

Bird Watching in June

The first Thursday of June was a glorious sunny day to the west of the Pennines: perfect for our trip to Leighton Moss RSPB reserve. This is a big site, split into two parts and we began our day at the main reserve accessed through the Visitor Centre. From here trails go off in two directions taking visitors from hide to hide, through a range of wetland and woodland habitats. This is the time when parent birds are busy fetching food for broods still in the nest or persuading youngsters to fledge into independence and the air was filled with the sounds from demanding chicks and of contact calls from family groups.

Over the course of the day we identified over forty species of birds plus deer, squirrels, a weasel zipping across the path and a vicious looking beetle called a Devil's Coachman.

Warblers were in good voice and along the trails we heard blackcaps, sedge and reed warblers and the characteristic explosion of sound from a Cetti's Warbler.

Star of the morning was the marsh harrier, at first visible high above us, but then unexpectedly dropping down to swoop towards the hide thus performing a low level fly-by for excellent views.

From the next hide we saw a perfectly disciplined mute swan family crossing the water; parent in front, youngsters in line spaced evenly, one behind the other following obediently, whilst the other parent patrolled back and forth beside the line.

We regrouped after lunch and drove the five minutes distance to the other side of the reserve where we expected to add to our count of species seen over the course of the day. Here there were avocets and black headed gulls nesting, a little egret feeding, oyster catchers probing for food and the expected line of godwits standing motionless in the water, all facing the same way.

Although there are reports of bitterns taking long feeding flights over the reserve we were once again disappointed. For us the bittern remained elusive.

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