



# Friends of Hambrook Marshes

## June 2015

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### Bird Report

I was delighted to see a red kite flying fairly low over the Westgate Gardens on 20<sup>th</sup>, but even more thrilled to see what was presumably a different bird sail over Hambrook Marshes the following day (with a further sighting over Saint Augustine's Abbey on 4<sup>th</sup> July). Kites are scavengers, and were a common sight over London's refuse-strewn streets in Elizabethan times: almost certainly they would have been equally familiar to Canterbury's residents. Shakespeare refers to this splendid raptor in a number of his plays, describing London as "city of kites and crows". But my favourite quote comes from *A Winter's Tale*, in which he warns us "When the kite builds, look to lesser linen". On first sight, this may sound distinctly odd, but Shakespeare was an acute observer of the natural world, and knew that kites had a habit of decorating their nests with whatever they could steal from the London streets – in this case, underwear.

Other birds close to the reserve included a Cetti's warbler by the level crossing and a resident turtle dove just over the level crossing in Tonford Lane, heard singing its purring song and also planing down in display flight on outstretched wings.

Unfortunately, the great crested grebes' second breeding attempt on Tonford Lake following failure of their first effort seems to have come to nought, and both birds have now departed.

Actually on the reserve, two mandarins flew upriver, and a cuckoo was present on 3<sup>rd</sup>. Three mistle thrushes, little seen in summer, were present on 3<sup>rd</sup>, and up to 14 swifts have occasionally been feeding overhead, a definite, if fairly small, improvement on last year. The rasping calls of young starlings filled the air on 11<sup>th</sup> when a flock of about a hundred birds descended on the Tonford field.



But, for me, the most exciting birdwatching involved some remarkably common birds that brought the scrub on the old railway embankment seething into life on 19<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup>. On both these days about 40 small birds were flitting from bush to bush, in such a frenzy that it

was difficult to keep track of individuals, and impossible to count them accurately. The majority were blue tits (left), but mixed in with them were a few great and long-tailed tits (right), blackcaps, garden warblers, robins, wrens and dunnocks. In 2013 I had just a single record of the rather dull-looking garden warbler; last year I recorded one on four dates, while this spring it has been regular for over two months and the four that I saw in that bustling flock were presumably a family party that had bred locally, perhaps even on the reserve.



*Bird photos courtesy of Dave Smith*