

## U3A BIRDWATCHING GROUP    Report by Andrew Lapworth

On our 17th October field trip to Durham Wildlife Trust's **Low Barns Nature Reserve** nine of us enjoyed a walk around this excellent nearby reserve. The rain stayed off and we were ahead of the gusty winds forecast; we visited several hides and ended the morning in their visitor centre and cafe.

The bird feeding stations were surprisingly quiet. From the first hide we watched the lake with Mute Swans, Mallards, Coots and Tufted Ducks and were entertained by close views of a

Moorhen scuttling around underneath the feeders designed for finches and tits. Having such close views of a Moorhen on land enabled us to see the bright red "garter" at the top of its bright green legs~ it's usually hidden.



Moorhen showing its red "garter"      Photo by Ian Blake

We went on to the next hide where we drew a bit of a blank, except for a flypast by Long-tailed Tits and 'scope views of the rear ends of the Exmoor ponies! The brightly coloured "birds" on the wires turned out to be warning discs on the overhead cables! Robins were the only birds in song: their wistful song in the Autumn is subtly different to their Spring song. Continuing on we noted the Wear was in full flow, and we tested our hearing trying to hear and see Goldcrests high-up in the swaying willows, along with Blue, Great and Coal Tits.

From the double-decker hide overlooking the main lake and with the sun behind us we had good views of the duck, geese and gull flocks. With the 'scopes we could see the bright yellow toes of a distant perched Little Egret at the far end, and we eventually also identified a few equally distant Goldeneye ducks diving alongside Pochards. Before returning to the cafe we heard and some of us saw a Common Buzzard drifting overhead, seen-off by the local Carrion Crows and Jackdaws.

Thanks to Linda Elliot for leading this trip, and Ian Blake for the photos. Overall we saw a respectful 26 species; not bad considering the breezy conditions.



No birds in this bush but an Exmoor Pony doing some "eco-system engineering"

Photo by Ian Blake