
Birdwatching in Early March

For our Distant-Birding trip we went down to Yorkshire Wildlife Trust's flagship reserve of Potteric Carr. Hardly above sea level at all, this wetland area was an impenetrable mass of bog and water right up until the mid 18th century. Its history since then is marked by a succession of narrow escapes from drainage and destruction. The present day reserve is a protected habitat bounded by busy roads and a railway. As visitors walk the trails there is a 360' view of woodland, wetland, rustling reeds and wide stretches of water but always accompanied by a roar of traffic which can be both intrusive and incongruous. Perhaps that is why the dunnocks sing so loudly: - to make themselves heard! It was a dull, drab day weather-wise, so we were pleasantly surprised to hear so many birds singing particularly in the area by the visitor centre where the well -stocked bird feeders are placed. There, the male goldfinches had arranged themselves symmetrically on the many perches of a long feeder, inviting photographs.

We were hoping for a sighting of a bittern, (we have seen one there in the past) but, sad to say, on this occasion the bitterns remained skulking in the bittern-height, bittern-coloured rushes. We had to make do with the phone pictures taken by the local birders who were eager to show us their close- ups of bitterns that had apparently wandered up and hung about for twenty minutes at a time.

Best bird of the day was probably spotting the first sand -martin of the year on the reserve. We reported it and were told we were the first of 2019 to report a sighting. Roe deer were feeding in long grasses and marsh harriers soared over head. A cetti's warbler uttered its characteristic explosive burst of song and one shot across the path in front of us. Shovelers gathered in groups on some pools, pochard on others. There were groups of teal but no wigeon so possibly any flocks have now flown north. Great crested grebe snoozed on the water with their necks bent over to rest their heads on their backs, whilst little grebes constantly disappeared as they dived below the surface hunting for food.

Despite the noise of traffic this is a reserve well worth a visit.