



Friends of Hambrook Marshes

October 2015

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Bird Report

The first snipe and skylark of the winter were both recorded on 11th, so far with just one or two snipe per visit, but on 27th I actually saw a skylark feeding on the reserve, my first record of this species on the ground since I began recording here in September 2012. Skylarks can't tolerate a lot of disturbance, so the level of human activity at Hambrook may be more than their nervous dispositions can cope with.



Another winter visitor, the redwing, appeared on 5th, and there were 35 in the embankment scrub on 27th. This tiny scrap of habitat has an importance out of all proportion to its size, partly because of its strategic siting, running roughly north to south across otherwise uninviting meadow, so linking scrub in the Whitehall Farm/Canterbury Academy area with the trees and bushy vegetation fringing the Wincheap industrial estate on the far side of the river. Sharing the embankment with the redwings were 17 blackbirds (left) and 12 long-tailed tits. In the previous two weeks there had also been 35 goldfinches and 14 chaffinches in this confined area, so the site has been simply heaving with activity. Not bad going for a scrappy straggle of hawthorn bushes and wild rose.

I finally got a good view of a Cetti's warbler beside the Tonford level crossing on 19th. It is an extremely secretive bird that nevertheless periodically gives away its presence with explosive bursts of loud song from the depths of dense cover, and Dave Smith did extremely well to get this excellent photo of it (right). On a brief glance you might possibly be forgiven for dismissing it as an archetypal LBJ (little brown



job), the bane of all novice, and, come to that, more experienced, birdwatchers, but if you look closely at the photo you can see that the brown is actually a warm rufous shade, and the bird has a faint, pale eyestripe. Not much to go on, though, when the best you can normally hope for is a glimpse of a dark shape flitting around in the heart of a hawthorn bush.

A new species for the reserve on 11th, again on the embankment, was a solitary coal tit (left). As it is a woodland bird that favours conifers and other evergreens such as ivy and holly, it is hardly surprising that it took over three years for me to add it to the list, even though it is a regular winter visitor to my garden feeder.

On 5th I counted 280 black-headed gulls streaming across the reserve, probably heading for recently ploughed fields on the nearby Downs. Few, if any, are present in the summer months, so a high count is always a sure sign that winter is on its way, as is the return of little grebes to the river, with three present at the end of the month in their usual area close to the East Station railway bridge. Over a hundred wood pigeons were crossing the gulls' route that morning, creating a web of flightpaths, and as both species were moving through when I arrived soon after dawn, it is quite possible that the real numbers were much higher.

All bird photos courtesy of Dave Smith