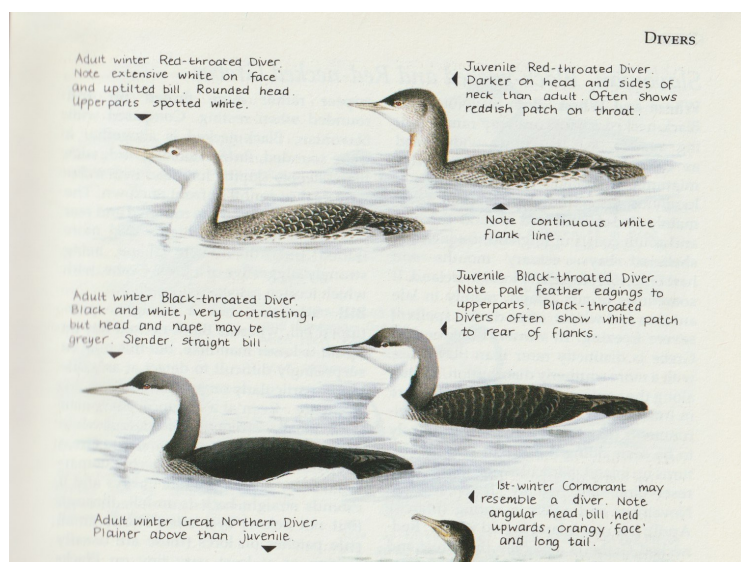


u3a BIRDWATCHING GROUP

November at RSPB Saltholme.

For our final field meeting of 2025 nine of us gathered at RSPB Saltholme in industrial Teeside on a cold but dry day in November. We had our coffees and cakes in the cafe overlooking the main lake which by then had much higher water levels. In amongst the variety of duck species we saw at least 4 Redshanks resting at the edge of one of the nearer islands, but it was otherwise quiet. On the ground floor we had close views of the birds at the feeding station: Finches: Gold, Green and Chaff, and petite Stock Doves. Because the tide was rising, (with high tide due at 14.00) we made our early way to the seal-spotting viewpoint overlooking Greatham Creek. Sure enough, the salt marsh was glistening and we had much closer views of numerous Redshanks in the muddy creeks plus 'scope views of **Curlews** and **Godwits**, **Shelducks**, **Teal** and **Wigeon**, and Little Egrets and Starlings. A few **Grey Seals** were hauled out, resting on the banks.

We then walked along Greatham Creek (and into the chilly wind) towards Seal Sands and the warm hide there. By then Teesmouth was filled with the rising water and we had to work hard and use our 'scopes to soon find several distant divers and ducks. Counting left or right from various prominent structures on the horizon we all managed to get views of a preening **Diver** species; in their winter plumages Divers are tricky to identify and we thought either **Red-throated** or **Black-throated** (neither bird showed any trace of their neck colours!)* A slightly nearer **Red-breasted Merganser** was easier to see and identify. On the walk back to the cars we added a couple of **Turnstones** in one of the pools, and then returned to the RSPB visitor centre for a warming lunch. A final session was then at the larger West and Back Saltholme pools hide where we had good views of hordes of duck and geese, with big flocks of Wigeon, Canada and **Barnacle** Geese with one lone **White-fronted Goose**. Kestrels and a Buzzard occasionally appeared and we enjoyed the spectacle of rising flocks of both **Lapwings** and **Golden Plover**. Some handsome **Pintail** Duck eventually revealed themselves. In front of the hide, hiding in plain sight, eagle-eyed Charlotte found a flock of 6-7 tightly grouped **Snipe**, tucked-in inconspicuously along the muddy edge. A few Linnet and Little Grebes were identified and as a highlight, we found a little family party of **Whooper Swans**. In total over 40 species seen.



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PS

Having checked a helpful reference guide I am now inclined to agree with Roger that our diver was Red-throated. The smoothness of the head shape (compared to the steep forehead of Black-throated) is more helpful than the bill-shape.

From: **The Macmillan Field Guide to Bird Identification**, by Alan Harris, Laurel Tucker and Keith Vinicombe. London: Macmillan, 1989.