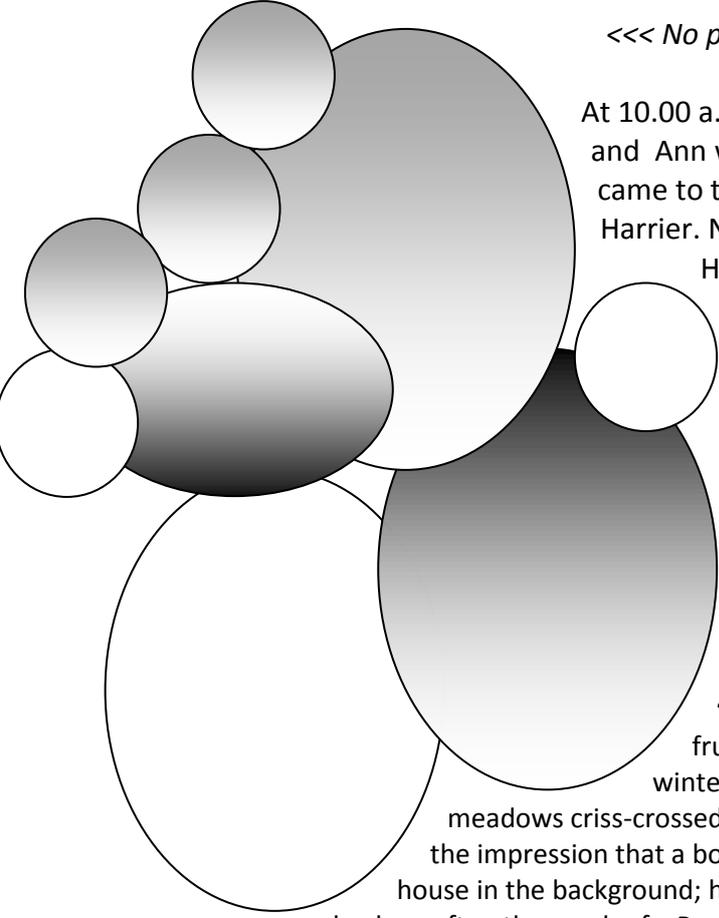


U3A Birding Group Outing: 16th April, 2016 at Ludham

Di Stagg

I have just come back from the Isle of Wight, where we had glorious weather. Blue skies; fluffy white clouds and warm sun. BUT NO BIRDS. Today I decided to run an extra outing as there will be no May Outing. The weather: solid rain all day – BUT BIRDS EVERYWHERE!

<<< No photos this week – just raindrops!



At 10.00 a.m., our little group, met at my house. It consisted of Wendy and Ann who together joined us as a result of the Open Day; Ann came to the Titchwell Outing and excelled herself by finding the Hen Harrier. Nicole was also with us. Her last event in Norfolk was the Hickling trip and she has attended a number of Birding Banters. It was left to Di to decide what we should do without drowning. We decided on a short trip in the car then a warming coffee and maybe Birding Banter.

Before we left, I heard a **Goldcrest** in the fir tree and after hunting for it, the little bird (our smallest) was tracked down, so a happy group got into the car. My yard was covered in sticks: result of two **Jackdaws** building a nest in a redundant chimney. I wish they would clear up after themselves...

We started in the direction of Ludham and made a quick stop at 'The Oak Tree Gap' at Horning Upper Street. This is usually quite fruitful even without the Bewick Swans that we see below us in the winter. The view is one of my favourites: looking down into the water-meadows criss-crossed with dikes and over to a mill by the hidden River Ant, which gave the impression that a boat was floating through the fields. Woodland and an occasional house in the background; hedging dividing ploughed land from grazing pasture; various bushes, often the perch of a Buzzard, but not today. There were numerous white blobs, though – all **Mute Swans**, except one – a **Little White Egret**.

Just down the road, we pulled into the lay-by near Ludham Bridge. It was tipping down and two got wet simply looking in the boot; I got soaked checking the field beside us. Nicole stayed warm until Ann called us all over with excitement: a **Barn Owl** was quartering the field to the right hunting back and forth for voles and the like. He had obviously had a bad night due to the rain and was so hungry (or maybe his chicks were) that he was forced to hunt at 10.40 in the morning. He was not doing well, however, because his feathers were wet and therefore no longer silent. Exhausted, he came to rest awkwardly on the 45° support-wire for an electricity pole.

In the distance on the other side of the road were two **Buzzards**, also hunting. There were some **Mallards**, **Greylag Geese** and more **Mute Swans**. It was too wet and cold to walk down to the bridge as I usually do, so we climbed back in the warm. Then I opened their windows to listen to a **Skylark** somewhere up in the grey.

As we drove over the bridge – great excitement – our first **House Martin** of the year flew over us! I had just missed seeing a Swallow the other day, so this was a real treat! The House Martins nest under the eaves of the nearby boat-shed. One House Martin might not make a Spring, especially not today, but it certainly promises there will be a Summer soon!

Down the little lane past The Dog Pub, a number of Crows were digging in a very muddy patch in the field. I explained that Crows come in small numbers; Rooks in large numbers; Crows are smart, neat with black beaks; Rooks are scruffy with silky pyjamas and 'white noses' (a white patch at the top of their beaks), 'So these are Crows'. But, no. They were **Rooks** with very muddy black noses and wet pyjamas stuck to their legs!

We braved the flood at the top of the Causeway to St Benet's Abbey and encountered a number of garden birds – which of course stopped going on the feeders as soon as we arrived. A beautiful female **Pheasant** was feeding the other side of the hedge, with two males not far behind her. **Jackdaws** hopped on the farmhouse roof and a very wet Partridge sat motionless in the field. I hoped it would be our rare English species with its grey legs and a beautiful chestnut horseshoe on its breast. It was sitting on its legs; I couldn't see a horseshoe so it was probably a **French Red-Legged Partridge**.

It is often difficult to identify birds even for the experienced: tricks of the light; silhouettes; just a flash of something fast.

A **Moorhen** (or a blackbird) flew into the dike and swam away – well, blackbirds don't usually swim, do they? One **Egyptian Goose** and some more **Mute Swans**... actually a lot more – at least a flock of 28 or more! They were presumably the non-breeding teenagers getting to know each other ready to pair up next year.

We continued down the very wet causeway, trying to identify various little birds in the trees around us. Down towards the slurry yard, a **Heron** flew over and nearby a male **Marsh Harrier** quartered the field in front of us in a similar way to the Barn Owl with as much success. We had excellent views of its handsome grey and black plumage. The **Pied Wagtails** that live there showed up and the flock of about 30 **Stock Doves** flew round. A **Robin** and two **Reed Buntings** landed on the wire fence of the car park – and that was where we had to stop: it was far too wet to go to the Abbey and we had to contend with a tractor and two cars on the way back. At the top of the road we had a glimpse of some **House Sparrows** which are always good to see nowadays; then it was off to get Wendy home for her birthday treat.

At this point, Ann suggested that Nicole and I went down to Bouchon Bijou Bistro for coffee and a slice of delicious almond slice (which was nice) and they treated me (which was even nicer!). After a good chat, we made our way home: and despite being a very wet day, I think I can say everyone thoroughly enjoyed it.

Sightings: Part 1 – Hoveton Area: 10.00 am – 10.10 am Raining.

Goldcrest – 1	Wood pigeons – 3	Robin – 1
Blackbird – 2		
	TOTAL: 4 SPECIES.	NEW SPECIES: 4

Sightings: Part 2 – Horning Area: 10.18– 10.35 am. Raining.

Carrion Crows – 9	Mute Swans – 5	Little White Egret – 1
Barn Owl – 1	Buzzards – 2	Mallards – 2
Greylag Geese – 5	Black-headed Gulls – 2	House Martin – 1
Blackbird – 2	Wood pigeons – 10	Rooks – 6
Skylark – 1 heard		
	TOTAL: 13 SPECIES.	NEW SPECIES: 11

Sightings: Part 3 – St Benet's Causeway: 10.55 – 12.00 noon. Raining.

Wood pigeons – 20+	Blue Tit – 6	Robin – 2
Blackbird – 1	Chaffinch – 10+	Dunnock – 1
Great Tit – 1	Pheasant – 3m. + 1f.	Carrion Crow – 2
Jackdaws – 6	Red-legged Partridge – 1	Moorhen – 1
Egyptian Goose – 1	Mute Swans – 28	Skylark – 2 heard
Mallards – 6	Stock Doves – 30	Heron – 1
Marsh Harrier – 1 m.	Greylag Geese – 5	Pied Wagtails – 2
Magpies – 3	Reed Buntings – 2	Starlings – 2
House Sparrows – 4		
	TOTAL BIRDS: 25 SPECIES.	NEW SPECIES: 17

TOTAL DIFFERENT SPECIES FOR THE DAY: 32