

GROUP VISIT TO SALTHOLME RSPB RESERVE 16 JANUARY 2023

Our first visit of the year coincided with the very cold snap and as the 7 of us met outside the Bowes Museum it had just begun snowing. After a brief review of prospects we decided to press-on and we went in 3 cars over to Saltholme in the heart of industrial Teeside. During our time there it was very cold but we enjoyed brilliant blue skies and there was no sign of the forecast snow showers.

First stop was in the RSPB's excellent cafe which overlooks The Lake. The pools have been remodelled over the last couple of years, resulting in lots of islands and edges, ideal for various species. We were soon trying to identify the various ducks: firstly trying to separate the diving ducks: female Goldeneyes from Tufted Ducks and Coots; then the usual Mallards from the black-bottomed Gadwalls. Around the edges were lots of yellow-bottomed Teal (the UK's smallest duck) and on the islands, grazing, whistling Widgeon flocks. There were also small numbers of waders: mainly Redshanks and Curlews, and on one island a good flock of the often overlooked Stock Doves.

Downstairs we checked the feeding station which had a delightful flock of Goldfinches, attended by a few handsome Greenfinches; below the feeders the usual suspects: Dunnocks, Robin, Chaffinches and 2-3 Moorhens.



Our next visit was across the wet fields to the double-decker hide overlooking West Saltholme pool; this area is now protected from ground predators such as foxes. When we arrived in the hide the helpful volunteer there told us we had just missed the Spoonbill which had been seen there for a couple of weeks (doh!). A very handsome male Pintail (duck) was 'scoped, and we sorted out various birds : big flocks of Widgeon, out on the fields Lapwings, Curlews and Golden Plovers. On the nearby low islands Peter found a close Meadow Pipit, and we also saw a Pied Wagtail and a small flock of Linnets. We did not see any raptors but the flocks were

occasionally spooked and gave us some wonderful spectacles. There were very mobile flocks of Greylag Geese and we spotted one rather distant Pink-footed Goose.

While most went back to the cafe for a soup and sandwich, 2 of us ate our sandwiches in the (very cold) Phil Stead hide; we had good close views of the very handsome Teal, Shelducks and a Common Buzzard being mobbed by a Carrion Crow. As we drove out of the car park we briefly saw a few Redwings feeding on the ground in the scrubby area

Our last stop of the day was to the viewpoint above Greatham Creek near Seal Sands. We had really good low sunlight there and had quality views of numerous Redshanks, Curlew, Dunlin, Ringed Plovers and one for two Black-tailed Godwits; nearby, sheltering in the muddy creek was a Little Egret showing its yellow toes well, and a Little Grebe swam by. We scanned the salt marsh in vain for quartering Short-eared Owls or Harriers; facing the wind the views were literally eye-watering. The tide was receding and there were still around 20 seals hauled out making the most of the winter sunshine. We agreed it had been a very enjoyable visit on what had been a cold and crisp winter's day.



Left: Teal, Britain's smallest duck