

U3A BIRDWATCHING GROUP REPORT by Andrew Lapworth

Deepdale nature reserve 17th April 2023

A good turnout of 14 of us met in Raby Avenue or the car park in Deepdale on an overcast but dry day. We walked down the slope of Orchard Brae and crossed the Tees on the aqueduct bridge; Dippers flew along the river there, and noisy Oystercatcher pairs flew over.

In Deepdale the feeders were attracting the usual Blue, Coal and Great Tits, Robins and Dunnocks; Wrens were singing loudly along the path. We enjoyed good close views of a Dipper in the beck and also a pair of beautiful Grey Wagtails. Chiffchaff song was conspicuous, but we



found it harder to listen to the flutey song of the newly arrived Blackcaps (the “Northern Nightingale”). Stopping to look at the large new nest boxes installed to attract Goosanders, Charlotte alerted us to a stunning male **Mandarin Duck** quietly perched nearby on a bough; despite his bright and gaudy plumage he was easy to overlook. We thought the female might have been in the nest box. Mandarins have become naturalised in the UK since the 20th Century; in the last few years we are seeing more of them locally along the Tees.

Some of us saw some nearby Treecreepers, and a high over-flying House Martin, newly arrived from Africa. We crossed the bridge over Ray Gill and walked up through the wood to the horse fields, hoping to find our first Redstart along the woodland edge; we weren't in luck with a

Redstart but we did see and hear a Mistle Thrush, a fine calling Curlew and heard a Tawny Owl calling from Deepdale.



Ian left us to walk back but was soon stopped when he alerted us to a male **Pied Flycatcher** investigating nest boxes. Pied Flycatchers are migrants from West Africa and now have a mainly westerly distribution in the UK. They are one of over 70 “Red Listed” birds nationally declining in the UK; thanks largely to the nest boxes installed by volunteers, in Deepdale there were 31 pairs in 2021: a nationally significant population.

On our return walk we enjoyed the woodland's emerging flora, including Moschatel (“Town hall clock”), the Hazel parasite: Toothwort, and some remaining Yellow Star of Bethlehem flowers, a scarce local flower of damp woods.

Our next monthly meeting is on **Monday 15th May**. Details will be emailed to group members.