

BIRDWATCHING GROUP report by Andrew Lapworth

RAINTON MEADOWS 18 SEPTEMBER 2023

Rainton Meadows, between Durham and Sunderland, is Durham Wildlife Trust's HQ and major nature reserve with a lovely little cafe and visitor centre. It was created when Rye Hill Opencast coal mine was restored in the late 1990s. It's an unlikely setting for "meadows" as it is on the edge of a large industrial park that you drive through to get there. However, when you walk around its grasslands, reedbeds, woods and large ponds you realise what a superb haven for wildlife has been created; "*if you build it, nature will come*".

Five of us had a splendid morning there, despite the prospect of heavy showers; we were in the main hides when we did have a downpour. The large ponds held all the usual suspects: Mute Swans, Canada and Greylag Geese, Great-crested and Little Grebes, Mallard, Tufted Duck and Gadwall, Coots and Moorhens. There was a large roving flock of Goldfinches feeding on the seed heads in the meadows. Of the waders, Lapwings and Golden Plover were conspicuous by their absence, however we did find a couple of roosting Common Snipe. But we were treated to two more unusual and rarer species which we viewed from the hide: a **juvenile Knot** (a small wader) and a fantastic **Great White Egret**. Knots (now officially called Red Knot) are seen in their many thousands on muddy estuaries in the Autumn and Winter around the UK; their huge flocks are one on nature's spectacles. An inland sighting of this bird, newly returned from above the Arctic Circle, was exceptional for Rainton, and we were able to study it through the 'scopes. No 'scopes were needed for the Heron-sized Great White Egret, but we used them to see the detail around its eye and large dagger-like bill, as it successfully caught numerous small fish.

We enjoyed a well-earned lunch in the cafe. Before leaving, some of us went up to the feeding station and we soon managed to see the rare **Willow Tits** (very similar to our local Marsh Tits). Rainton is holding on to a good local population of them.



Great White Egret at Rainton Meadows; photo by Andrew Lapworth