

## Bird Race, 4<sup>th</sup> January 2008

Ashdown Bird Group's 2<sup>nd</sup> team, The Hen Harriers (Joanne Chattaway, Sue Walsh, Sue Phillips) left Uckfield at 7.30 on a rather grey, cool morning, having heard **wren**, **robin**, **house sparrow** and **duncock** as they loaded the car.

We headed for the Framfield Fishing Lakes (and thank you to the bailiff for letting us in) where some good woodland species were found – **great spotted woodpecker**, **green woodpecker**, **goldfinch**, **blue** and **great tit**, **mistle** and **song thrushes**, **blackbird**, **chaffinch**, **jay**, **nuthatch**, **rook** and **magpie**. A couple of extras, too – the essential **wood pigeon**, **pheasant**, **crow**, **grey heron**, **moorhen** and **mallard**.

After a pleasant hour, we decided to move on, heading for the coast via Heathfield, where **feral pigeons** were seen. Then on to the Black Horse at Battle. This excellent pub currently offers not just food, ale and folk music, but a flock of **bramblings** in the field opposite. These we ticked in an instant, having been offered the use of a 'scope by some friendly birders.

Onward, via Netherfield – here an impromptu stop by the roadside produced not only a **goldcrest** in the hedge about four feet from us, but visible and calling **marsh tits**, closely followed by **long tailed tits** and a couple of **coal tits**. An additional nuthatch was seen and heard here, too.

En route, we counted **jackdaws**, **collared dove**, **starling**, **pieb wagtail** and **starling** – all welcome.

To Pett Village – the area round the car park usually produces **greenfinch**, and did today. We went over to the shore at Cliff End, and set up the 'scopes. Here a strong, cold wind was blowing, though it had seemed mild inland. A pair of **Fulmar** were tucked into the cliff, and we soon found **gannets**, **great crested grebes**, **red throated divers** heading west, and at least thirty **auks** – guillemots or razorbills, or both? We counted one for these, as the rough sea made it hard to be sure. **Herring gulls** and **black headed gulls** were everywhere, and some **oystercatchers** flew by as we scanned the waves.

Stopping at the west end of the pools, we found **common gull**, **curlew**, **lapwing**, **golden plover**, and **redshank**. At the next stop, we found **shelduck**, many **coots**, and **cormorants** (at last!) before we headed up on to the sea wall. There were men with large earth moving equipment here, so we quickly headed on to the area beyond the Colonel Body Lakes – where we had a short break, being entertained by a female **stonechat** flitting about as we warmed up with soup (thank you, Joanne). Though there ought to have been a perched peregrine, or a flyby merlin, we found neither, in spite of our best efforts. (And where was the marsh harrier?) Back up on the sea wall, we were nearly blown away, but the tide was just beginning to ebb, and we found a few brave **turnstones**, **grey plover**, **ringed plover** and a nice flurry of **dunlin**. There were **scoter** offshore, too. On the fields, we found **Brent**, **Canada** and **greylag geese**; on the pools, we could see two **mute swans**, **teal**, **wigeon**, **shoveller**, and **gadwall**.

Time was marching on, so we moved on towards Rye Harbour. Stopping at the observation point, we heard a **bearded tit**, and saw a **lesser black backed gull**

amongst the other gulls roosting near Castle Water. Alas, we were unable to summon up a water rail, or kingfisher, or Cetti's warbler- but we did find a **kestrel** on the semi-derelict barn by the roadside – our only raptor during the course of the day.

Onward to Rye Harbour itself, where we found the hoped-for **grey partridge**, **meadow pipits**, and a couple of **rock pipits**. But best of all, the **shore lark** was pottering about amongst the **skylarks** near the red roofed hut., A lone **sanderling** was seen running along near the **greater black backed gulls** on the shore, The tide was going out very fast, so we retraced our steps, picking up **reed bunting** on the way.

On the Oyster Creek side of the Harbour, we searched in vain for unusual ducks, but only found **tufted duck** and **pochard** (must try harder). But we did see a small flock of **linnet**, and, at last, a **little egret**.

We thought it best to head for Scotney Pit for the long tailed duck reported there, and in the hope of harriers. On the way we found **fieldfares**, **redwing** and another mistle thrush feeding on the sheep fields. At Scotney Pit, we failed to find the promised long tailed duck, though we did get our last bird here – **little grebe**.

Each year, the Bird Race is an exercise in what might have been: "if the weather had only been a bit better" or "if only we had spent more time at..?" Each year, I expect we all think we' ll do better next time– not a bad rule for life in general!

TOTAL – 83

**We take this opportunity to thank those who kindly sponsored us so generously.**

SP  
SW  
JC