

Notes on a trip to **Dungeness and Walland Marsh**, 30<sup>th</sup> January 08

A midweek outing to Dungeness saw Roy S, Roy H, Joanne C, Al Nottage and Sue P picking the one decent day of the week – bright sunshine and only a light wind blowing. We stopped briefly at Scotney Pit, where there were many wigeon, some tufted ducks, pochard and shelduck, but the long tailed duck remained in hiding. Some Canada and greylag geese were seen on the brazing fields, and lapwings and the usual gulls were present. A female stonechat perched on the fence, as did a robin.

We headed on to Dungeness, stopping at the visitor centre to see what was about. Happily, two Bewick swans were visible, as was the Slavonian grebe, male and redhead smew, ruddy duck, hundreds of cormorants, a couple of mute swans, coots, more of the usual gulls, mallard and a couple of great crested grebes.

From the first hide, Joanne found a high flying sparrowhawk, and we enjoyed seeing gadwall and more ducks..From the subsequent hides, we had good views of goldeneye, more smew, shoveller and beautiful pintails. In the distance, we could see a perched kestrel. We stopped at Christmas Dell hide for lunch, and failed to find the bittern – but Roy S was quick to identify a Cetti' s warbler in the low bushes just in front of us, which was very pleasing. More smew were seen here, too, and more gadwall.

Denge Marsh was a little disappointing, as the water levels were too high for waders, though we did hear little grebe calling. Teal were seen on the far bank, as was a little egret, but a real highlight was to see several bearded tits dangling from the reeds, with a reed bunting keeping them company. A dunnock was seen as we strolled back. We decided to go on to the Hanson ARC Pit, where we again searched in vain for bittern. A drake goldeneye showed well, with five ducks in attendance; a green woodpecker flew over as we strolled back.

Onwards to Walland Marsh – we were all keen to see what we could find, and it didn' t disappoint. Stopping near the large barn, we found many chaffinches and a yellowhammer, though no corn buntings, or little owl. As we drove on, Joanne yelled for us to stop – she is the barn owl queen! There was a barn owl flying close by, hunting over the dyke and the fields. (This caused some mild annoyance to the following traffic, but we tucked in and stayed put.) Just a little further on, we hauled up on the roadside and found a large party of golden plover. Behind them, the barn owl was flying again, and we had distant views of a marsh harrier. And from the field in front of us, a male merlin made a low flight to a bush on the field edge – it seemed to have settled there, but we couldn' t locate it again. A great spotted woodpecker was calling from the trees. Time was moving on, so we dashed to the Woolpack, parked and got out the ' scopes. Just in time– no fewer than five marsh harriers were seen, some perched on the ground, some flying about, with a kestrel perched and later seen hunting. Another barn owl appeared, and quartered the area for some time. Best of all, two male hen harriers appeared, quite making Roy H' s day. Three fieldfares settled on nearby wires; a song thrush sang from the trees to our left. Roy S saw a couple of snipe flying up. Blackbirds were seen here, too.

Luckily, the light had remained good throughout the day, and we had all enjoyed a very happy and successful trip.