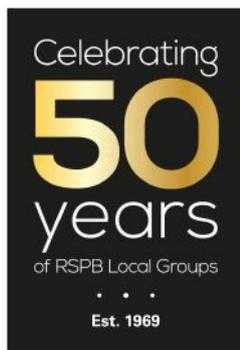


Summer 2020



## News from Lakenheath Fen

March 2020

Hello from Lakenheath Fen! It's a lovely sunny calm day today, which makes a nice change from the wild windy weather we had for much of February! A few more poplars in each of the

woods have come down in the winds, some splitting halfway up creating some lovely jaggy tops, which in time will provide some excellent nesting opportunities for woodpeckers, marsh tits, and dare I say (rather optimistically) willow tits! On days like these, male marsh harriers will be showing off with their aerial sky-dances, and it seems like spring is not far away! Another sign that spring is on its way is an early grunting bittern on 14th February, and a robin who has built a nest in an old teapot near the visitor centre!

### Reserve management

As mentioned in the last article, more reed cutting was done in December, with our friendly digger driver, Pat, from the local Internal Drainage Board finishing off cutting the reed in New Fen South (the reedbed near Mere Hide). He cut all the reed across a similar area to last year, as well as cutting sections of reed along the northern edges of two grazing marshes, and along part of one of our main water carrying



Marsh tit



Common crane

drains. A small strip was left for us to cut with strimmers, and the reed gathered into bundles, which we will then use to re-thatch the viewpoint roofs, which are looking a bit sorry for themselves at the moment!

Elsewhere on the reserve, the other digger, driven by Paul, replaced pipes which had become blocked, installed a sluice for better water control in one of the grazing marshes, and cleaned out sections of ditch in another. He also levelled out a lumpy access bank, and created a ramp onto another bank to allow for easier access with tractor and topper.

All of the reed cutting and other digger work was finished by the end of January, which means much of the potentially disturbing work has been completed in good time for the breeding season. Other jobs we've done in the reedbed is removing some mature willows to open up the view from Joist Fen viewpoint towards an area where the cranes often feed when they are here.

### Environment Agency works

We've also had various contractors for the Environment Agency on-site, who have been doing quite a bit of work along the riverbank, which is a flood protection bank as well as having the Public Footpath run along the top of it. They have an annual programme of bank works, mostly clearing back shrubs and bushes along the top and sides of the bank. This is done for several reasons. One, so they can

actually get a good look at the bank to make sure it is intact and undamaged. And secondly to prevent roots, or creatures that make burrows under scrub, from damaging the bank. So although it is done for good reason, it does mean that they remove a lot of habitat for wildlife. To make up for this, (as they did last year) they gave us some more native trees and shrubs (671 to be precise!) that we have duly (with help from the Environment Agency and our volunteers) planted mostly in West Wood to continue with the diversification of the wood. We kept a few back to plant around the visitor centre and car park, just to add a bit more interest.

### Wildlife

A good couple of months for birds of prey, with merlin, peregrine and red kite being seen regularly. The marsh harrier roost had built up to 27 on 18th December, and a rough legged buzzard was seen occasionally through December and into the New Year. Up to six great white egrets were recorded in December. A drake Mandarin duck was seen with a flock of greylag geese on 20th November. The most recent WeBS count on 8th February found fairly good numbers of wildfowl (for here), with 143 coots, 171 mallards, 50 shovelers, 89 gadwalls, 111 teals and 122 wigeons being recorded across the site. A new cormorant roost, containing up to 47 birds (peak on 23rd January) built up at the start of the year in poplars along a drain at the western end of reserve. This seems to have mostly dispersed now, with only up to 20 now being seen regularly.

Seventeen pied wagtails came into roost in the reeds on 12th November, while up to 22 corn buntings were recorded roosting by the big willow near the visitor centre in December. A lone chiffchaff was still present on 7th December,



Harvest mouse








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while blackcap was last seen on 25th November. Three bullfinches were seen in the poplar woods on 3rd December – this is quite unusual for us here!

There has been quite a lot of crane activity in the last few weeks, with our resident pair now back on-site.

Two otters were seen in a reedbed channel at the western end of the reserve on 9th January, and harvest mice, and nests, have been seen throughout all of the areas we have been reed-cutting on, so we know we have a good population here, even though we don't see them very much!

For more information about the reserve including up-to-date sightings and forthcoming events, please look on the website at: [rspb.org.uk/reserves-and-events/reserves-a-z/lakenheath-fen/](http://rspb.org.uk/reserves-and-events/reserves-a-z/lakenheath-fen/) email us at [lakenheath@rspb.org.uk](mailto:lakenheath@rspb.org.uk) or phone the office on 01842 863400.

Hope to see you on the reserve soon!

*Cheers,  
Katherine, Warden  
6th March 2020*

## Weekend in Scotland

In January 2020 Mike and Carol arranged for 43 of our Group to spend three days in Dumfries and Galloway. We stayed at the Station Hotel in Dumfries and despite storm Brendan we managed to have an excellent time and saw a good variety of birds. The main reason of course for visiting this area at this time of the year is the large numbers of barnacle geese which migrate from the Arctic regions to the Solway Firth.

We set off from Lincoln at 7 am and stopped for a break at a lovely café and farm shop on the A66, not far from Scotch Corner. We then made our way to RSPB Campfield Marsh in Cumbria. When we arrived, it was raining quite heavily with a very strong wind and after visiting the Reception we walked along an extremely wet and muddy footpath to a hide overlooking Bowness Common. Despite the difficult conditions we managed to see a little egret, heron, skylark, blackbird, buzzard, linnets, redwings, goldfinches, chaffinches, and woodpigeons. On the pools there were wigeons, teals, mallards, shovelers, a goldeneye and a couple of moorhens and the wet grassland contained lapwings, a curlew and oystercatcher.

We then returned to the Solway Firth where there was a bit of shade from the wind and rain. We saw a small skein of barnacle geese over the sea and on the water's edge there were knots, dunlins, grey plovers, black-tailed godwits and a great black-backed gull. A peregrine was spotted flying along the beach and in the adjacent trees and bushes we found a stock dove, robin, magpie, goldcrest, great tit, tree sparrows, jackdaws and carrion crows. A sparrowhawk was also seen which brought our total for the first day to 36 species. We then set off for our hotel in Dumfries.



Photo: Peter Skelton

Barnacle geese

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The next day, Sunday, we had planned to visit RSPB Mersehead but owing to the adverse conditions there, we went to Caerlaverock instead. It was a cold, dry, sunny day and as we drove along the riverside in Dumfries, we spotted some goosanders. At Caerlaverock we soon added black-headed gull, collared dove, rook, house sparrow, pied wagtail and greenfinch to our list before moving to the Peter Scott observatory to see the feeding of the whooper swans. This was also enticing mute swans, greylag geese, Canada geese and several ducks including wigeons, teals, mallards and tufted ducks. Afterwards we set off to explore the rest of the reserve and our first stop was at the feeding station on the Peter Scott trail. This was being visited by blue tits, great tits, coal tits, siskins, yellowhammers, tree sparrows and goldfinches. A treecreeper, goldcrest and great spotted woodpecker were seen in the adjacent trees and in the nearby wildlife garden we found a pair of bullfinches.

The footpaths to the Saltcot Merse Observatory and Avenue Tower hide were flooded in places but this did not deter most of our intrepid group. On the way we saw dunnocks, two wrens, robins, redwings, reed buntings, starlings and a flock of twites in a distant tree. A sparrowhawk, kestrel, pheasant and stock dove were also

seen and those of us who managed to get to the Observatory were rewarded with an excellent view of a merlin. Well worth getting your feet wet for! From the two hides we saw the usual wildfowl and waders with the addition of shelducks, pintails, a red-breasted merganser and golden plovers. Other new birds were little grebes, a male hen harrier and cormorants.

On Monday, our final day, we went to RSPB Mersehead. Mike had previously contacted the warden who informed him that although some parts of the reserve were impassable and gale force winds and heavy rain were forecast, we should be alright. When we were approaching Mersehead there were barnacle geese everywhere, large flocks in the fields and thousands flying over the reserve. It really was a spectacular sight. At the Visitor Centre we were able to look at the feeders while sheltered from the elements and they were attracting yellowhammers, great tits, goldfinches, chaffinches, greenfinches and tree sparrows.

We then ventured outside and decided to do the Coastal Trail before the tide came in. The first part of the walk was quite sheltered but when we turned on to the beach the wind was very strong and it was difficult to hold our binoculars steady. The only birds we saw were some meadow pipits and herring gulls and it was a relief when we eventually left the beach for the shelter of some woodlands. Here a tree creeper was seen and a leucistic barnacle goose was found among the large flock in the fields. We then made our way to Bruaich hide where there were shelducks, pintails, shovelers, curlews, lapwings, common gulls, a grey heron, little grebe and marsh harrier. This brought our total for the weekend to 74 species. The only mammals we saw were roe deer and brown hares.



Marsh harrier

Les Bunyan (rspb-images.com)

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In view of the weather we left for home earlier than planned, at 2 pm and after our usual stop at the motorway services we arrived in Lincoln around 7.15 pm. Thanks to Mike and Carol for once again organising a wonderful weekend.

*Ray Daniels*  
*RSPB Lincoln Local Group*

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## A new hide for Rye Meads

A brand-new hide has been completed at RSPB Rye Meads nature reserve replacing the old Kingfisher Hide with an up to date facility.

The Kingfisher Hide at RSPB Rye Meads was falling into disrepair. The hide was a very popular destination on the reserve, giving unparalleled views of kingfishers. So, the RSPB appealed for funding to develop a brand-new kingfisher hub, catering for families, birders and photographers alike!

The old Kingfisher Hide at Rye Meads was constructed in the 1980s and had reached the end of its useful life. The hide was perfectly positioned on the edge of a freshwater pool providing spectacular close views of the kingfishers and their nesting bank. Given the amazing location of the hide, it was a key attraction for visitors enabling them to get astonishing views of many species, but especially the breeding kingfishers.

One of the principal aims of the RSPB is to support nature by bringing people, especially young people and families, closer to nature, building a community who cares about nature and wants to save it. As the Kingfisher Hide provided such a close connection to the life of this iconic bird, it was a vital place for nurturing a wider interest in nature and its conservation amongst local communities.

The Kingfisher Viewing Hub project replaces the old hide, improving access and greatly enhancing the overall visitor experience. The pool in front of the hide has been extended, allowing more views of more wildlife and a new bank has been installed offering further nesting space for kingfishers.

Following an extensive community consultation, it was established that there are three main groups of visitors: birdwatchers, photographers and nature-loving families. The new hub is designed to accommodate for all their needs at the same time, providing more space for all and with secluded areas in the hide for birdwatchers and photographers.

If you no longer wish to hear from RSPB Lincoln Local Group, please contact Mel Thorn, T: 07774 667370 to *unsubscribe from communications*, confirming your name and address and stating that you wish to unsubscribe from the RSPB Lincoln Local Group's communications.

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Kingfisher

Demolishing the old hide and building the new hub obviously were very costly and an appeal was made for funds to carry out the work. People don't always realise just how expensive it is to provide visitor facilities at nature reserves so to give you some idea of the money required, some of the projected costings for this project included:

- Demolition of existing hide - £1,200
- New Hide - £46,500
- Upgrade 210m of footpath to hide - £7,150
- Landscaping and create hardstanding behind the hide - £1,600
- Extend pool in front of the hide creating water vole habitat - £1,200
- Install new base for kingfisher bank - £2,600
- CCTV camera install to kingfisher nest burrows - £1,280

Funding came from many sources including several local groups; and in 2019, the Lincoln Local Group made a donation of £1,000 towards the costs. The new kingfisher hub was officially opened on Thursday 26 March. Next year we are planning a coach trip to Rye Meads to see the new hide and the rest of the reserve. The last time we visited Rye Meads was in February 2007 when we also called in at Amwell Quarry.

Rye Meads is a 58.5-hectare biological Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in Hertfordshire. This delightful wetland reserve beside the River Lee is a firm favourite with walkers, birdwatchers and photographers thanks to its many trails, visitor centre and eight birdwatching hides. We are planning to visit the reserve in the late spring/early summer of 2021 so you will all have a chance to go to this popular reserve.

## Calendar and photo Competition

The Group will be producing a calendar for 2021 and, as this year, it will feature photos taken by members of the Group. The calendar will go on sale in September.

We would like you to submit a maximum of three digital photos for consideration by handing them to a committee member on a memory stick or CD (which will be returned to you). Alternatively, you can email low-resolution jpeg images to [info@lincolnrspb.org.uk](mailto:info@lincolnrspb.org.uk) If the images are selected for the calendar, we will require high-resolution files. Please state the month of the year in which each of the photos were taken.

The person submitting the photograph must be the photographer and the photograph must have been taken in the UK. The copyright of all photographs will remain with the photographer.

The subject must be British wildlife. No wildlife or habitats should be harmed, put at risk or unduly disturbed in the process of taking the photographs and the photographer must abide by the Code of Conduct for Wildlife Photography.

The photographs must be in landscape format and ideally should be 3508 x 2480 pixels.

The committee will decide which photographs will be used for the calendar. The committee's decision is final and no correspondence regarding the results will be entered into.

The deadline for submitting photographs is 31 July 2020. Any photo submitted after that date will not be considered.



Marsh harriers in a stormy sky

## A stormy start to 2020

It has not been a good start to the year as far as our field meetings are concerned. Although

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we did have an enjoyable time in Dumfries and Galloway, on the third day we were there storm Brendan hit the area with winds of up to 80 miles an hour so we decided to leave for home two hours earlier than planned just as the storm began to take hold with heavy rain and gale force winds. It made for an exciting trip home with the wind blowing the roof hatches on the coach open several times during the journey!

The first day trip of the year was to have been to The Lodge nature reserve and Headquarters of the RSPB but we were advised by the reserve manager not to go as storm Dennis was due to hit the UK that weekend and as the reserve is mainly woodland, there was a serious risk of falling trees and branches making the reserve far too risky to visit. So, we postponed the trip for two weeks. However, two weeks later storm Jorge was due to hit the UK that weekend so the decision was taken to cancel the trip completely. Some of you may be disappointed but people's safety must come first. If you have paid any money for the trip it will be refunded in full.

Let's hope that the rest of the year does not cause any problems. However, with the coronavirus beginning to become more widespread that too may affect some of our events, depending on Government advice and whether the virus becomes a serious epidemic. The best way to keep up to date and to what is happening to events is to check our website before setting off. We will endeavour to keep it fully up to date with any information about changes or cancellations to the programme.

## Newsletter copy date

Please send your contributions for the autumn newsletter to the group leader by the end of July. Contributions can be hand-written, typed, submitted on memory stick or, preferably, sent by email to: [info@lincolnrspb.org.uk](mailto:info@lincolnrspb.org.uk)

## Field trip reports

### Lackford Lakes – 13 October 2019

In October we visited Lackford Lakes near Bury St Edmunds in Suffolk. We set off in the rain but by the time we reached our destination it had stopped and apart from a light shower at lunch time, it remained dry all day. This reserve consists of lakes, reeds, meadow and woodland and the River Lark runs along its northern edge. The Reception and Café overlook a small pond and the first bird we saw was a kingfisher, which was a great start to the day. There was also a moorhen and mallard and the feeders were attracting blue tits and great tits.

There are eight hides on the reserve overlooking the many lakes and reedbeds and we decided to go to The Slough first, which is an area where kingfishers are frequent visitors. In the woodlands we spotted woodpigeons, magpies, greenfinches, siskins, blackbirds, dunnocks, long-tailed tits, a jay, blackcap and wren. When we reached the hides overlooking The Slough the kingfisher activity was amazing. There were at least three different birds flying between the two hides and landing on the various perches provided. Occasionally one would fly up above the water, hover like a hummingbird and then dive into the water, emerge with a fish and return to its perch to eat it. They were fascinating to watch and provided some wonderful photographic opportunities. We also caught a glimpse of a water rail, a Cetti's warbler and three common snipe, which were well camouflaged.

After a very entertaining hour or so we left the kingfishers to explore the rest of the reserve. On Mill Deep, Hawker pool and Long Reach we saw Egyptian geese, Canada geese, greylag geese, mute swans, coots, great crested



Little grebe

grebes, little grebes, grey herons and little egrets. Other wildfowl seen were gadwalls, pochards, shovelers, tufted ducks and wigeons. The lakes also contained lapwings, cormorants, black-headed, lesser black-backed and great black-backed gulls and a common buzzard. Jackdaws and carrion crows were flying over. Walking between the



Green woodpecker

hides we spotted robins and long-tailed tits in the bushes and we came across a large tree stump which had bird seed sprinkled on the top. This was enticing a male pheasant, nuthatch, two marsh tits and a coal tit.

Other birds seen by the group were a great spotted woodpecker, green woodpecker, merlin, bullfinch and goldfinches, which brought the total bird species to 50. A field vole was the only mammal we found but we had a very enjoyable day.

### Titchwell Marsh – 17 November 2019

Our field trip in November should have been to Rutland Water but in view of the flooding in the area we were advised to cancel it. Mike therefore arranged for us to visit Titchwell Marsh, which turned out to be an excellent choice because we had good weather and saw 64 species of birds.

The first birds on our list were woodpigeons, starlings and a magpie but when we checked the feeding station near the visitor centre, we added goldfinches, greenfinches, chaffinches, great tits, long-tailed tits, a coal tit and dunnock. In the nearby trees and bushes, we also spotted a blackbird, tree creeper, pheasant, robin and two goldcrests and a skein of pink-footed geese flew over. We then set off along the West Bank Path, carefully looking in the dykes for a water rail. We only saw a moorhen but some of our group managed to find one in this area later.

When we reached the freshwater marsh there were several marsh harriers and a buzzard flying in the distance and while we were watching them, a bittern flew out of the reeds in front of us. On the marsh on the east side of the path there were curlews, black-headed gulls, brent geese, little egrets, a great white egret and a grey plover. We then went into the Island Hide, which overlooks the freshwater marsh and there were many waders and wildfowl. The waders included avocets, golden plovers,

lapwings, redshanks, knots and dunlins and the wildfowl consisted of tufted ducks, mallards, gadwalls, teals, wigeons, shelducks, shovelers and greylag geese. Also, there were reed buntings, pied wagtails and common gulls.

After lunch we walked down to the beach and on the way, we had excellent views of a pair of stonechats and several meadow pipits. A kestrel flew over and on the tidal marsh there were little grebes, bar-tailed godwits, black-tailed godwits, a spotted redshank and a lovely male pintail. On the tide line we spotted turnstones, sanderlings and oystercatchers and on the sea, there were great crested grebes, cormorants, herring gulls, lesser black-backed gulls and a solitary grey seal. Additional birds seen were a rock pipit, water pipit and yellow-legged gull and other mammals found were a shrew and muntjac deer. After a very enjoyable day at a wonderful reserve we returned to the coach.

### Blacktoft Sands – 15 December 2019

Our final trip of the year was to the RSPB reserve at Blacktoft Sands. It was a cold day but it remained dry with some sunny periods. In the trees bordering the carpark we saw blue tits, blackbirds, a robin and magpie and when we reached the feeding station, we added tree sparrows, chaffinches, a goldfinch and dunnock to our list. The adjacent field and reedbeds contained carrion crows, woodpigeons, a pied wagtail, pheasant, moorhen and flock of fieldfares.

We went into the Centre, which overlooks a reedbed and we saw mute swans, wigeons, mallards, teals, lapwings and a marsh harrier. We then made our way to the three hides to the east of the Centre where there were more marsh harriers, a kestrel, reed buntings, greylag geese and a great spotted woodpecker. After a short break for lunch we went to the hides to the west of the Reception and we were pleased to find a good variety of birds. They included great tits, curlews, shelducks, shovelers, black-headed gulls, little grebes, two buzzards and a black-tailed godwit.

We also saw five bullfinches and we had an excellent view



Bullfinch

Mike Langman (rspb-images.com)



Rock pipit

Mike Langman (rspb-images.com)

of a goldcrest. We then returned to the most easterly hide where we were hoping to see the hen harriers coming in to roost. Unfortunately, we had to leave before they arrived but we did have a distant view of a stonechat and a brief glimpse of a kingfisher flying along the dyke in front of the hide. Some of our group also spotted whooper swans which brought the total species seen to 38. Nevertheless, it was a very enjoyable day.

*Ray Daniels  
RSPB Lincoln Local Group*

## New Local Group Officer

A new Local Group Officer for the Central and Eastern Region has been appointed. George Lee-Harris joined the RSPB 9 March this year. George has a background in working with volunteers and community groups through his work with the Sheffield Wildlife Trust and is incredibly passionate about making a positive impact for the environment. Spending a year with the UN Environment as an intern has given George a good insight into policy and advocacy for the environment, right down to grassroots community movements.

George is based at the RSPB's England Headquarters in Birmingham and is working full time Monday to Friday. He takes over from Drew Lyness' Local Groups Officer role for Eastern England making up the new central and eastern region.

George will be our Group's first point of contact for enquiries, registering new volunteers, etc and he will be the person for you to contact about any aspect of our local Group that you feel you are unable to discuss with a committee member or the Group Leader. The address for RSPB England Headquarters is:

RSPB England Headquarters  
First Floor, One Cornwall Street,  
Birmingham, B3 2JN  
Tel: 01767 693777

## Greenspaces trip to Scotland

3 - 8 February 2020

One can never have too much of Scotland whatever the season, so setting off with much anticipation of seeing snow on 'them thar' hills this was to be a reconnaissance trip for forthcoming Greenspaces tours.

Calling at Insh Marshes on the way up gave loads of waterfowl, mainly the dabblers of mallards, teals and a couple of shovelers. It was clear that there was to be very little snow on the mountain tops and it had been wet rather than cold.

Saturday turned into Sunday with light snow forecast so, armed with camera, cushion, birdseed and a flask, we set out for Loch Garten. It was to be fairly quiet as work on the revamped Nature Centre had stopped for the weekend. Great views of 'cresties' (crested tits), red squirrels, great spotted woodpeckers, a tree creeper, and a host of other species were had with some even getting their photographs taken as the light snow got heavier. Heading to Avielochan, putting some feed out in the now heavier snow it soon attracted a host of tits and chaffinches with a couple of dashes from the resident sparrowhawk being made through the area. The constantly changing light on the hills due to the snow showers coming and going was something to be admired and enjoyed. A short walk from Grantown-on-Spey later in the day showed the River Spey up and above its normal levels giving no chance of seeing the resident dippers.

With the following day being inclement it was a rest day and also it was the evening of my Seabird Cities talk at the hotel, so a little final prep was needed for that.



Photo: Steve Lovell

Great spotted woodpecker

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or contact Steve on 01522 – 689456

or 079 57 618 684

A drive up to the Morayshire coast gave a great selection of winter waders and several species of sea-ducks – common and velvet scoters with eiders and the wonderfully plumaged long-tailed ducks being seen at close quarters in the harbour at Burghead.

As Tuesday became Wednesday, Findhorn Bay was visited just after high tide with redshank, bar-tailed godwits, curlews, dunlins, knots, oystercatchers, 200+ pintails and a single pink-footed goose which had clearly suffered an injury to its leg, possibly from shooting. I would have liked to have recovered the bird but to get it to a rescue centre was too much of a risk on the shifting sands.

Around the corner on to Findhorn Dunes, odd flypasts with various waders, with cormorants and shags on the sea and up to 50 long-tailed ducks. The spit at the mouth of the Spey had both common and grey seals on an exposed sandbar. A pair of stonechats in the twigs in the dunes brightened up the birding further. Heading into Findhorn village a new café was discovered being very community based with organic vegetables, a bakery and incredible cakes but a real buzz from the people in there. Moving on to Nairn and making our way to the harbour it was well worth the effort even in the

now strengthening winds. A stunning male goosander, a large raft of scaup, hundreds of long-tailed ducks, more common scoters and on the rocks and beach 60+ bar-tailed godwits, turnstones and a couple of purple sandpipers. A visit later in the day to Fort George allowed a viewing of an exhibition of Scotland from the air. It was just brilliant, particularly the photo of the old Singer sewing machine works on the Clyde, which employed 19,000 people in its heyday.

On to Thursday and we took a group of guests from the hotel to Loch Garten, a couple of which were keen photographers and they managed to get some good photos of the differing bird species although the squirrels were a little elusive.

So on to the afternoon; after stopping to take lunch at Tomintoul we went out with David, a local guide to the Glenlivet estate to see mountain hares. After traversing the hillsides and looking for signs we managed to see a few but without putting them under undue pressure. It is just so sad to see them in their winter white when there is and has been very little snow this winter. Who knows if with climate change will there be an evolution towards a different pelage in the future? It was great to see several brown hares and rabbits in this area of the Ladder Hills thus completing our British lagomorph (hares and rabbits) list for the day. David was also an astronomer of the highest order and he had helped to set up and get special status for the Glenlivet Estate as a Dark Skies Park as well as being an astronomical photographer of some repute judging by his images. Getting back in good time to the hotel it was to be my second talk of the week about the Somerset Levels and all of its unique habitats and wildlife through the seasons.

The final day was spent on the Black Isle with Udale Bay at high tide being spectacular with 300+ curlews, 200 + bar-tailed godwits,



Mountain Hare



Crested tit

Photo: Steve Lovell

800+ redshanks, dunlins, knots, red-breasted mergansers, wigeons, teals and an unusual record of a little egret, which is not a common bird up in this part of Britain. Noticing a group of 300+ pink-footed geese, I managed to get behind the church wall without disturbing them in order to get a little closer for a few shots of them feeding on a stubble field. It was just great to see them this close and see all of their interactions with one another. Heading a little further east brought us into Cromarty, where Ecoventures are based, a company who specialise in trips out into the Forth to see the cetaceans notably the resident bottle-nosed dolphins and the various seabirds. It is a company that has won several awards on account of its reviews and also its 'safe space' policy. With the delights of the local café, bakery and cheese shop being assessed, a long walk down to the Sutors of Cromarty completed the day. A first time drive down Strathconnon was stunning, stopping at various points along the way, the highlight being a group of crossbills flying overhead calling as they went over. A brief stop at a regular otter observation point on the return journey proved to be fruitless but there is always another day.

It was great to be up in the area, meeting new people, and have a slightly different take on proceedings, seeing how the winter visitors had dispersed to various locations since our last visit in October 2019.

Steve Lovell  
Greenspaces Nature

## Conservation Success stories in 2019

In 2019, the RSPB celebrated the bitterns' best year since records began, with over 100 male,

booming bitterns recorded on reserves for the first time, and almost 200 males across the UK. Lakenheath Fen had the highest number of boomers recorded, whilst Avalon Marshes continued to be a stronghold.

Together with the WWT we have captive-reared and released 112 black-tailed godwits as part of Project Godwit. There are now more godwits breeding on the Ouse Washes than for the last 20 years!

In 2019, curlew numbers were as fit as a butcher's dog at Labrador Bay, where we recorded the highest number of pairs to date. Meanwhile, work at Ashill continues and 23 territories were recorded last season, with 30 also at Labrador Bay. These bespoke reserves are working well.

In the Forest of Bowland, RSPB staff and volunteers showed extraordinary dedication to look after all five hen harriers nests through to fledging, marking it as the most successful breeding year in Bowland since 2010! And increased police presence has resulted in just two hen harriers disappearing this autumn, compared to the 16 birds lost in suspicious circumstances in the same period last year.

News from Wallasea gives hope for the future. The habitat work was only completed in 2019 but already 146 pairs of breeding avocets and 124 curlew territories were recorded in summer. And in winter, 21,400 water birds were noted. The recently created saline lagoons are supporting lots of water birds with more than 5,300 birds recorded at the last Wetland Bird survey in October. This is just the start!

The response of butterfly species to all the efforts at Winterbourne Downs has been spectacular, with Small Blue finding the specially created butterfly banks in 2016, Marsh Fritillary arriving at the reserve in 2017, and



Corn bunting



Puffins

Adonis Blue colonising both banks in 2018. The icing on the cake was the sighting of three Duke of Burgundy butterflies in May 2019, amongst the cowslips in the sheltered area of longer grass. This has brought the total number of butterfly species at the site to 34!

In the 1980s there were fewer than 100 field crickets left in the entire UK. This year, more than 300 males were heard calling at RSPB Farnham Heath alone. This has been part of the fantastic work of 'Back from the Brink' partnership project which has been recognised by the National Lottery as the 'Best Heritage project' for 2019!

Puffarazzi continued to be a great citizen science touchstone for the RSPB. Phase 2 focussed on getting historic pictures of puffins with fish, which give us a handle on how their diet has changed. By October, some 2,500 photographs from over 40 colonies had been submitted by the public.

## Coach trip date confirmed

This year's annual programme gives two possible dates for the coach trip to Yorkshire Wildlife Trust Filey Dams reserve and Filey Brigg because the date could not be confirmed at the time the programme was printed.

The date has now been agreed and the coach trip will be on Sunday 11 October.

## Quotable quotes

"Look deep into nature, and then you will understand everything better."

*Albert Einstein*

## Dates for your diary

**ALL EVENTS UP TO SEPTEMBER HAVE BEEN CANCELLED DUE TO THE CORONAVIRUS (COVID - 19)**

**THE SITUATION WILL BE REVIEWED LATER IN THE YEAR SO PLEASE CHECK THE GROUP'S WEBSITE BEFORE LEAVING HOME TO TRAVEL TO AN EVENT**

### SEPTEMBER

**10 INDOOR MEETING Hungarian Wildlife** by Geoff Trinder. Sponsored by Shirley Warner in memory of her husband Peter Warner.

**13 COACH TRIP to RSPB Titchwell Marsh.** Autumn migration will be well underway at this time of the year. Leave Lincoln 8 am. Leave reserve 5 pm. Adults £23. C, H, VC, WC.

### OCTOBER

**8 INDOOR MEETING Wings Over Wales** by Steve Magennis, ARPS ([www.stevemagennis.co.uk](http://www.stevemagennis.co.uk)). Meeting sponsored by Sue Stevenson, Richard and Trevor Jones in memory of Christine.

**10 AGM AND MEMBERS' DAY.** See the winter issue of Nature's Home magazine for date and time or contact RSPB HQ T: 01767 680551.

**11 COACH TRIP to Yorkshire Wildlife Trust Filey Dams and Filey Brigg.** Leave Lincoln 8 am. Leave reserve 5 pm. Adults £23. C, WC.

### NOVEMBER

**12 INDOOR MEETING A Fish with Feathers** by Michael Leach DSc, FLS, FRGS, FZS ([www.michael-leach.co.uk](http://www.michael-leach.co.uk)). A talk about penguins. Michael is a well known wildlife author, speaker and photographer. Sponsored by Just Audi VW.

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**15 COACH TRIP to Ferry Meadows and RSPB Nene Washes** for a good selection of woodland and water birds. Leave Lincoln 8.30 am. Leave reserve 4.30 pm. Adults £20. C, H, VC, WC.

### DECEMBER

**10 INDOOR MEETING End of the Year Show.** Details available in September. Sponsored by Janette Marshall in memory of her parents, Eileen and John White.

**13 COACH TRIP to Pitsford Reservoir.** At this time of the year there will be plenty of winter wildfowl to see. Leave Lincoln 8 am. Leave reserve 4 pm. Adults £25, which includes the permit cost. H, WC

*Indoor meetings are held at Bishop Grosseteste University. Nature reserve facilities are shown thus: C = Café, H = Hides, NT = Nature Trail, S = Shop, VC = Visitor Centre, WC = Toilets.*

*To book coach trips or holidays phone Mike on 01526 321917.*

Further details of all of our events can be found on our website: [lincolnrspb.org.uk](http://lincolnrspb.org.uk)



The RSPB is the UK's largest nature conservation charity, inspiring everyone to give nature a home. Together with our partners, we protect threatened birds and wildlife so our towns, coast and countryside will teem with life once again. We also play a leading role in a worldwide partnership of nature conservation organisations.

**Website: [rspb.org.uk](http://rspb.org.uk)**

The RSPB Lincoln Local Group holds regular events to which RSPB members and members of the public are welcome.

**Website: [lincolnrspb.org.uk](http://lincolnrspb.org.uk)**