

Our largest group of birdwatchers (18-strong) gathered in the car park at the Wetland and Wildfowl Trust's reserve at Martin Mere in Lancs. on a cold, crystal clear morning. It remained sunny almost all of the day, the light was fantastic, and plumage colours were easy to distinguish.

Oystercatcher, Lapwing and Ruff (3 of them) flew over the car park while we were booting up, while the expected wildfowl consisted of Pintail, Wigeon and Shelduck. We were soon through the visitor centre and passing the Red-breasted Geese pen just outside, making for the new Discovery Hide. Here our group settled in, filling two bays of the observation area. Whooper Swans made the biggest impression, hundreds of them feeding on the Mere and in the potato field. Good numbers of Greylag were present, together with the odd Canada. Careful scoping of the fields at the rear of the Mere alongside Vinson's Marsh produced distant views of some of the many Pink-footed Geese scattered around the reserve, with better and closer views to come. More wildfowl were seen, including Teal and Pochard, waders too, with more Ruff, a single Redshank and 5 Black-tailed Godwits. The first of several Buzzards was seen, and the Ross's Goose showed well on an island in front of the hide.

Ross's Goose is an odd bird, a small goose, breeding in the high arctic in Northern Canada. It has undergone a large increase in population and has reached the east coast of America, so is a candidate for vagrancy to Britain. However it is considered that there is reasonable doubt that they have ever occurred in a natural state in Britain, and so are placed in Category D of the British list. So whether our Ross's Goose is a genuine wild vagrant, or has vaulted the fence from the adjacent wildfowl collection, is a matter for conjecture!



Ross's Goose



Tawny Owl – the shape of the head can be made out in the Upper Left Quadrant

We wandered on, passing the heated Raines Observatory, which held a mysterious fascination for some, to an area near the Kingfisher hide where some of the trees had ivy-covered trunks. Looking at one a little way off the path, and following the trunk up as far as it could be seen, produced a sighting of the greater part of a roosting Tawny Owl, in particular the wing feathers, layered one upon the next. With its location not easy to describe, and the roost site veiled by strands of ivy, it took some considerable time to get everyone on to the bird. One member managed to focus their scope on the owl, and the view became a little clearer, particularly when our target moved. All saw the owl, or those parts of the owl visible, but not all were totally convinced!

Feeders nearby added Tree Sparrow, 4 species of Tit including Willow, Siskin and Greenfinch to our list, as we made our way to the Ron Barker Hide. Here Skylarks were spotted ascending from the marshy fields, and Reed Buntings were picked out among the reeds. A Harrier species was spotted dropping in near a fence line, but there it stayed, non-specific. And just as we were leaving our lunch counter, 8 Avocets dropped into the marsh.

We re-traced our steps, past the Discovery Hide and on out to the Harrier Hide. The only additions we could make were Kestrel, Tufted Duck and Gadwall. The Janet Kear hide held nothing new, so we trod onwards to the United Utilities hide, passing Long-tailed Tits along the path. Finally the UU hide gave a good view of the rear plumage of a male Sparrowhawk. We returned to the Discovery hide in time for the swan feed at 1500, and were treated to excellent close views of many of the species already seen during the day. Various car-loads started to drift away in order to avoid the worst of the traffic, and all were satisfied with a day-list of 53 species.

Richard Howells

Images by Derrick Bradley

Pink-footed Goose	Vinson's Marsh	Black-tailed Godwit	5 on mere
Greylag Goose	on mere	Ruff	on mere
Ross's Goose	on mere	Black-headed Gull	from Harrier Hide & on mere
Canada Goose	on mere	Lesser Black-backed Gull	from Harrier Hide
Mute Swan	from Harrier Hide	Rock Pigeon	overhead
Whooper Swan	on mere	Common Wood-Pigeon	seen in flight
Common Shelduck	on mere	Tawny Owl	in foliage nr Kingfisher Hide
Gadwall	from Harrier Hide	Eurasian Magpie	in flight from Discovery Hide
Eurasian Wigeon	on mere	Carrion Crow	on mere
Mallard	on mere	Eurasian Skylark	Vinson's Marsh
Northern Pintail	on mere	Willow Tit	on feeders nr Kingfisher hide
Green-winged Teal	on mere	Coal Tit	on feeders
Common Pochard	on mere	Great Tit	on feeders
Tufted Duck	from Harrier Hide	Eurasian Blue Tit	on feeders
Ring-necked Pheasant	nr Kingfisher hide	Long-tailed Tit	near Janet Kear Hide
Great Cormorant	on mere	Winter Wren	Several
Grey Heron	Ron Barker hide	European Robin	Several
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	United Utilities hide	Eurasian Blackbird	Several
Eurasian Buzzard	several seen soaring	European Starling	on mere
Eurasian Kestrel	from Harrier Hide	Duncock	several
Harrier sp.	one seen from Ron Barker hide	Reed Bunting	on feeders Janet Kear Hide
Common Moorhen	on mere	Chaffinch	on feeders
Eurasian Coot	on mere	European Greenfinch	on feeders nr Kingfisher hide
Northern Lapwing	on mere	Eurasian Siskin	on feeders nr Kingfisher hide
Eurasian Oystercatcher	on mere	House Sparrow	nr Visitor Centre
Pied Avocet	8 on Sunley's Marsh	Tree Sparrow	on feeders nr Kingfisher hide
Redshank	1 on mere		