

## Blue House Farm 8/3/14 Report from B.Luke

We had a good day at Blue House Farm. There were 15 of us. It was dry all day, but cool and windy when we were on the sea wall. Much warmer and sunny when we got down to the reserve. We had to splash through, or divert round, a certain amount of lying water and all ended up bringing home quite a lot of mud on our boots and trousers. But everybody seemed happy with the day.

We saw: Little grebe; Little Egret; Grey heron; Mute swan; Greylag goose; Canada Goose; literally hundreds of Brent Geese; Shelduck; Wigeon; Gadwall; Teal; Mallard; Shoveler; Tufted duck; Marsh Harrier; Kestrel; Peregrine; Pheasant; Moorhen; Coot; Oystercatcher; Lapwing; Knot; Curlew; Black-headed gull; Woodpigeon; Collared dove; Skylark (several singing); Meadow pipit (several doing their flight song and parachuting back to the ground or a fence post); Grey wagtail; Pied wagtail; Blackbird; Long-tailed tit; Blue tit; Great tit; Magpie; Jackdaw; Rook; Carrion crow; House sparrow; Chaffinch; Greenfinch; Goldfinch; Robin

and we heard: Green woodpecker; Dunnock

On arrival we switched on the webcam - and there was a barn owl in its box. Not one for the list, as it was on a screen, but good to see.

As we headed towards the sea wall we watched flock after flock of Brent geese heading west over the river Crouch. So, fearing that there might be none left on the reserve, we turned right when we reached the sea wall and walked up to the former ferry crossing to South Fambridge. From there we had reasonable views of the Brents, plus various other birds - though Long-tailed tits and grey wagtail were probably the only ones we did not see again later.

We then had to retrace our steps and walk a considerable distance along the sea wall, to the steps leading down on to the meadows and the permissive path leading to the hides. Any of us finding this a bit of a slog were put in our place when we were overtaken by a party of long distance walkers enjoying a 26 mile ramble. There was plenty of mud alongside the Crouch, but only a few gulls and oystercatchers enjoying it, though we did add a solitary knot to our list.

The hides were too small to accommodate all the party. The first one we came to had not much more than a coot to offer. So half the group stayed there to eat their lunch, while the other half moved on to the second hide.

This was much more productive and was where we saw our peregrine (perched), marsh harrier, little grebe, as well as enjoying a field full of Brent geese and flocks of lapwings and starlings, which took to the air from time to time when spooked.

As the party who had lunched in the less productive hide arrived, the first group there moved on to the third, which provided several new birds for the day (shoveler, kestrel, gadwall, lots of curlew ... ..).

From here some people headed off to the station and others to the pub. The sun was shining, the pub now stays open all afternoon; so those not in a hurry stayed a while.