



ORIOLE BIRDING



TOUR REPORT SOMERSET LEVELS & FOREST OF DEAN 8TH — 12TH JUNE 2022

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WEDNESDAY 8th JUNE – *Fresh WSW winds, sunny spells, 16C*

The group convened early afternoon at the Speech House Hotel in the heart of the Forest of Dean, where we would be spending the next two nights. While waiting to depart, we took time to appreciate the comings and goings of Common House Martins, nesting on the hotel's various outbuildings. European Greenfinches were noisily proclaiming their presence from a presumed nest site in a tall boundary hedge, with Pied Wagtails and Dunnocks also noted.

Our first outing would be a short session at New Fancy View, where the remnants of old colliery workings afford a splendid vista over a large part of the forest, looking north. A succession of Common Buzzards appeared at various locations over the forest, with Common Swifts, Lesser Black-backed Gulls, Common Woodpigeons and a Common Raven also seen. Species in the proximity of the viewpoint included Song Thrush, Eurasian Siskin, Common Chiffchaff, Willow Warbler and Eurasian Blackcap.

Moving on, we headed the short distance to Nagshead RSPB, a lovely oak woodland reserve in the south-west of the Forest of Dean, just past the village of Parkend. The Lower Hide area was rather quiet on this occasion, although we did locate Eurasian Treecreeper and Great Spotted Woodpecker. Next to the short trail, where we eventually found a pair of European Pied Flycatchers, working hard (the female harder than the male, it has to be said!) to feed their brood in a nest box, with the male allowing particularly good views while perched. Eurasian Nuthatch, European Robin, Song Thrush and Eurasian Wren were also sighted in the same locality, before we concluded our first afternoon's birding in the forest.



European Pied Flycatcher

Following dinner at the hotel, an evening excursion was made to a nearby area of regrowing forest clearfell, where the heath-like habitat is managed for ground-nesting birds (including Eurasian Nightjar) by the Forestry Commission. Arriving at 21:20, we were quickly treated to a roding Eurasian Woodcock, the first of more than a dozen such sightings. Soon after the first European Nightjar began churring, followed by a close flypast and views of three or four birds, including one

perched - magical! A vocal male European Stonechat was seemingly reluctant to go to roost, while a Wild Boar was seen over the other side of the clearing and several Fallow Deers ambled into view.



Eurasian Nightjar

By now, the midges were becoming an annoyance, so we stayed just long enough for another couple of Nightjar and Woodcock sightings, plus a calling Tawny Owl, before retracing our route back to the vehicle, concluding a pleasant first day in the forest.

THURSDAY 9th JUNE – *Moderate WS W winds, showers until mid-afternoon, 17C*

After breakfast our first destination would be Yew Tree Brake, an area of mixed habitats ranging from clearfell to coniferous and deciduous plantations, where we would take circular walk to Woorgreens Pond and back. On reaching the large clearance, where succession has resulted in an area of scrub of various ages, we were impressed by the number of Willow Warbler territories, with adults noted taking food to hidden nests. Four Hawfinches flew over heading south, but all too briefly. Garden Warblers, Common Chiffchaffs and Eurasian Blackcaps were frequent and a Common Buzzard was active.

A little further along the trail some moderate rain arrived, but we didn't let it dampen our spirits too much, helped by the sighting of the first of several Tree Pipits, with one pair showing especially well. A Grey Heron perched in a tree on the island at Woorgreens Pond, which held a few Greylag Geese, Canada Geese and Common Moorhens. On our return route we noted a couple of singing Goldcrests and we were alerted to the presence of Common Crossbills by their distinctive 'glipp-glipp-glipp' calls, with several seen close overhead.

Following refreshments back at the hotel, we moved on to Cannop Ponds, where we were entertained by a variety of woodland birds on the feeders at the stoneworks, including Eurasian Siskin, Eurasian Nuthatch, Great Spotted Woodpecker and Common Chaffinch. A pair of Grey Wagtails were busy taking food to a nest in the utility building by the stream, where a brief Spotted Flycatcher and Eurasian Treecreeper were also appreciated. The ponds themselves held a motley

collection of Mandarin Ducks in various states of moult, this being a reliable site for the species, plus a family of Mute Swans, Little Grebe, Tufted Ducks and feeding Common House Martins.

Packed lunch was taken at New Fancy View, which was rather quiet in the somewhat damp conditions, with the hoped-for Northern Goshawks remaining conspicuous by their absence.

Suitably revitalised, we headed for Symonds Yat Rock, where a viewpoint affords superb views of the precipitous rocks, under which the River Wye snakes. With patience we eventually had flight and perched views of Peregrine Falcons; the species has nested here on Coldwell Rocks for at least 20 years. Following several perched views of the falcons, one did the decent thing and gave us superb close views as it harried a Common Buzzard, which it had taken exception to.

Next, we decided to end the afternoon with another visit to Nagshead. Both Firecrest and Goldcrest were singing unseen by the car park, while a Garden Warbler could be heard on the track down to the Lower Hide. Having being on our feet a fair portion of the day, we opted for a sit down in the Campbell Hide, which overlooks a small pool surrounded by woodland. Birds coming in to bathe included female European Pied Flycatcher, Goldcrest, Blue Tits, Great Tits and Eurasian Siskin, with a Grey Wagtail pottering around on the floating Potamogeton.

FRIDAY 10th JUNE – *Moderate SW winds, sunny spells, 18C*

Today we would be transferring to the Somerset Levels, via Steart Marshes WWT, a reserve on the coast of the Bristol Channel, just west of Bridgwater. Following a hearty breakfast, we checked out of the hotel and headed south for, navigating the rather circuitous route from the M5 past Bridgwater and on towards the Bristol Channel.

Arriving at the reserve car park at around 10:00, we were greeted by an extremely showy singing Sedge Warbler, with Common Whitethroat, Cetti's Warbler and Common Reed Bunting also vocal nearby. Small flocks of Linnets were active and a Common Cuckoo was heard. A fine male Western Marsh Harrier flew low overhead, prompting alarm calls from some unseen Pied Avocets on the adjacent marsh. In addition, a Great White Egret also gave a flypast, our first and definitely not last of the tour.



Eurasian Spoonbill

We were just about to head off to view the hides overlooking Otterhampton Marsh, when a Western Cattle Egret flew in and disappeared into long vegetation, where a herd of cattle were feeding. This prompted us to take a diversion in that direction along the permissive footpath to Stockland Marsh. This proved a good move when an unexpected Eurasian Spoonbill flew past at close range. Several more Western Cattle Egrets were seen distantly – what a remarkable change of UK status for the species there has been. A Gadwall protected its unfeasibly large brood of chicks in one of the vegetated rhynes. Further sightings here included a female Western Marsh Harrier, Stock Dove, Collared Dove, Eurasian Skylark and several Common Reed Buntings.

Retracing our steps, we headed for the Quantock Hide, overlooking Otterhampton Marsh, which afforded close views of the substantial colony of breeding Pied Avocets, with plenty of chicks of various ages present. Eurasian Oystercatchers also had young present, while four Little Ringed Plovers included a sitting bird, with a changeover observed at a nest on a shingle island near the hide. Common Shelducks, Herring Gulls, Lesser Black-backed Gulls and a Great Black-backed Gull were also on the marsh.

Back at the car park, we took on board some homemade cake before leaving Steart, having spent a pleasant couple of hours at this impressive reserve. Heading east towards the Avalon Marshes, our plan was to call in first at Catcott Lows, where we would take lunch.

Formerly arable land, Catcott is one of the lowest points in the Brue Valley and has been converted to grazing marsh, with Glastonbury Tor forming a scenic background from the Lows Hide. Pausing at the top of the approach track to the reserve, we scored our first Eurasian Bittern of the tour, with one seen in flight, albeit somewhat distantly. Parking up at the small car park where a hide and a screen overlook the marsh, we were soon onto a Great White Egret, Little Egret, a flock of Black-tailed Godwits and some Northern Lapwings; one sitting on a nest and others with young. Birds of prey were a Eurasian Hobby catching dragonflies, Western Marsh Harriers and a hunting Common Kestrel. Three Western Cattle Egrets flew up out of long vegetation and back down out of view. A Eurasian Bullfinch was seen by the car park, with a Spotted Flycatcher along the approach track as we were leaving.



Eurasian Hobby

Another Western Cattle Egret was noted en route to the fabulous Ham Wall RSPB reserve, where we arrived at about 14:30. Eurasian Hobby and Great White Egret were both seen from the car park on arrival. Walking east from the car park, we were soon onto Western Marsh Harriers and an expanding breeding colony of Great Cormorants was visible to the south. Bird song included Eurasian Reed Warbler and the explosive bursts of Cetti's Warbler. Pausing by the first platform, we caught sight of a Eurasian Bittern in flight over the trees at the back of the reserve, with another making a very short flight over the reeds. A few Northern Lapwings and Common Redshanks flew up in response to passing harriers, Water Rails called and a Black-headed Gull perched atop a post. At the Avalon Hide we witnessed a food pass between a pair of Western Marsh Harriers, with more Great White Egrets, Great Crested Grebes with young, Little Grebes catching dragonfly nymphs, Common Pochard, Common Moorhens and Eurasian Coots.



Great White Egret

Retracing our route back to the car park, we headed for our hotel in Wells, where we would be spending the next two nights.

SATURDAY 11th June – *Moderate and freshening SW winds, sunny spells, 20C*

The first part of the day would be spent at Shapwick Heath NNR, a 500 ha reserve lying immediately west of Ham Wall. Walking west towards the Meare Heath Hide, we paused at the open area known as Meare Heath, where a hunting Eurasian Hobby showed very well. Great White Egrets were almost constantly in view, this being a favoured area for nesting. Two elusive Garden Warblers were in full song, with a song-flighting Common Whitethroat being more cooperative. Odonata encouraged into activity by the warming sun included Scarce Chaser, Four-spotted Chaser, Hairy Dragonfly, Red-eyed Damselfly and Variable Damselfly. Settling down in the Meare Heath Hide, we were treated to views of a hunting Eurasian Hobby, a pair of Marsh Harriers and a brief flight from a Eurasian

Bittern. Noah's Lake held good numbers of Mute Swans, Great Cormorants, Tufted Ducks and Great Crested Grebes, with a few sightings of Great White Egret there, too.

Heading back to the vehicle, we decided to give our legs a rest with a drive along Totney Drove to Tealham Moor, though a landscape seemingly belonging to a previous age, where vegetated rhynes criss-crossed a complex of damp grazing pastures. Several Western Cattle Egrets with the cattle here were welcome if not unexpected, with yet more Western Marsh Harriers and Great White Egrets. Pausing at a pull in by a gate, we were pleased to have a male Western Yellow Wagtail fly in and land at very close proximity, while a Meadow Pipit popped up on the adjacent gate post.



Meadow Pipit

An agreeable lunch was taken alfresco at the Avalon Centre, where the café more than adequately served our needs.

Following this, we drove the short distance to Westhay NNR, a long-established Somerset Wildlife Trust reserve, being a network of open water, reedbed and the largest surviving fragment of lowland acidic mire in the south-west, all reclaimed from the remnants of industrial-scale peat extraction. A Eurasian Bittern 'boomed' repeatedly near the Tower Hide, but didn't break cover, while a pair of Western Marsh Harriers was very active here. At the North Hide two Hobbies entertained and a Great Crested Grebe posed close by for photos. A Common Cuckoo called unseen near the car park as we prepared to leave.

Our final destination of the day would be Greylake RSPB, another area of wet grazing meadows, just over the other side of the Polden Hills from the Avalon Marshes, in the north-west corner of King's Sedgemoor. A Common Cuckoo was seen in flight from the hide, where a Cetti's Warbler showed uncommonly well. Several Western Cattle Egrets were noted at distance, with the obligatory Great White Egrets and Western Marsh Harriers also present. A Common Snipe was noted in display

flight, before disappearing back into the lush vegetation. Just before leaving two Grass Snakes were observed under some corrugated tin.

Arriving back in Wells, we took the opportunity to explore some of the hugely impressive historic city centre in the evening sunshine, including a short visit to the magnificent cathedral.

SUNDAY 12th JUNE – *Moderate SW winds, sunny spells, 20C*

Our final session of the tour would be spent at Ham Wall, with the main aim of hopefully securing more and better views of Eurasian Bittern. Luckily this proved to be the case, with a close fly past from one off the main track over Walton Heath, where it eventually plonked down into the reeds and out of view. From here, we opted to take a walk on the grass track around Loxton's Marsh trail, a secluded and less visited area of the reserve. A Eurasian Bittern flew by close to the hide, but too briefly for all the group to get onto. Wildfowl along the channels included Common Pochards, Tufted Ducks and our first Northern Shoveler of the tour. Finally, we had enough time to call in at the Tor View hide, where we observed our third Eurasian Bittern of the morning, along with the expected Western Marsh Harriers and Great White Egrets.

By now it was time to make tracks back to Speech House Hotel and then Newport Railway Station, in order for the participants to complete their onward journeys, concluding an enjoyable tour of the Forest of Dean and Somerset Levels.



Western Cattle Egret

THE SOMERSET LEVELS AND FOREST OF DEAN IN SPRING - JUNE 2022

Species order, names and taxonomy follows - Clements, J. F., T. S. Schulenberg, M. J. Iliff, D. Roberson, T. A. Fredericks, B. L. Sullivan, and C. L. Wood. 2018. The eBird/Clements checklist of birds of the world: v2018. Downloaded from <http://www.birds.cornell.edu/clementschecklist/download/>

#	Common Name	Scientific name		8	9	10	11	12		Comments
Anatidae (Ducks, Geese, and Waterfowl)										
1	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>			✓		✓			
2	Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>			✓	✓	✓			
3	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓		
4	Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>				✓				Stear WWT
5	Mandarin Duck	<i>Aix galericulata</i>			✓					Cannop Ponds
6	Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>						✓		Ham Wall
7	Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>				✓	✓	✓		
8	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓		
9	Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>				✓		✓		
10	Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>					✓	✓		
Phasianidae (Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies)										
11	Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>			✓	✓	✓			
Podicipedidae (Grebes)										
12	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>			✓	✓	✓			
13	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>				✓	✓	✓		
Columbidae, Cuculidae and Apodidae (Pigeons, Doves, Cuckoos and Swifts)										
14	Rock Dove (Feral Pigeon)	<i>Columba livia</i>				✓	✓	✓		
15	Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>				✓	✓			
16	Common Woodpigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		

17	Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>				✓	✓			
18	Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>				H	✓			
19	European Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus europaeus</i>		✓						
20	Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Rallidae (Rails and Coots)										
21	Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>				H	H	H		
22	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓		
23	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓		
Recurvirostridae and Charadriidae (Stilts, Avocets, Plovers and allies)										
24	Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>				✓				
25	Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>				✓				
26	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>				✓	✓	✓		
27	Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>				✓				
Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)										
28	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>				✓				Catcott Lows
29	Eurasian Woodcock	<i>Scolopax rusticola</i>		✓						
30	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>					✓			Greylake RSPB
31	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>					✓			
Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skuas)										
32	Black-headed Gull	<i>Choicocephalus ridibundus</i>				✓	✓			Only one seen
33	Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>				✓		✓		
34	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓		
35	Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>				✓				
Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)										
36	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>				✓	✓	✓		
Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets and Bitterns)										
37	Great Bittern	<i>Botaurus stellaris</i>				✓	✓	✓		
38	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓		
39	Western Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>				✓	✓			Scattered sightings

40	Great White Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>				✓	✓	✓		
41	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>				✓	✓	✓		
42	Eurasian Spoonbill					✓				Steart WWT
<i>Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)</i>										
43	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>				✓	✓	✓		
44	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
<i>Picidae (Woodpeckers)</i>										
45	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>		H	✓	H	✓	H		
<i>Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)</i>										
46	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>				✓	✓			
47	Eurasian Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>				✓	✓			
48	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>			✓					Symonds Yat
<i>Corvidae (Crows, Jays and Magpies)</i>										
49	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>			✓	✓	✓			
50	Common Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>				✓	✓	✓		
51	Eurasian Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓		
52	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>				✓	✓			
53	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
54	Common Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓			
<i>Panuridae and Alaudidae (Reedling and Larks)</i>										
55	Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>				✓	✓			
<i>Hirundinidae (Swallows)</i>										
56	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
57	Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
<i>Paridae (Tits)</i>										
58	Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>			✓					
59	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
60	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
61	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>			✓		✓	✓		

	Sittidae and Certhiidae (Nuthatches and Treecreepers)									
62	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>		✓	✓					
63	Eurasian Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>		✓	✓					
	Troglodytidae (Wrens)									
64	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>		H	✓	✓	✓	✓		
	Regulidae (Kinglets)									
65	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>		✓	✓		H			
66	Common Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>			H					Nagshead RSPB
	Scotocercidae and Phylloscopidae (Bush and Leaf Warblers)									
67	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>				H	✓	✓		
68	Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>		✓	✓	H	✓	H		
69	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>		✓	✓	H	✓	H		
	Sylviidae (Sylviid Warblers)									
70	Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>				✓				
71	Eurasian Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>				✓	✓	✓		
72	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	H		
73	Garden Warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>		H	✓	H	H			
74	Common Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>				✓	✓	H		
	Muscicapidae (Old World Flycatchers)									
75	Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>			✓	✓				
76	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>		H	✓	✓	✓	✓		
77	European Pied Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>		✓	✓					Nagshead RSPB
78	Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>			H					Speech House
	Turdidae and Sturnidae (Thrushes and Starlings)									
79	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>		✓						
80	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
81	Eurasian Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
82	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓		
	Prunellidae (Accentors)									

83	Dunnoch	<i>Prunella modularis</i>		✓	✓	✓	H	H		
	Motacillidae (Wagtails and Pipits)									
84	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>			✓		✓			
85	Western Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>					✓			Tealham Moor
86	Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>			✓	✓	✓			
87	Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>			✓					
	Fringillidae (Finches)									
88	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
89	Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>				✓				
90	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>			✓					Four Yew Tree Brake
91	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>		✓	✓	✓				
92	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>				✓				
93	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
94	Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>		✓	✓					
95	Common Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>			✓					Yew Tree Brake
	Emberizidae (Old World Buntings)									
96	Common Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>				✓	✓	✓		
	Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)									
97	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		

