

Our first field trip of 2018 was made to Martin Mere, on the basis that we were guaranteed birds whatever the weather. Although cold it turned out to be quite bearable, and we assembled in the car park before invading the reserve. A Wren foraging in a tiny bush while we pulled our boots on started the day list, with flying Whooper Swans quickly added.

We started at the new Discovery Hide overlooking the Mere, which has replaced the old Swan Link hide. Despite the availability of comfortable chairs and a glazed lounge, members chose the wing that could be opened to the elements – not quite a Victoria Cross-winning decision but certainly the choice of birders with some years of experience! From here, as is usual at Martin Mere, species flowed on to our list at a good rate, with, not unexpectedly, wildfowl in the van. Greylag, Pochard, Pintail, Shelduck, Wigeon, Teal and Tufted Duck were all sighted quickly. We then set to work to ferret out those birds scarcer in number hiding among their congeners. Ruff were moving around in small numbers and feeding on the shoreline, while a Snipe zigzagged through the air. We picked a Common Gull out of the Black-headed throng, Skylarks were seen overhead, and prolonged study of geese in the fields beyond the Mere and between Vinson's and Woodend Marsh confirmed the majority of them were Pink-footed Geese. Photographic evidence proved the presence of a pair of Goldeneye, though not seen by everyone.

We reluctantly moved on from the spectacle, picking up Tree Sparrow on the feeders as we headed north. From the Ron Barker hide, flocks of Teal and Wigeon covered Sunleys with a few Shoveler, and here we added Buzzard, Kestrel and Sparrowhawk. Herring Gull made it on to the daylist, as did Little Grebe on the canal in front of the hide.

We returned south, stopping at the fork in the path near the Kingfisher hide. A preliminary (and very lucky) sweep revealed the roosting site of one bird, and it was worth the ten minutes spent erecting the scope to near-maximum angle to view the Tawny Owl. Nearly all the members saw at least the belly feathers of this bird, in a copse that has become regular for them in recent years.

Little Egret and Song Thrush were noted on the return walk, while a female Bullfinch caught the attention at the Infocus feeder area. The yellow flash of a Goldfinch's wing engaged our attention as we waited for members to reassemble. Our next stop was the Janet Kear hide, always a spot to add passerines to a day list. And sure enough Reed Bunting, Coal Tit and Greenfinch duly appeared. The visibility was good enough to watch the activities on the mere, and Oystercatcher, Lesser and Great Black-backed gull were all added to the tally. Adding species was becoming much more difficult with only Heron from the Harrier Hide, and our last bird of the day from the United Utilities hide – a hunting Marsh Harrier. 57 species was a good total for a January trip.

Richard Howells

Martin Mere Trip List 24/01/2018

Pink-footed Goose	Scattered over the reserve
Greylag Goose	Good numbers on the Mere
Canada Goose	Small numbers close to the Mere & on Sunley's
Whooper Swan	Good numbers on the Mere
Common Shelduck	Good numbers on the Mere
Eurasian Wigeon	Good numbers on the Mere
Mallard	Good numbers on the Mere
Northern Shoveler	Small numbers on the Mere and on Sunleys
Northern Pintail	C 20 on the Mere
Teal	The Mere
Common Pochard	Several on The Mere

Tufted Duck	Seen from Discovery & harrier hides.
Common Goldeneye	Pair photographed on The Mere
Little Grebe	Seen from the Barker Hide.
Great Cormorant	Several on The Mere
Grey Heron	Seen from the Barker Hide.
Little Egret	One seen.
Western Marsh-Harrier	Seen from United Utilities hide.
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	Seen from the Barker Hide.
Eurasian Buzzard	Seen from the Barker Hide & The Mere.
Eurasian Kestrel	Seen from the Barker Hide.
Common Moorhen	Lots
Eurasian Coot	Lots
Northern Lapwing	Good numbers on the Mere
Eurasian Oystercatcher	1 on the Mere.
Common Redshank	Good numbers on the Mere
Ruff	Good numbers on the Mere
Common Snipe	One airborne over The Mere
Black-headed Gull	Small numbers on the Mere
Common Gull	2-3 on the Mere
Herring Gull	Single on Mere.
Lesser Black-backed Gull	2 on the Mere
Great Black-backed Gull	Single on Mere.
Feral Pigeon	Lots.
Stock Dove	Several seen flying
Tawny Owl	One not quite completely hidden near Hale Hide
Eurasian Magpie	Seen from the Barker Hide.
Eurasian Jackdaw	Several overhead.
Rook	Seen from the Barker Hide.
Carrion Crow	Present.
Eurasian Skylark	Seen & heard over The Mere
Coal Tit	Janet Kear Hide
Great Tit	Hale and Janet Kear Hides
Eurasian Blue Tit	Hale & Janet Kear Hides
Winter Wren	One in car park.
European Robin	Alongside Duckery
Eurasian Blackbird	Near Hale Hide
Song Thrush	One seen.
European Starling	Over The Mere.
Duncock	Near Hale Hide
White Wagtail yarrellii	On The Mere
Reed Bunting	Janet Kear Hide
Chaffinch	Janet Kear Hide

European Greenfinch	Janet Kear Hide
European Goldfinch	Janet Kear Hide
Eurasian Bullfinch	Female close to InFocus feeders.
Eurasian Tree Sparrow	Hale & Janet Kear Hides