

## AUTUMN WALK

28<sup>th</sup> October 2023

Fourteen hardy souls (including Committee members) braved the elements for the Friends annual autumn walk. In spite of the dire forecast, we were very fortunate with the weather with watery sunshine persisting for most of the walk. Sadly the weather forecast meant that we had to cancel the planned bird ringing.

This year's walk had been brought forward by a couple of weeks from previous years to take advantage of the extra daylight and better weather(!). The recent heavy rain had resulted in rapidly rising water levels in the reservoir (after months of little or no rainfall) and very wet conditions under foot especially in Whillets Meadows. Wellies were definitely the order of the day!

As with previous years we started with a walk from the Hide through the Study Area to Pintail Point. We were hoping to see plenty of fungi given the recent rain, but in the event there was not too much to see. We were able to spot and identify a number of common species – Fly Agaric, The Deceiver, Amethyst Deceiver, Birch Bracket, Birch Bolete, Green Elf Cup, Stinkhorn, Dog Stinkhorn, Inkcap and Yellow Field Cap. There were a number of specimens that we were unable to identify, many of which were small bonnet types of the *Mycena* family.

As we walked through the Study Area we were able to point out some of the habitat improvement work carried out by the Work Party during the year, the main aim of which was to bring light into the area to encourage more wild flowers and butterflies. We talked about the high nest boxes and the successes this year with Tawny Owl, Mandarin Duck, Jackdaw and Stock Dove. We also saw the remains of a wasps' nest in the ground which had been entirely destroyed by badgers – just a few empty combs and bedraggled wasps remained.

At Pintail Point we enjoyed splendid views across the reservoir back towards the Hide. We saw the first of many flyovers by Redwing. We pointed out the nest box where a pair of Barn Owl had successfully raised 4 chicks this year. We also pointed out a hornet's nest in a box which had been used successfully by Mandarin Duck earlier in the year. This is one of three hornets' nests in our nest boxes this year (more than usual). All three are nests of our native hornet (*Vespa crabro*) and thankfully not the invasive Asian Hornet (*V. velutina*).

After returning to the Hide, we then headed towards Whillets Meadows taking time *en route* to look at the birdlife on the Reservoir from the various viewing points along Legsheath Lane. As well as the usual large numbers of Greylag and Canada Geese and increasingly, Egyptian Geese, we spotted Great Crested Grebe, Little Grebe, Teal, Shoveler, Gadwall, Tufted Duck, Mallard, Grey Heron and Cormorant. Some of us were fortunate to see fleeting glimpses of a Kingfisher darting across the water and also a Grey Wagtail at the water's edge. The main aerial activity was provided by 100+ "chukking" Jackdaws in flight above the high trees on the North bank of the Reservoir.

On arrival at Whillets, we made our way across the soggy meadows towards Meadow Pond to see the new dipping platform. The wet weather meant that there were few late flying dragonflies in evidence. Apart from a few overflying Redwing, there was not much to see, so we returned to the Hide calling in on Whillets reed bed on the way through. We had hoped to

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see a few Reed Buntings coming into roost in the reeds, but we may have been a bit too early and the weather was against us, so sadly we drew a blank.

There was just time for a final bit of birdwatching at the Hide before, with the weather closing in, we decided to call it a day. In spite of the weather and the absence of bird ringing, all present agreed that it had been an enjoyable and informative afternoon. Members appreciated being able to see parts of the Reserve not normally open to the public.

Thank you to the organisers and our guides for the afternoon.

*Photographs from the Afternoon:*



“The Hardy Souls” in the Study Area Woods



Meadow Pond, Whillets Meadows

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Amethyst Deceiver



Dog Stinkhorn

Photos by Ian Hodgson and Richard Allan

John Edwards  
29<sup>th</sup> October 2023