
71	Common Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>	✓	✓
72	Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	✓	✓