

BIRDWATCHING AT BISHOP MIDDLEHAM NOVEMBER 20TH 2023

For our last outdoor meeting of 2023, eleven of us made the trip to Bishop Middleham for a wander around this historic rural site. We met and parked on the village green by the church, and then walked along Fourmarts Lane. Contractors were working on the sewage farm, and we needed to make way for some big trucks accessing their site. After all the rains, the lane and fields were very soggy and muddy, and there were flash ponds in many of the low-lying fields; wellies weren't out of order!

Crows, Jackdaws and Magpies were soon noted as we booted up, and Blackbirds, Woodpigeons and Tits were found in the surrounding and nearly leafless trees. We stopped and scanned the huge Hornbeams in the lane, but the **Hawfinches** that have frequented the trees in past winters were not found; maybe they will turn up later this winter. As we walked along the lane we stopped to 'scope small flocks of Starlings, Fieldfares and Redwings when they settled in the distant trees. The winter-visiting thrushes were still feeding on the abundant crops of berries along the hedgerows at this time of the year. A high flying Sparrowhawk kept the flocks mobile.

Next we visited the Durham Bird Club hide overlooking Castle Lake; this gives a warm and sheltered place to scan the lake in relative comfort. We were soon looking at hordes of wildfowl scattered across this extensive area. On the hilly slopes opposite were flocks of Canada and Greylag Geese, and large numbers of grazing Widgeon. On the lake we sorted out the diving ducks from the dabblers and up-enders: Tufted Ducks and Goldeneyes in the former; Mallard, Gadwall, Shovelers, and Teal in the latter. In between the numerous Coots hid one of two Little Grebes; there were also a few pairs of Mute Swans.

We returned to the track and walked down to scan the flooded fields and very full drains. We added Grey Herons, Moorhens, Shelduck and the Little Egrets, including a group of 4 huddled together. Eagle eyes found a Greater-Spotted Woodpecker on a fallen tree, Linnets in the field, and a very active group of foraging Reed Buntings and Stonechats along the scrubby edge in front of us. En route back to the cars a Mistle Thrush called as it flew over us, and we saw a Kestrel.

Around 30 species were seen on our visit; we particularly enjoyed the thrush species we saw, only missing Song Thrush. *Not long after our visit the **Hawfinch** has been seen almost daily feeding on or under the Hornbeams.*

In December we held a planning meeting, and have plotted out our monthly visits for 2024. Thanks to all who have offered to lead various meetings.



Bishop Middleham birdwatchers



The Hawfinch present in February 2023