

JANUARY FIELD MEETING AT LOW BARNES

Our first group meeting of 2025 saw fifteen of us at Durham Wildlife Trust's **Low Barnes** nature reserve beside the river near Witton-le-Wear. It was a cold and chilly morning and pretty quiet with very few birds calling. At the first spacious West Pasture hide overlooking West Lake we were entertained by numerous small birds coming to the feeders, including Great Spotted Woodpecker, Nuthatch and a female Reed Bunting plus Moorhens and Coots feeding on the ground below. Anne spotted a distant strange beast across the far side of the pond which turned out to be first the rear end of, and eventually, a whole Roe deer! Next were treated to wonderful close views of a normally secretive and shy Water Rail. The bird was probing for food in the ground and tangles of vegetation but gave prolonged views almost at touching distance below two sides of the hide. And then there were two, bird of the morning!

We wandered along the path beside the Wear without seeing or hearing much. At the second hide we filled it to scan the still frozen Marston Lake. Alas the two female Smew present the previous week had departed so our best birds there were a couple of Goldeneye amongst the other diving ducks and some well concealed Teal dotted around the scene. To our amazement another Water Rail gave further good views. Back at the cafe we ended our brief visit; not very many birds but what cracking and privileged views of not one but at least 3 Water Rails.

Group's Bird of the month



Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus*. A usually shy bird, more often heard than seen. We often only know it's there by hearing its piglet squeals. Cold weather with frozen ponds and lakes make the rails venture out into the open to the delight of birdwatchers. Seen well and closely its plumage is a subtle mix of blacks, brown and greys, in contrast to its bright red long bill and pink legs.