

BIRDWATCHING GROUP

LEIGHTON MOSS 19 FEBRUARY 2024 REPORT AND PHOTO BY ANDREW LAPWORTH

Eleven of us assembled outside The Bowes Museum to sort car sharing to go to the RSPB reserve at Leighton Moss, in Silverdale, Lancashire. We visited this lovely wetland reserve last summer, but we thought a winter visit would be equally rewarding and so it turned out to be.

After enjoying coffee and snacks in their excellent cafe we ventured out to their “Skytower” to take in extensive views across the reedbeds and lakes. Before we had a chance to climb the tower we enjoyed unbelievably close views of some feeding Redwings (winter thrushes) in the bushes above our heads. From the tower we soon enjoyed good views of several Marsh Harriers (both male and females). We soon heard, but did not see, two of the reserve’s iconic birds: a Cetti’s Warbler was singing below the tower but remained elusive; a small warbler with an explosive and loud call. In contrast we heard the booming calls of a Bittern, a secretive member of the Heron family. The sound is almost subliminal: easily overlooked or not noticed. We would hear the Bitterns throughout the day. The sound of a piglet being strangled told us a Water Rail was hiding in the reedbed too. Sometimes you just have to enjoy hearing birds rather than seeing them.

We visited several well-placed hides along the boardwalks; water levels were very high after the rains. We enjoyed excellent views of many species of ducks, especially some handsome Pintails, Shovelers and small Teals. I really struggled to identify one unusual smart duck until someone in the hide told us it was a hybrid: a cross between a Shoveler and, from South America, a Cinnamon Teal (no doubt escaped from a collection)! Next we watched hunting Marsh Harriers close-by, one harrying a Moorhen which we think was caught. Along the edges of the little islands we found Snipe and Redshanks; overhead: flocks of Lapwings and Oystercatchers.

In the areas around the visitor centre in the afternoon we all had good views of various small woodland birds, including Chaffinch, Goldfinch, Bullfinch and Siskins. In addition to 5 species of Tits we had good views of mouse-like Treecreepers going up the tree trunks and Nuthatches going down them.

We decided not to stay for the expected Starling murmuration; most of us had enjoyed our spectacular local one from the Demenses over Startforth. In total 52 bird species were seen or heard on the day.

