

Report on our Minsmere outing by Dawn Painter

Had a great coach trip to the famous RSPB Minsmere last Saturday (25.01.14). We were picked up promptly at 8.20 from Parliament Hill, the last pick up point for this eastbound journey. The MBS crowd were as friendly and welcoming as ever. As was our ever so keen driver, Amit ('remember me as Action Man In Trouble' he told us. Comfort or worrying premonition?). First pit stop was taken at about 10.30 and the first tick of the day, Pied Wagtail. Good start but onwards to the reserve.

Alight the coach, follow the leader, and straight to the coast for glimpses of common Scoter and flocks of, what turned out to be Goldeneye, flying in formation, just feet from the sea. Pintail, Shoveler, Lapwing, Teal next on the list from East Hide. Lovely views of Wigeon from the hide they forgot to build a roof on, between the scrape and the North Sea. Lots of Tufties, Greylag, Lapwing and one loan Redshank. The water levels were very high and much of the grassy banks were underwater therefore not a lot of perching space.

The weather was pretty grey although the sun made an appearance at around 2pm allegedly. No sign of Bewick's or Whooper just Mute from The Sluice. South Hide for lunch and 2 Curlew added (to the list not lunch). We were then getting reports of otter up at Island Mere. All in good time I thought. A Cetti's was heard but not seen, as usual.

Three stairs to climb the impressively lofty Bittern Hide and a decent view of the North Levels. Marsh Harriers aplenty – throughout the day actually – utterly amazing. I had never laid eyes on one until Titchwell a few weeks ago, now they were everywhere. I managed to get three in one photograph at one point.

A quick mooch through the woodland and our final destination of the day, Island Mere Hide. A crowd had gathered inside and out, along the right edge of the hide and walkway. A Bittern was lurking. I strolled over and positioned myself among the rabble. Within seconds of locating said Bittern, it had climbed up through the reeds and flown a short distance across the channel. Great timing by Andrew, our leader, on purpose I'm sure.

The group then dissipated for the last hour – I hung about waiting for Otters or Water Pipits (the lagoon directly in front of Island Mere Hide has been created specially for Water Pipits. I suspect there was too much water, even for them there Pipits). I saw neither but a fabulous day was had at this outstanding reserve.

End notes: Juvenile Shag were spotted, GBB Gulls, Dunlin etc 50 odd species in total including sightings of seal, out at sea.

End endnotes: driving back through torrential rain and lightning was not an enjoyable experience even with Action Man at the helm. But Dr Who was on my bus back from Parliament Hill which was strangely reassuring and made the visions of the swerving coach ride go away...

Dawn Painter

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