

A new destination for our group, a six-year-old RSPB reserve, and at the far end of the M6 Toll Road - all seemed like good reasons to visit this site straddling the border between Warwickshire and Staffordshire. Especially with spring just around the corner, it would provide us with a good opportunity to see the last of the wintering birds, and maybe, just maybe, one or two of the early spring arrivals. RSPB Middleton Lakes were able to provide us with a couple of their trusty volunteers to exhibit their reserve to us.

A healthy group of sixteen gathered in the winter sun at Middleton's car park, just around the corner from Middleton Hall's facilities. Herons were immediately apparent from the site's 27-nest-strong heronry. Black-headed Gulls and Long-tailed Tits were seen from the car park before we set off for the heronry viewpoint together with a well-stocked feeding area. Chaffinch, Greenfinch and Goldfinch were all availing themselves of the feed, together with hordes of Blue and Great Tits. But perhaps the most attractive of the diners were the Lesser Redpolls, of which there were 4 or 5, showing breeding plumage of red caps and with females showing pink rumps. A male Reed Bunting came in while we were there, and a male Great Spotted Woodpecker, and we heard Chiffchaff, our first spring migrant.



Likely to be a male Lesser Redpoll showing extensive pink on its rump

We walked on down the long finger of woodland that points towards the lakes and both heard and saw another Chiffchaff. The Rooks were noisy in their rookery, bringing in nesting material, and another Great Spot attracted our attention. Redwings (a reminder that winter is almost gone) were spotted in the shrubbery, and a Nuthatch performed upside-down walking on the larger trees.

We crossed the canal bridge and entered the reserve proper, and were instantly greeted by the song of Cetti's Warbler. Plenty of wildfowl were noted on Fisher's Mill Pool including Teal, Tufted Duck, Shoveler and a pair of lingering Goldeneye. Little Egret and Buzzard were identified, and then a Black Swan flew across the pool, its white primaries glowing in the sunlight. Black Swan is a Category E* species in Britain, a species recorded as introductions, human-assisted transportees or escapees from captivity, and whose breeding populations (and Black Swan does breed in Britain, hence the asterisk) are thought not to be self-sustaining.



Little Egret

We moved on to the two screens overlooking the Jubilee Wetlands, areas of scrapes dug out as the reserve was created. Here the wildfowl recorded altered slightly, with Great Crested Grebe, Greylag, Shelduck and Gadwall all observed. Waders made their bow, with Lapwing, Oystercatcher, Redshank, Golden Plover, Curlew, Dunlin and Ringed Plover. Little Ringed Plover and Avocet, more early spring migrants, enlivened the scene. The number of wading birds seen here proves that the RSPB knows how to provide good wader habitat.



Avocet

Our final move was made up to the Lookout, a fancy name for a very good hide, this time looking out over North Pool. Our guides helped us identify an adult Mediterranean Gull, our scarcity of the day. It was on a breeding island for Black-headed Gulls, and gave us an outstanding opportunity to compare the two similar species, particularly as interaction was continually occurring. Colour of legs and bills, size, shade of the differing black hoods, extent to which the hood extended down the nape and amount or lack of black in tail and primary feathers - all the identification indicators were open to scrutiny. Our guides left us here, having done an excellent job. We enjoyed our lunch, while checking the North Pool's residents for birds not yet seen. Our list was substantial at this point, so not much was added. A hovering Kestrel, and Linnets on the shore of the Pool were the only increases that could be made, together with Stock Doves seen on the long walk back to the car park.

Some spent a little more time at the feeding station, and here was heard the drumming of a Great Spotted Woodpecker. Heard too the voice of a woodpecker, perhaps a Lesser Spotted (one of our most elusive birds), but there was insufficient evidence to claim it. A pity, as this species was seen in the area that morning, and its presence as an addition to our list would have raised it to 60. As it was we saw 59 species for an eminently satisfying day.

Richard Howells

Images: Derrick Bradley

Middleton Lakes Trip List 23rd March 2016

Greylag Goose	Anser anser	Fisher's Mill Pool.
Canada Goose	Branta canadensis	Fisher's Mill Pool.
Mute Swan	Cygnus olor	Fisher's Mill Pool.
Black Swan	Cygnus atratus	1 N over Fisher's Mill R
Shelduck	Tadorna tadorna	Jubilee Wetlands/N Pool.
Gadwall	Anas strepera	Jubilee Wetlands/N Pool.
Wigeon	Anas penelope	Jubilee Wetlands
Mallard	Anas platyrhynchos	Heronry pool.
Shoveler	Anas clypeata	Jubilee Wetlands/N Pool.
Teal	Anas crecca	Jubilee Wetlands/N Pool.
Tufted Duck	Aythya fuligula	Jubilee Wetlands/N Pool.
Goldeneye	Bucephala clangula	Fisher's Mill Pool.
Pheasant	Phasianus colchicus	Rookery Wood Farm.
Great Crested Grebe	Podiceps cristatus	West Scrape.
Heron	Ardea cinerea	Heronry.
Little Egret	Egretta garzetta	Fisher's Mill Reedbed
Buzzard	Buteo buteo	Soaring to of reserve

Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	W of Jubilee Wetlands.
Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	Heronry pool.
Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	Several.
Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	Jubilee Wetlands
Golden-Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>	9 Jubilee Wetlands
Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	6 Jubilee Wetlands
Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>	1 Jubilee Wetlands
Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	2 Jubilee Wetlands
Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>	3 Jubilee Wetlands/N Pool
Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	Jubilee Wetlands
Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	2 in flt Jubilee Wetlands
Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	4 Jubilee Wetlands
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	Breeding North Pool.
Mediterranean Gull	<i>Ichthyaetus melanocephalus</i>	Adult on North Pool.
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	2 Fisher's Mill Pool.
Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>	W of Jubilee Wetlands N
Wood-Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	Pooh Stick Bridge.
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	Feeding Stn, Rookery wood
Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	Jubilee Wetlands.
Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>	Meadows.
Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	Rookery Wood.
Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	Heronry.
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	Car Park/Feeding Stn.
Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	Car Park/Feeding Stn.
Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	Car Park/Feeding Stn.
Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>	Nr Pooh Stick Bridge
Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	Several.
Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	Nr. Fisher's Mill bridge.
Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	2 heard, 1 seen
Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	Car Park, Feeding Station
Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	Feeding Stn/Rookery wood
Redwing	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>	2 Pooh Stick Bridge.
Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	Over Jubilee Wetlands.
Duncock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	Several.
Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba yarrellii</i>	9 Jubilee Wetlands.
Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	Single male Feeding Stn.
Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	Feeding Station.
Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>	Feeding Station.
Lesser Redpoll	<i>Carduelis flammea cabaret</i>	Feeding Station.
Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	Feeding Station.
Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>	North pool.
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	Feeding Station