

An excellent day was had. Coach nice and early, lovely lady driver with an impeccable safety record, always a reassurance. I would call it a trip of three thirds but it was more like two quarters and a half really what with the two quick stops at the Observatory and Arc Pits before the main RSPB reserve for the remainder of the day. There certainly was a lot to see.

The first stop at the Observatory gave many of us brief glimpses of porpoise. Not a bird but a marvellous sighting and an absolute first for me. Scoter and gannet were here too. We then had a wander around the moat - a perfectly round indentation in the gravel which has filled with gorse and other shrubbery and can be a pit stop for many returning birds. But the weather was fair and so the birds had no real need to hunker down in the shelter of the moat and the pickings were slim. A print out of Hume's Warbler was passed around the coach on the outward journey as there had been sightings in this vicinity but none of us were lucky with this one although Graham did get us a splendid male linnet showing well in the sunshine. The fresh new growth of Seakale provided a mix of purple and glaucous green popping up all over the shingle. Also of interest were the caterpillars inside their silk web, spun eerily around the branches of a blackthorn - most likely brown-tailed tussock moth.

Dungeness, with its lighthouse, dwellings and stony vastness, was very beautiful in the sunny weather but I can only imagine it's bleak in less favourable conditions. Even the giant power stations and distant industry have a certain appeal on a warm April morning. Andrew got our ten tonne coach to make an impressive emergency stop on the road out of the observatory. A pair of wheatear was in the garden of one of the beach residents and an entire bus load of bird enthusiasts flung themselves at the windows down one side of the coach. Also impressive to pass Derek Jarman's garden - the combination of black chalet, yellow windows, plants, pebbles and beach combed sculptures are a poignant legacy to the man himself.

Arc Pits gave us the wonderful long-tailed duck and courting great crested grebes. And a marsh harrier flew across the water while we were lunching in Hanson ARC Hide.

We reached the RSPB reserve at 1.30pm by which time the weather was cooler and cloudier. The highlight of the afternoon for many of us was a singing sedge warbler, performing from its bramble stage, its audience very appreciative with many commenting on the bird's red throat, never having been close enough to notice. And some of us saw our first swallows of the year – always a delight. Took a photo of a wolf spider with seven legs but I'd say this was more through accident than an evolutionary adaptation. And noticed lots of prehistoric equisetum growing up through the grass. Lastly Andrew saw a bearded tit right at the end of the day. Slavonian grebe was scribbled up on the RSPB sightings board for the day but no one got that one either... After losing, then finding one of our people, we made haste a little later than the proposed 4.30pm departure time but thankfully all present and correct. (DP ed MH)



You can view more of Dawn's photos at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/mbsbirds/sets/72157644092822455>