

## The Birds

Although the cold weather of last few weeks offered some incredible mid winter birding, it's been nice seeing thrushes feeding in open fields again now - where they should be! In comparison though, this period has been very 'average', and with several local birders having spent some of the time away, there are a lot fewer sightings to report and photos to show.

White birds have been the highlights during the last couple of weeks. On 16<sup>th</sup> an adult **Spoonbill** was found resting on Colyford Marsh, it remained in the area until 22<sup>nd</sup> during which time it could be found either here or on the estuary. On 25<sup>th</sup> a late afternoon jaunt along the estuary revealed an all white large Gull whether it's an unusual **Iceland Gull** or an all white commoner Gull species has still to be ascertained...

Continuing with the white bird theme, both our 'wild' Swans were still present, though out of the two the **Whooper** has been much more reliable. The **Bewick's** has become much more sporadic in its appearances.

The sea has received little attention, although it has been producing a few notable sightings. **Red-throated Divers** have been scattered about, with many both on the sea and flying over it, with a lone **Eider** remaining off Seaton Hole along with a drake **Red-breasted Merganser** on 28<sup>th</sup>. On 19<sup>th</sup> an impressive flock of 135 **Brent Geese** flew east, this included five **Pale-bellied Brents**.

On the estuary, five **Gadwall** remain from the big freeze, and other notable wildfowl included two female **Goosanders** on 23<sup>rd</sup> and three **Pintail** (one drake) on 26<sup>th</sup>. Also up to three **Med Gulls** have been present daily, and a 'Scandinavian' **Herring Gull** on 25<sup>th</sup>.

Photo: **Spoonbill** - Karen Woolley.



## Holyford Woods and environs

Spring is in the air. Bluebells are peeping out from the leaf litter everywhere, and where there is light and shelter Hazel catkins are between 3" and 4", bright with pollen. In the centre of each Foxglove plant are new shoots appearing. Feisty **Wrens** are back on the defensive, and the **Robins**, **Dunnocks** and the **Song Thrush** are in good voice. The **Great Spotted Woodpecker** is drumming away, and **Great Tits** are calling for mates. On the Reservoir are a total of 3 pairs of **Mallards**, and 2 **Moorhens** are in residence. **Goldcrests** are flitting around and calling in the conifers on The Hangings. On the reservoir the Parrot Feather weed which died down in the frost and snow is starting to pick up again. On two occasions Paco and I have seen **Roe deer**. As the buck lost his antlers before Christmas, I presumed the one which did not flee was him. New antlers will soon appear. Judging by the number of places where I pick up the pungent scent of **Fox**, the Woods are a main route on a dog fox's search for a mate. I am now on the look-out for the first frog spawn!



Warm Words from Jean Kreiseler, Cold Photos from Peter Vernon.

## Ringling

**Sunday** (Seaton Marshes) 27<sup>th</sup> **January**

With ice formed along the edge of the lagoon most duck appeared reluctant to break through or fly over it. Eventually a bold and huge 'domestic hybrid Mallard' made its way through to the bait and others followed very quickly into the catching area. The catch included 74 Shelduck (not 75 as originally thought) which included 55 retraps, 19 Wigeon (one retrap) and 1 Mallard. Total of 94 birds, not a bad catch for the site. The hybrid Mallard was released unharmed to act as an 'active' decoy for future catches! We had our largest attendance with 23 present with family members and friends appearing during the morning.

**Monday** (Colyford Common) 28<sup>th</sup> **January**

Early this morning the keen few ventured to remove birds from the Abberton Traps, resulting in Teal 4, Mallard 3 and Moorhen 2. Not wishing to waste the morning mist nets, were erected and 15 birds were caught and processed: Great Tit 2, Blue Tit 5 (2), Robin (1), Reed Bunting 1, Goldfinch 1 and Long-tailed Tit 5. Just so that those new members of the Group are aware the figures in brackets relate to retraps in the overall total.

## The Trivia

Pleased to tell you that our two Otters are frequently seen, at the Borrow Pit and other parts of the reserve.

Sue Smith took a lovely sequence of photos of Roe deer at Black Hole Marsh on the 24<sup>th</sup> – here is just one of them.

Perhaps not so trivial, but this weekend is the RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch, during which everyone is urged to note the birds in their garden for just one hour. Get a form at [www.rspb.org.uk/birdwatch/](http://www.rspb.org.uk/birdwatch/)



## Diary Dates

Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> Feb 10 am to Noon

**Birds for Beginners** at Colyford Common hide This is the new name for 'Meet the Birds', and is a chance to talk about the birds, to pass on your knowledge or learn.

Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> Feb All day

**Bird Watch at Portland Harbour and RSPB Reserves**  
Contact Ian Waite for details 01297 20326

Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> Feb 1 pm to 4 pm ) **Wet and Wild Winter Weekend.** Based at Colyford

Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> Feb 10 am – 4 pm )

Common with parking at Colyford Memorial Hall on Saturday

Monday 15<sup>th</sup> Feb 10 am – 4 pm )

Monday but NOT Sunday. *Full programme attached.*

This twice-monthly email newsletter is freely available to anyone who would like it, as is a periodic one about the activities of the East Devon Local Group of the Devon Wildlife Trust. Just send me an email with Axe Estuary Birds and/or East Devon DWT in the subject line. Also, for those without a computer, I will send a copy by post if you would like to send me some stamps.

Thanks to those who keep us informed – please continue to tell us of any unusual, interesting or amusing sightings, and what is about locally, and send any photos you would like to share.

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*Shelduck*

*Carol Lowe*

