

Birdwatching – November 2016 – October 2017



Here is a record of the iU3A Birdwatching group visits from November 2016 through to October 2017, the end of the iU3A year. For more recent visits and future plans, go to our [web page](#)

November 2016

No visit

December 2016



Camley Street Nature Park — 8 of us braved the December cold and had a trip to this local green haven in the middle of bustling Kings Cross. We didn't see much in terms of quantity but the quality of what we did see made this a very worthwhile visit. Firstly we were all stunned by the display of a Kingfisher. It flew back and forward several times over one of the small ponds giving all of us time to ensure we caught the flashes of iridescent blue. The best sighting of a kingfisher ever! Even a heron

wanted to get into the quality awards by wading up to us - within 10 feet - to give us close up viewings. Then it spread its wings for a short flight display to the other end of the pond. Both intimate displays.

January 2017

Woodberry Downs WWT — our first visit of 2017. It was cool and blustery but 9 of us still turned out to blow away any remaining Christmas or New Year cobwebs. We didn't see anything unusual but still enjoyed the walk around this very local reserve. The tits were everywhere and the robins very friendly. A dunnock was spotted but the local hero - bitten - was not evident. At the end we hurried into the excellent cafe for a warm up and a natter and discussions on where to go next time. But we forgot to take a photo!

Barnes, the London Wetland Centre — it was a cold January day but two of us braved it to this visit and were well rewarded - we say a Bitten! It was doing it's best to hid in the reeds but with the help of some professionals we could make it out and see it stretching in the odd ray of sunshine. Worth the visit just for that. We also saw the usual good spread of ducks (including several Smew) but we didn't see any Kingfishers. Overall our count of 35 was pretty good considering it was only two sets of eyes.

February

Regents Park — for our first visit in February we went to this easy accessible park. It was a bright cold day and there was lots of activity. There were about 14 herons — some of whom were sitting on nests. We saw 33 species in total (at least 4 were true ornamentals). These included: pigeons, black headed gulls, herring gulls, black backed gulls, mute swans, Canada geese, Egyptian geese, Brent geese, greylag geese, wigeon, pochard, red crested pochard, crow, magpie, smew, great crested grebe, bufflehead duck, ring necked parakeet, pintail, teal, blue winged teal, herons, cormorants, robin, song thrush, great tit, blue tit, moorhen, coot, shoveler, gadwall, mallard, tufted duck and shelduck.



Trent Park — an easy tube journey took six of us to this large open space. A mixture of woodland, grassland and two lakes gave the promise of a variety of sightings. It turned out an experience more of quality rather than of quantity. The tally was in the teens but the stars were nuthatches, female mandarins and a green woodpecker. The nuthatches, outlined by the sun, were enthralling and we happily watched them feeding on bugs in a couple of trees. Only when the sun disappeared did we realise it was time to move on. The park reports

offered sightings of woodpeckers and there was plenty of tree damage to prove they were there, but we thought we were going to be unlucky. However a couple of brief flashes meant we ended the visit satisfied. Or maybe that was due to the tea and cake!

March

Middlesex Filter Beds and Waterworks Centre

— not the best location due to some paths being closed. However it was a good day and we had a few good sightings. Built by the East London Waterworks Company in the mid 1800s it demonstrates how previously industrial areas can become valuable habitats for wildlife. The Middlesex Filter Beds were easily reached by bus to the Lea Bridge road then a short walk down the Lee Canal towpath. The highlight here was spotting a grey wagtail. We watched it for some time as it danced around the weir gates between the Lee Canal and the river. After this we eventually managed to trek our way into the Waterworks Centre nature reserve — which was rather disappointing — despite being the largest bird hide in London. However there was some open water allowing viewings of pochard, teal, wigeon, mallard and tufted ducks.



April



Abney Cemetery, Stoke Newington — easy to reach this fascinating place is worth a visit at any time regardless of the bird life. As much time was spent on this lovely afternoon looking at the selection of old trees not to mention the jumble of gravestones. But what about the bird life? Well we saw the usual garden birds, plenty of great & blue tits, robins, a dunnock and plenty of jays.

Walthamstow Reservoirs — another easy-to-reach outing. We last visited here last July and work is still ongoing converting it from just a Thames Water reservoir site to a WWT reserve. It certainly is an extensive site and a bargain for just the £1.00 entrance fee (hopefully WWT won't change this!). The site is still predominately water, ie good for ducks, gulls, geese. But there are some wooded areas attracting garden birds and song birds. 24 was our count (including four heard but not seen). The benefit of this size of reserve was we weren't just seeing one of this & one of that, but tens of this & tens of that. The ducks ranged from pochards, tufted, shelducks, teal, grebe (great & small). Many grey herons (including juveniles), cormorants (their nests taking over three trees completely). Tree life carried blackcaps, chetti's warbler, starlings, swallow(s), chaffinch (male & female) apart from all the more common garden birds. The hit of the day being probably the egyptian geese. Quite black & white in flight but more distinguishable on the ground. I think we'll be returning here again.



May

Rainham Marshes — this time we did get enough support to hire a guide at this extensive RSPB reserve. Unfortunately it was a very hot May day — for us and the birds. So our sightings score was a lot lower than we've had on previous visits to here. However 37 was still a reasonable range. I'm not sure what we'd class as the highlight for this visit. Possibly the reed bunting? It was also good to see a few swifts soaring overhead. A redshank was another beauty. While the bird life might have been hiding there were plenty of butterflies, damselflies, dragonflies and marsh frogs (making a terrible racket). At the end of the circuit the eight of us were ready for our lunch and some refreshment to cool down. We'll be back again — but on a cooler day.

June



Woodberry Wetlands (LWT) — a small group of us had a wander round our local reserve on this windy June day. Our last visit was blighted by being too hot and this one was blighted by being too windy. That's our excuse anyway for not seeing too much (in total and in variety). However the highlight was seeing a chiffchaff. This bird is often heard but rarely seen. A first probably for our group. We're 90% certain — if it wasn't a chiffchaff then it would have to be a willow warbler, but the habitat probably makes it more likely to have been a chiffchaff. With a spatter of rain

coming on the café was a welcome destination at the end.

Rye Meads (Lea Valley) — this is a large RSPB reserve with a good variety of habitat. We had a good wander around visiting most of the hides and saw many young fledglings. Whatever the species they seemed to have many young with them. However we were not successful in sighting the kingfishers — their young had fledged a week or so before this visit. Apart from a good range of bird life there were many butterfly species around and also a good variety of dragonflies. Hits of the day — coots chasing a grass snake in the water; kestrel perched on a post only 15' away; banded demoiselle dragonfly (thanks to Annie for that one!).



July



Brent Reservoir — we last visited this location in September last year and it proved to be a reasonable site again. We were lucky this time in that the locked hide was occupied by a Member when we got there so he allowed us access — and confirmed our sighting of Sandpipers. The public hide on the north side was not so good — occupied by a squatter! But overall we had a good visit on a pleasant summer's day.

August

Four of us visited **Trent Country Park**. The weather forecast was ominous but in the end we escaped any serious rain. We had a very pleasant walk through woods, heath and in the Japanese Water Garden (which is being restored) and we heard a lot of birds (including a blackcap) but sightings were few — largely due to thick foliage. The highlight of the visit was a great spotted woodpecker; we also saw one robin and a disappearing female chaffinch, together with a few speeding and therefore unidentifiable small brown birds. On the lake there were mallards, moorhen and Canada geese. Also sighted were butterflies — red admiral, small heath and gatekeeper; and a few dragonflies — possibly common hawkers.



Walthamstow Reservoirs — Seven of us returned to this relatively local reserve on a lovely August day. It's still under conversion from Thames Water reservoir to LWT reserve and is due to open fully in October. It's a good location — quite a vast area. Needs some more cultivation of mixed habitat but we still managed to see many ducks (particularly tufted) and grebes. Highlights were a peregrine falcon, kingfisher and 4 grey wagtails. Count was 26 bird, 3 butterfly, 3 dragonfly (as photo). (Photo: thanks to Annie Woodhouse)



September



Stocker's Lake, Rickmansworth — the dull wet weather didn't put us off and we managed to dodge the showers. Stocker's Lake is one of the oldest gravel pits in the Colne Valley and a Wildlife Trust reserve. Our count at the end of the day was in the twenties. This included the usual few (considering the time of year) song birds but a good selection of ducks, a couple of which we weren't 100% sure of (possibly gadwall and goldeneye). However, the highlight of the day was spotting a green woodpecker. As the rain started to come on again we headed for the café — to end another pleasant day out.

October

Surrey Docks — we hadn't been here before as a birdwatching group so it was a new experience. Our first stretch of water was Canada Water straight outside the station. Even this small stretch gave us tufted ducks, great crested grebes and many gulls. We carried on south to the nearly-connected Greenland docks. Many more great crested grebes kept us entertained here with their constant diving and the highlight was a pair of egyptian geese. We then moved to the River Thames which was at low tide. But sadly there was nothing interesting on the mud flats. After an aborted trip to Surrey Farm for a coffee (they don't open on Mondays!) we were on the Slave Hill Ecological Park walk, ie the filled-in Russia Dock. A pleasant stroll but mainly magpies and pigeons. Good views of London from top of the Hill. Then passing Surrey Water we were back to Rotherhithe.

