

## SOS Bird Race 2008 – Ashdown Bird Group Men's Team

PRESENT: Shaun Taylor, Alan Caulket, Glyn Evans, Peter Johnson

Everyone met at Peter's house at 8am. The plan was to get most of the woodland species as early as possible before moving on to the coast (due to the weather conditions).

At 8.10am we saw **brambling, greenfinch, chaffinch, house sparrow, blue tit, coal tit, collared dove, starling, jackdaw, dunnoek, robin, blackbird** and **wood pigeon**. We also heard **song thrush** and **wren** when loading the car.

Our first port of call was Little Trodgers Lane in Mayfield. En route we stopped at a field entrance and saw a single **stock dove** and admired **rooks** in their rookery. Once at the right spot we managed to see **marsh tit, nuthatch** and **great tit** but failed to find a great spotted woodpecker.

Onward to Scotsford Lane! Again en route we stopped and saw **redwing** and **mistle thrush**. At the small bridge in Scotsford Lane we only saw **common gull, crow** and **pheasant**.

We only stopped briefly, carrying on to Footland Wood. I personally had high hopes of collecting the last of the woodland species here, but sadly it wasn't to be. A slow meander out in the mud gave brief views of a **goldcrest** and later a single **long-tailed tit**. Unfortunately we couldn't count bullfinch and greatspotted woodpecker as only one person saw each (it's the law!).

Slithering back to the car we had a **magpie** and a **jay**, and after a quick coffee break and the weather began to deteriorate with showery rain and a strengthening breeze. We then drove on to Brede Valley in the rain, which thankfully stopped when we arrived. We only added **mute swan** and **meadow pipit** (heard calling) to our list, no sign of any partridge or green woodpeckers. Very, very quiet indeed!

By now the time was roughly 11am. Heading on to our next destination we all complained that at this rate we weren't going to break the 60 species mark! So you can imagine our relief when driving along the Pett road we saw big flocks of waders. We stopped several times before reaching the cliff viewpoint and added **lapwing, curlew, redshank, grey plover, golden plover, dunlin, canada goose, greylag goose, brent goose, grey heron, mallard, gadwall, shoveler, wigeon, pochard, shelduck, little grebe, coot, moorhen, cormorant, black headed gull, great black backed gull** and **herring gull**. A **snipe** also briefly flew across, well timed as everyone was looking that way!

We then drove down and parked by the public toilets and walked out to do some sea watching and also look at the cliffs. It was very difficult indeed (but rewarding!), we managed to tuck ourselves into a little alcove and do some sea watching. Between us we saw **great crested grebe, red-throated diver, black-throated diver, razorbill, guillemot** and **fulmar**. Because the wind was a south-westerly and high tide it pushed the birds closer to us, however, it was also nearing gale-force winds so the swell and

waves were incredible. There could well have been much more to see out there but it was just too difficult and we had other places to be!

Moving on back to Rye Harbour we thought we could guarantee a pied wagtail in the public car park...you guessed it, wrong again! Well, not entirely, whilst we had lunch a **sparrowhawk** flew across and then something spooked the gulls, and flying with them going "Chiswick" was a single **pied wagtail**. Never has there been such jubilation about such a common little bird! Also **feral pigeon** were present.

Walking out onto the nature reserve we saw some **tufted duck** tucked up behind the bank keeping out the weather. We then took up some **skylark**, and a little farther on Alan found the **shore lark**. We viewed it briefly before it flew off and then carried on toward the river mouth. This was a lifer for Glyn.

Viewing across Camber Sands we found **oystercatcher** and **sanderling**, and the odd **turnstone** flew past us. A large flock of **common scoter** flew past the river mouth giving difficult and distant views as they went between the waves.

At the end of the river mouth there was no sign of any knot on the beach and still no sign of any gannet flying past either. The beach works was in full swing also. On walking back we saw the shore lark again (pleasing Glyn) and flushed **stonechat** and **reed bunting**.

Arriving back at the car park we then decided to go straight to Scotney gravel pit and stop at the smaller pits on the return back to the bittern watch point.

Again it was very windy at Scotney but we found **scaup**, **feral goose** and then the winter female **long-tailed duck** (with a little help). At this point it was 3.15pm so we began to head back to Rye. Until I spotted a raptor up on one of the barn roofs (hiding of course!) so we did a quick U-turn and I had a look and it turned out to be a **kestrel**. We did stop at Northpoint and one un-named pond but couldn't find anything new.

Glyn suggested that we had a walk along Oyster Creek to look at the spot where the long-eared owls have been in previous years, maybe pick up any missing passerines like goldfinch. Unfortunately, nothing. A quick walk back and down to the bittern watch point at Bournes produced our last bird of the day, **little egret**.

I guess the moral of the story is don't go out on a very windy day. But you have to pick a day and go for it, maybe if this hadn't of been so windy we could have picked up those extra passerines and got 85 or so, but it wasn't to be.

A very difficult day but worth it. I'm sure everyone feels they could do it better if they had another go!