

Lowestoft RSPB Group Visit

Margaret Jay 2006

Our Lowestoft RSPB Local Group visited Wheatfen with Peter Clayton – it was a glorious warm, sunny day with just enough breeze to prevent us from getting too hot. On arrival we were met by the Warden, David Nobbs, who had coffee all ready for us. We then started our walk from Wheatfen Cottage which has been the home of the Ellis family since 1946.

Our first stop was at Home Dyke, where David pointed out the very clear water. It was tidal and could flood during the winter. Proceeding we passed a fen full of Meadowsweet, which in the Spring was full of Flag Irises, and so on to Smee Loop Loke. It was then we heard a Cetti warbler calling quite close. Smee Loop Loke is known for its flora and insects and along the Loop Loke we saw marsh pea (only found on the Norfolk Broads and Somerset Levels), purple loosestrife, yellow loosestrife, meadowsweet, tufted vetch, skull cap, marsh thistles, marsh woundwort, rosebay willowherb, the latter is also known as fire weed as it is the first plant to appear after forest fires. We then came to the river where we looked across to Strumpshaw on the other side. David then took us off the beaten track to see the swallowtail caterpillar. He showed us one which was quite large and which put out its yellow fork as protection also giving off a smell of pineapple.

Back on the main path we heard a sedge warbler, black cap, willow warbler, stopping in a clearing overlooking the river by a crack willow, where we saw a kestrel attacking a marsh harrier, continually sweeping down on to it, which certainly was one of the highlights of the day. Also observed was a heron, shelduck, and greylag geese. Earlier we had also seen an owl and a bittern flying across the path just in front of us. Amongst the butterflies, we came across the comma, gatekeeper, meadow brown, brimstone and ringlets, and on our return to the cottage a white admiral. Along the paths we came across dust holes where pheasants had taken dust baths.

After lunch David took us to Deep Water and Wheatfen Broads, stopping on the way in Surlingham Woods where we were shown the spot which had featured in the children's film *The Secret of Eel Island*. He then showed us the spot where the white admirals were most prolific and we saw four or five of them flitting about. David also pointed out a giant marsh marigold which had leaves as big as rhubarb leaves. Also seen was a common spotted orchid. We also came across wild red currants in the woods, from which our cultivated red and black currants have derived.

It was an excellent day out. Many thanks to Peter Clayton and David Nobbs.