

BIRDWATCHING GROUP

RAINTON MEADOWS NOVEMBER 2024

Report by Andrew Lapworth

Our final field meeting of 2024 was to Durham Wildlife Trust's flagship reserve and visitor centre, Rainton Meadows on 18th November. Thirteen of us made the journey to this unlikely area just off the main road between Durham and Sunderland, and surrounded by business and retail parks. The reserve was created by the restoration of the Rye Hill opencast coal mine in 1996, and now consists of lakes and wetlands, grassland and woodland, all connected by a network of paths, plus DWT's HQ and visitor centre. After getting our coffee and cake fixes we moved to the newly restored hide overlooking the main body of water, and saw numerous ducks and geese, Mute Swans and Great Crested Grebes and Grey Herons. We were surprised by the lack of waders around the edges, and just one raptor, a Kestrel.

We moved uphill to the woodlands surrounding Joe's Pond and saw Long-tailed Tits and a close Goldcrest (Europe's smallest bird); eventually we were rewarded by close and prolonged views of some special birds attracted to the feeding stations: smart male and female Bullfinches (the male's grey and pink plumage almost glowing in the sunshine) and nervous and jittery Willow Tits; Rainton is a hotspot for this latter localised species that is very scarce across the UK. Willow Tits and Marsh Tits look very alike and can only be reliably separated by their different calls and songs. All in all an enjoyable visit on a cold but sunny November day.

In December we had an indoor meeting at Enterprise House to plan our visits for 2025, follow by my illustrated talk on *Birds and Wildlife in Costa Rica*. The colourful Neotropical birds provided some good contrasts to the cold and dark December days!