

West Dean Woods 29-03-08

10 members gathered on a Saturday at the car park of SWT West Dean Woods reserve for a two-part led walk.

Once again the Society was most fortunate to call upon the excellent observation skills of arguably West Sussex's finest birder, Bernie Forbes, accompanied and ably assisted by both David Smith and Dorian Mason. Expectations were running high in light of some fine recent sightings!

Following the challenging route of 2007, Bernie had planned a more relaxed itinerary in the form of a short morning walk, together with a slightly longer afternoon jaunt following a break for lunch.

No sooner had we donned boots and jackets and we had our first bird of the day, a Red Kite almost directly overhead! Marsh Tit was heard singing also, both before we had even set off!

Underway, we quickly added some more common woodland species and through the canopy saw 2 Sparrowhawk and 2 Common Buzzard airborne. A feeding Treecreeper preceded a shift to a field boundary where we were rewarded with good views of a perched (light) Buzzard. The breeze was starting to become more significant now and despite searching out some prime habitat, we missed out on an undisclosed rarity sadly.

Lunch consumed, we relocated to another part of the Estate and set off in the direction of Monkton farm. A frequently resident Little Owl was not in its usual tree, however the Red Kite made a return and treated us to some fine close aerial views. Red-legged Partridge quickly moved out of sight as we headed up a field edge and now in more open countryside, Stock Dove, Meadow Pipit and Kestrel were seen, together with a distant singing Skylark. In the woodland once again, Jay and two late Fieldfare made it onto our list, with a further distant Buzzard also.

Walking further, we came upon some likely Firecrest habitat and for this Bernie deployed Secret Weapon #1, an MP3 player with sound reinforcement speakers! The bird call and song sounded very lifelike, so we moved back a little and following some nervous anticipation, our target bird appeared in response! We all had good short-range views of this diminutive scarcity with its stunning stripy head pattern. The weather, unsuitable as it had been for most of the day, took a turn for the worse at this juncture and together, we took the decision to call it a day. A fine end to our visit nonetheless!

ABG'ers don't like to miss a trick, and so it was this time, with several members stopping off on their route home to take in Peregrine and Raven (now in the family way) on the outskirts of Lewes. Another great day out!

Several others stopped off at Weir Wood Reservoir and saw Swallow, House Martin and Goldeneye.

Thanks are due to Bernie, David and Dorian for their guiding throughout the day, to Sue Phillips for making the arrangements and to Alan and Maureen Caulkett, Joanne and David Chattaway, Bob, Judy and Peter Johnson, Phil Norris, and Shaun Taylor for their observational contribution.

Alan Nottage