



**TOUR REPORT**  
**SOMERSET LEVELS & FOREST OF DEAN**  
**14<sup>TH</sup> – 18<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2022**

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**14<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2022**

Unfortunately, we were delayed in starting due to an accident on the dreaded M25, but by mid-afternoon we were out birding. With such good weather conditions, we headed straight for the New Fancy Viewpoint for some raptor watching. Very quickly we picked up a pair of Common Buzzards, before spotting our first Northern Goshawk of the tour. At least 3 individuals were seen at distance looking towards Cinderford, but in scopes gave fantastic prolonged views as they circled above the forest. Eurasian Siskins were in plentiful supply flying over and at head-height, and a stunning male Bullfinch was seen in one of the thorny trees behind the viewpoint. Next stop was the cricket pitch at Parkend, where two of us glimpsed a Hawfinch flying away on arrival. 5 Mistle Thrushes and 2 Pied Wagtails were on the cricket pitch, Common Starlings perched on nearby houses, we heard House Sparrow, and a Common Nuthatch, 3 Greenfinches, Chaffinch, and Coal, Blue & Great Tits fed around the Yews. Our last stop of the day was to return to Speech House and explore the areas locally to the hotel, known as 'The Hollies'. Here we located Common Treecreeper, Blackbirds, Northern Wren amongst other woodland birds, and hearing Dunnock. As the sun set we finished our day in the Cyril Arboretum, where there was plenty of birdsong. We had brief views of Great Spotted Woodpecker, thirty-plus Redwings flew overhead, and a handful of singing Goldcrests and 2 Firecrests, with the latter showing briefly high in the canopy.



**Brambling – a dapper male at Cannop Ponds**

**15<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2022**

Most of the group met at dawn for a walk in the nearby Arboretum, where we did manage to get brief flight views of a pair of Hawfinches. We also saw 5 Ravens flying overhead, plus Song Thrush, Firecrest, Goldcrest, Coal and Blue Tits, Wood Pigeons, Blackbirds, European Robins, and a male Bullfinch. 12 Redwing, 2 Mistle Thrush, and surprise 4 Greylag Geese were in the Paddock next to



Speech House before we headed back for breakfast. Our next stop RSPB Nagshead Reserve where on en-route we spotted Fallow Deer, and on arrival we noted Grey Heron on the pond, a Tawny Owl called nearby, and a Firecrest gave good views. We walked the 'Short Trail' finding Nuthatch, Treecreeper, Goldcrest, amongst the chorus of commoner woodland species, most notably Song Thrushes, a couple of which had to learnt to mimic Goshawk! Great Spotted Woodpeckers were actively drumming but sadly we couldn't locate Lesser Spotted Woodpecker. Close to the small pond we discovered colonies of the Scarlet Elf Cup fungi. We decided to finish our morning at Parkend cricket pitch, where we were rewarded with views of a male and female Hawfinch on the ground. Sitting in the minibus we also enjoyed closer views of a variety of other species already recorded, including a female Bullfinch which perched on the fence in front of the bus.

After a quick comfort stop at Speech House we headed to the Blackpool Brook for lunch. No sooner had we got out of the minibus, Anne shouted "DIPPER". We all enjoyed brief but good views of this enigmatic river bird before it flew upstream. After lunch we visited one of the Cannop Ponds, enjoying several first species for the trip including 3 Brambling, a Marsh Tit, Mandarin Ducks, Little Grebe, Moorhen, Eurasian Coot, Tufted Duck, and Cormorants. Onto Symonds Yat we watched Peregrine Falcon, and found Goosanders on the River Wye. We also noted out first Common Pheasant and Canada Geese of the trip, whilst admiring the impressive scenery. We decided to finish the day at the second Cannop Pond, and just before we arrived 3 Wild Boar ran across the road. On the lake there were plentiful Mandarins, and a short walk resulted in two of the group spotting our first Kingfisher of the trip. A good day with several special birds. Over our evening meal it was concluded that Northern Goshawk was the star bird of our time in the Forest of Dean.



**Common Chiffchaff – a sure sign of Spring!**

**16<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2022**

A very atmospheric low mist hung over the forest this morning, and a Mistle Thrush sang in the grounds of Speech House. Following breakfast, we loaded the bus and cars and headed south to the South Wales coast and the scrapes at Goldcliff Lagoons. The weather worsened as we drove south, and sadly didn't improve for most of the day, however we enjoyed new habitats and several new species to the trip list. As we walked onto the reserve our first Common Chiffchaff sang from nearby trees, despite the rain. From the first hide (Curlew Hide), we found a splendid and particularly pale wintering Spotted Redshank, a strikingly different bird compared to the 25+ Common Redshanks that were feeding closer to the hide. A small number of Northern Lapwings were on the large stony island, a Common Snipe was seen on the far bank, and a Little Egret settled in the lagoon. Several Canada Geese were scattered across the lagoons, and a Sand Martin was seen distantly valiantly appearing to feed despite the rain. We noted small numbers of Northern Shovelers, Eurasian Wigeon, Common Teal, Gadwall, and from the second hide (Greenshank Hide) some Common Shelducks flew in, a pair of Herring Gulls courted, and a few Curlew were noted flying across the hide. Despite the conditions we walked to the third hide (Avocet Hide) observing a bedraggled female Kestrel en-route. We located Oystercatchers and a Raven, but sadly the reported Eurasian Spoonbill wasn't present. From the sea-wall overlooking the Severn Estuary we located a small flock of Pied Avocets, a Ringed Plover, and 4 Black-headed Gulls were with a flock of Herring Gulls. On the return walk we enjoyed 3 Reed Buntings and a female Stonechat, after which we headed to the nearby Newport Wetlands RSPB Reserve for a well-deserved hot drink, lunch and comfort break.



### **Great Egret – a familiar sight on the Somerset Levels**

For the afternoon we headed south to the Somerset Levels, noting lots of Rooks in their Rookeries en-route. We spent the afternoon at the Ham Wall RSPB reserve in slightly improved conditions, but still raining. Despite the rain, Great Bitterns 'booming' was a constant soundtrack, even being heard from the car park as we geared up. 3 Common Chiffchaffs and 1 Blackcap sang as we walked to the

first viewpoint, where we found our first Great Egret and a female Marsh Harrier was perched in a reedbed. Good numbers of Northern Shoveler, Tufted Ducks, Common Teal, Gadwall, Eurasian Wigeon were joined by Common Pochards and Great Crested Grebes, and several singing Cetti's Warblers. We enjoyed great views of a Water Rail, admired the camouflage of at least 20 Common Snipe, and it was amusing to be accompanied by a very friendly Robin and pair of Great Tits as we visited the first two screens. A Peregrine Falcon appeared from nowhere but was soon out of view again very quickly, and again flew through whilst at the Tor View Hide. We finished the day with superb views 12+ Great Egrets and at least 80 Cattle Egrets heading to roost. We also had a nice mini murmurations of Common Starlings, and a Sparrowhawk was seen by some speeding through the car park.

## **17<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2022**

A bright and sunny day greeted us on day 4 as we headed to the relatively new reserve at Steart Marshes and neighbouring Bridgewater Bay NNR. We spent the morning visiting the hides on the Mendip Hide and Quantock Hides. Nice numbers of duck were present along with 2 flocks of Avocet. Both Great and Little Egrets were seen, and a pair of Ravens flew over. We found our first Meadow Pipits and Green Sandpiper of the tour. We then headed to the beach car park, where the nearby saltmarsh was alive with Skylarks. From the beach Eurasian Curlew, Common Shelduck and Oystercatcher could be distantly seen, a Peregrine Falcon flew past, and flocks of Golden Plover flew overhead. Next, we visited the neighbouring Bridgewater Bay Reserve, parking in Steart village, where we walked the 1 mile track to the Tower Hide for lunch and back. From the car park 2 Chiffchaffs hunted insects in the blossoming Cherry Plum tree, and it was interesting to find a dead and somewhat squashed Great Crested Newt on the road, allowing us to look at its identification features. Meadow Pipits, Common Stonechat, Redwings, and our first Linnets, Fieldfares, and a male Northern Wheatear were found. From the Tower Hide itself, we watched a couple of flocks of Knot and Dunlin fly past.



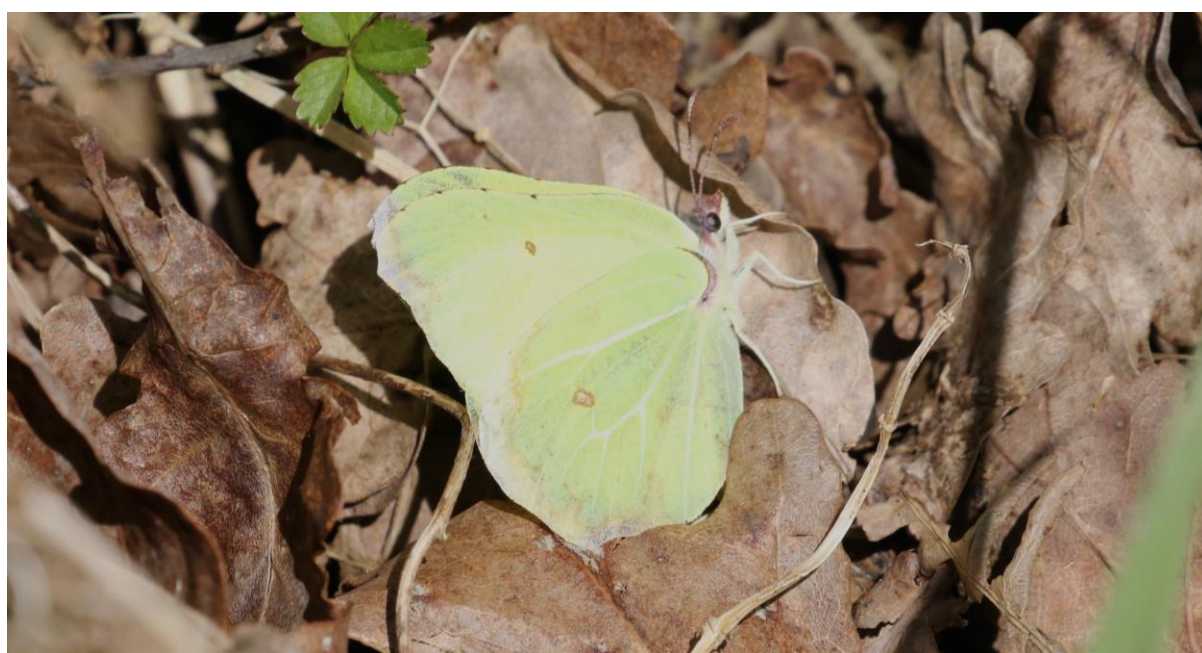
**Northern Wheatear – our first on tour this year!**



We then headed inland to the Levels where in addition to birds we were regularly spotting Roe Deer too. Our first stop of the RSPB Sedgemoor reserve, the most reliable area for Common Cranes. Unfortunately, it wasn't our day, but it was a treat to see a Kingfisher zipping along the river. Onto the RSPB Greylake Reserve we enjoyed close-up views of Teal, Shoveler, Wigeon, Gadwall, Mallard and Common Snipe. Water Rails called in the reedbeds and more Great and Little Egrets graced the marshes. Common Buzzards, Western Marsh Harrier, and Common Kestrel were all also present here. We finished the day at Catcott Lows. Here we spent the final 30 minutes enjoying the marshes at dusk, and added both Pintail and a super Glossy Ibis, which showed itself right at the last innings.

## **18<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2022**

After breakfast and checkout, we headed to Shapwick Heath NNR to spend our final morning of the break. We drove via the Levels around Westhay Moor, where we added a Cattle Egret feeding amongst some Devon Cattle. Greylag and Canada Geese were gathered in the fields opposite the main Westhay reserve. Onto Shapwick Heath the woodland areas were alive with birdsong, with several Chiffchaff and one Blackcap amongst the chorus. Bitterns 'boomed' and Water Rails 'squealed' from the reedbeds, and it was great to have teasing views of the main Great Egrets Heronry in the reedbed. The first main lake opposite the Tower Hide held a good selection of wildfowl, including Common Pochard, Northern Shoveler, Eurasian Wigeon, Eurasian Teal, Mallard, Gadwall, Tufted Duck, and Little & Great Crested Grebes. We then moved onto the Noah Hide overlooking Noah's Lake, where the water was covered in wildfowl. Whilst some of the group scanned for our missing Garganey, Graham spotted a Bittern flying in to one of the islands. It posed beautifully in its characteristic upright stance long enough for everyone to view it, before creeping to the back of the reeds. From the Seventy Acres Hide we enjoyed regular Marsh Harriers and Common Buzzards, and a Raven 'cronked' overhead. From Meare Hide we didn't add any birds, but could hear the subtle croaking of Common Toads from the reeds in front. By late morning the sun was warm and butterflies were active, with at least a dozen individual male Brimstones spotted, along with Small Tortoiseshells, and at least one each of Comma and Peacock. At 12.30 we returned to the Swan Inn to wish everyone safe journeys home, and to get to the train station for 13:40. It had been an immensely enjoyable few days with some great birds and a really nice company.



**Brimstone – one of several early-season butterflies seen on the trip**

**Many thanks to Tony Jakeman for use of his excellent photos in the report**

**Bird Checklist**

1. Greylag Goose
2. Canada Goose
3. Mute Swan
4. Common Shelduck
5. Mandarin Duck
6. Northern Shoveler
7. Gadwall
8. Eurasian Wigeon
9. Mallard
10. Northern Pintail
11. Eurasian Teal
12. Common Pochard
13. Tufted Duck
14. Goosander
15. Common Pheasant
16. Little Grebe
17. Great Crested Grebe
18. Rock Dove (Feral Pigeon)
19. Stock Dove
20. Common Woodpigeon
21. Collared Dove
22. Water Rail
23. Common Moorhen
24. Eurasian Coot
25. Pied Avocet
26. Eurasian Oystercatcher
27. Golden Plover
28. Northern Lapwing
29. Common Ringed Plover
30. Eurasian Curlew
31. Red Knot
32. Dunlin
33. Common Snipe
34. Green Sandpiper
35. Spotted Redshank
36. Common Redshank
37. Black-headed Gull
38. Herring Gull
39. Lesser Black-backed Gull
40. Great Black-backed Gull
41. Great Cormorant
42. Great Bittern
43. Grey Heron
44. Great White Egret
45. Cattle Egret
46. Little Egret
47. Glossy Ibis

48. Western Marsh Harrier
49. Eurasian Sparrowhawk
50. Northern Goshawk
51. Red Kite
52. Common Buzzard
53. Tawny Owl (HEARD)
54. Common Kingfisher
55. Great Spotted Woodpecker
56. Eurasian Green Woodpecker (HEARD)
57. Common Kestrel
58. Peregrine Falcon
59. Eurasian Jay
60. Common Magpie
61. Eurasian Jackdaw
62. Rook
63. Carrion Crow
64. Common Raven
65. Eurasian Skylark
66. Sand Martin
67. Coal Tit
68. Marsh Tit
69. Eurasian Blue Tit
70. Great Tit
71. Long-tailed Tit
72. Eurasian Nuthatch
73. Eurasian Treecreeper
74. Eurasian Wren
75. White-throated Dipper
76. Goldcrest
77. Common Firecrest
78. Cetti's Warbler
79. Common Chiffchaff
80. Eurasian Blackcap
81. European Robin
82. European Stonechat
83. Mistle Thrush
84. Fieldfare
85. Redwing
86. Song Thrush
87. Eurasian Blackbird
88. Common Starling
89. Northern Wheatear
90. Dunnock
91. Grey Wagtail
92. Pied Wagtail
93. Meadow Pipit
94. Common Chaffinch
95. Brambling
96. Eurasian Bullfinch
97. Hawfinch
98. European Greenfinch



- 99. Common Linnet
- 100. Lesser Redpoll (HEARD)
- 101. Common Crossbill
- 102. European Goldfinch
- 103. Eurasian Siskin
- 104. Reed Bunting
- 105. House Sparrow

#### **Other Wildlife**

- 1. Small Tortoiseshell
- 2. Fallow Deer
- 3. Muntjac Deer
- 4. Wild Boar
- 5. Grey Squirrel
- 6. American Mink
- 7. Scarlet Elf Cup (fungi)
- 8. European Rabbit
- 9. Roe Deer
- 10. Brimstone
- 11. Comma
- 12. Common Toad (HEARD)
- 13. Peacock