

Isle of Sheppey Raptor Spectacular

Trip Report 26th February 2017

Led by Richard Taylor-Jones

Assisted by Helen Saunders & Julian Dowding



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Introduction

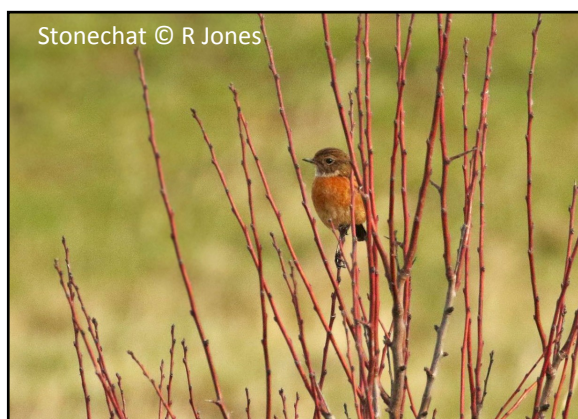
The Isle of Sheppey is renowned for its wildlife, and in particular its birds. It is a truly magical location situated on the northern coast of Kent, a true wilderness which has been well managed for birds and other wildlife. It's also home to about 100 wintering Marsh Harriers, which represents about 25% of the UK population. Lapwings too deserve special mention, for here, they are a common bird.

Richard met the 11 guests and Julian and Helen from Greenwings at the Elmley Nature Reserve just before 9am. After introductions were made, we spent a little time looking at the birds on the reserve feeder-Goldfinches, Chaffinches and House Sparrows together with a Pheasant-and then a short time watching Hares. Craig had initially seen a courting pair engaged in a boxing match near the power station.



We then we set off in an easterly direction following the footpath and passing countless waders and a good number of Marsh Harriers. Skylarks sang, and Lapwing squealed lifting our spirits somewhat in the stiff breeze.

Stop 1. We arrived at Sharfleet Creek passing Stonechat and lots of waders, and soon found ourselves watching a pair of Stoats, gambolling across the marsh. Richard gently tested our wildlife knowledge, by asking us how to differentiate Stoats from Weasels. Black tipped bushy tail!



Stop 2. Well Marsh Creek. We arrived here about 10:30am with the rising tide. Richard informed us that the rising tide would push the birds closer together and also nearer to us. This meant that any birds of prey, particularly falcons, might fly in. Here we scoped out the area, a useful high point in the landscape and picked up plenty of interesting waterfowl and waders. It was at this point that Richard spotted a Merlin flying fairly rapidly and low in a southerly direction over Spitend Marshes

and towards us. Most of the group managed to see this bird, the smallest of UK falcons, looking for a meal. Here we also heard our first Skylarks of the year, rising high and delivering their sweet silver songs.

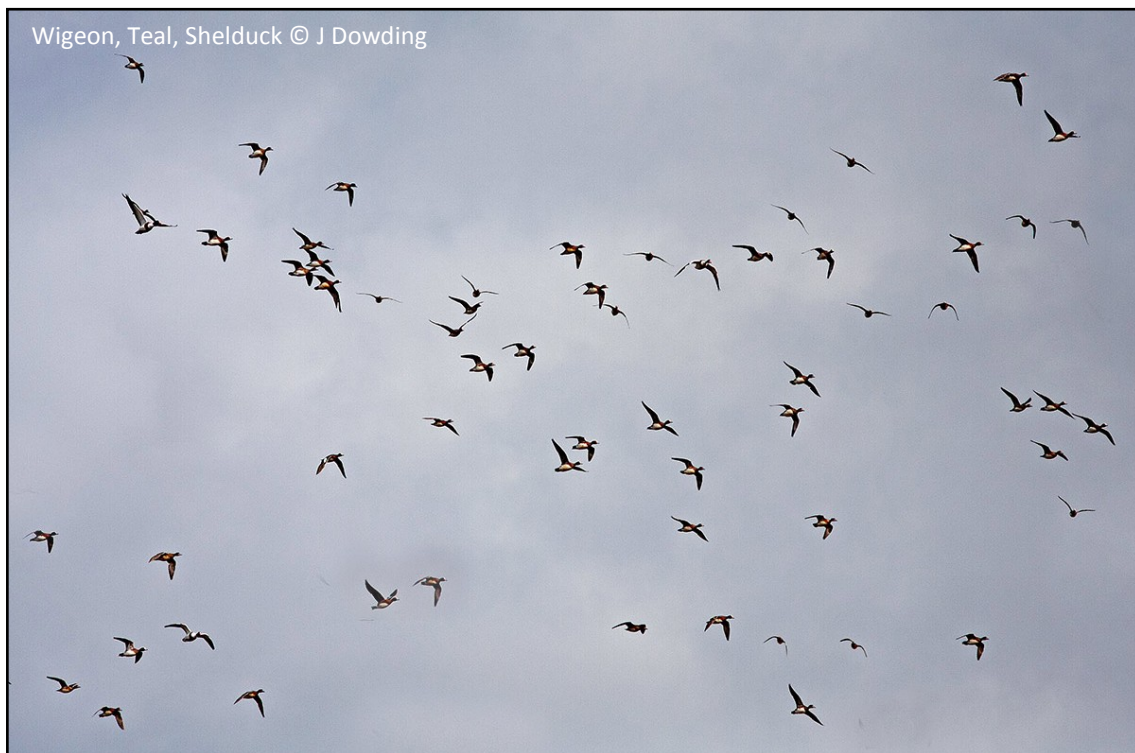


While scanning for raptors, flocks of Golden Plover and Dunlin would occasionally take flight, lit brilliantly against the dramatic sky. Flocks of Wigeon, mixed with Teal, Shelduck and Mallard also lifted.



Stop 3. Our last morning stop was South Fleet Hide overlooking a large expanse of open water where plenty of avian interest soon had everyone.

After our visit to South Fleet, we walked back to the car park and then drove to a local pub for a well-deserved lunch.



Stop 4. Following lunch, we drove the short distance to Capel Fleet Raptor Viewpoint. This RSPB reserve is well known for its raptors. Here, Richard quickly spotted a wonderful male Hen Harrier.



Also seen were Kestrel, Common Crane and Marsh Harrier. The wind had by now increased if anything and it appeared as if we were going to miss the much hoped for Barn Owls.

Stop 5. We returned to Elmley car park passing more Lapwings on the marshes on the way. Gary, Helen and Julian were the last to arrive and announced that while watching a Hare, they'd seen a



Short-eared Owl, so perhaps all was not lost. Our little group waited by the barn, in the hope of more owls but alas, none were seen. By now it was dusk so we decided to move on.

Stop 6. With no owls showing, and with light beginning to fade, Richard suggested that we should visit the Marsh Harrier roost, a short walk away. Arriving at the roost, we could see several birds floating over the roost and occasionally dropping in and landing. It was quite a sight, such magnificent birds set against the landscape of marshes and distant industry. Altogether about a dozen Marsh Harriers were seen. Their behaviour was rather interesting. What appeared to be happening was that a nesting pair had already set up territory and was seeing off interlopers that were trying to roost. So we witnessed the sight of Harriers making repeated attempts to land and eventually flying east to some other roosts for the night. Robert also pointed out 2 Buzzards here.

By about 6pm, we decided to call it a day and walked back to the car park. At this point, Ellen's eagle eyes spotted a Barn Owl, hunting low over the rough by the car park. Finally, we'd seen an owl. As we approached the bird, it seemed to disappear, but then a call from two of our party announced that they'd seen a Short-eared Owl. Eventually, most of us managed to see the bird and then another, perched on a post, almost hidden in the darkness that had now enveloped us. Another view of the Barn Owl rounded off the day with a flourish before saying our goodbyes and our homeward journey.

Footnote.

Altogether, 47 bird species were seen including 7 raptors, innumerable waders and waterfowl, and a handful of passerines. Greenwings would like to thank everybody on the trip for their wonderful company. Special thanks to Richard for his expert guiding.



After the roost © Julian D



Group shot © H Saunders

Species list overleaf

Isle of Sheppey - Raptor Spectacular 26th February 2017			comments	location
Birds				
	Common name	Scientific name		
1	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	3	
2	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>		
3	Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	12	
4	Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	20+	
5	Wigeon	<i>Anas penelope</i>	200	
6	Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>	2	
7	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>		
8	Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	20+	
9	Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>	12	
10	Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	2	
11	Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	1	
12	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	2	
13	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>		
14	Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	20+	
15	Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>	1 male	at Capel Fleet
16	Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	4	
17	Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	2	
18	Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>	1	
19	Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	100+	
20	Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>	1	at Capel Fleet
21	Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>	12+	
22	Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>		
23	Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>	75+	
24	Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	100's	
25	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	75	
26	Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	1	
27	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i> ?		
28	Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	12+	
29	Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>		
30	Black headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>		
31	Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>		
32	Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>		
33	Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>		
34	Barn Owl	<i>Tyto alba</i>	3	near Elmley Car Park
35	Short-eared Owl	<i>Asio flammeus</i>	3	near Elmley Car Park
36	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>		
37	Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	5	
38	Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	1	
39	Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>		
40	Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>		

	Birds continued		comments	location
41	Fieldfare	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>	1	
42	Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	4	
43	House sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>		
44	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	6 flying over	Sharfleet & Well Marsh Creek
45	Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	9 males	Capel Fleet
46	Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		Car park feeding station
47	Reed bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	2 males	
	Mammals			
	Common name	Scientific name		
1	European Hare	<i>Lepus europaeus</i>	several inc. 2 Boxing	
2	European Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>	1	
3	Stoat	<i>Mustela erminea</i>	2	