

## ROTHER VALLEY COUNTRY PARK    SUNDAY 6<sup>th</sup> JANUARY 2018

Our first outing of the New Year was a winter regular with a visit to the Rother Valley Country Park. After a night of keen frost, just three members, Charles Seymour, Malcolm Swift and Graham Gill set out from the Greendale Shops car park at 08.30hrs. It was very cold, but with a clear sky the prospects were for a good day out.

On arrival at the car park at the end of Rother Valley Way we changed into our boots and started to log our sightings and before we left the car park we had Greenfinch, Chaffinch, Bullfinch, Goldfinch, Wood Pigeon, Great Tit and Blue Tit. A good start to the list, and as we walked down towards the lake, Malcolm heard a Wren calling from the railway bridge and this was soon spotted on the embankment.

When we reached the main path we decided to walk around the lake in a clockwise direction, close to the water's edge to get the benefit of the sunshine, rather than being in partial shade on the path.

Our first sighting on the water was of two male Goldeneye which we overlooked at first as Tufted Ducks but then spotted their white cheek patches. Walking alongside the water we added Great Crested Grebe, Mute Swan, Pochard, Tufted Duck and the usual hoards of Black-headed Gulls. As we continued a pair of Goosanders flew over the water towards the North Lake, our first of many Goosander sighting today.

As we walked past some reeds there was an opening with an overhanging Alder branch, and from it a Kingfisher flew off over the water towards the island, it's vivid colours reflecting in the bright sun.

Three Grey Herons were spotted on this side of the island along with a group of Cormorants.

More sightings were added as we walked around the North Lake. These included Wigeon, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Herring Gull, Moorhen, Mallard and a flotilla of around a dozen diving Goosanders.

Both the North Lake and the Main Lake had large areas of ice on them due to the previous two nights frosts and Black-headed Gulls in particular made use of the icy surface.

A Pied Wagtail was spotted as we passed the children's play area and there were several Greylag Geese in amongst the vast numbers of Mallard near the visitor's centre. We counted nine Grey Heron as we scanned the Main Lake island from this side.

By this time it was really enjoyable walking, as we were feeling the benefit of the strong sunshine and not a cloud in sight.

After a brief visit to the Visitors Centre, we crossed the bridge over the River Rother and turned right along the approach road. In the fields on the left we saw our only mammals of the day in the shape of two Grey Squirrels on the edge of the woodland. Continuing along the road we came to the clearing overlooking the Meadowgate Lake which has rustic seats – ideal for our lunch stop.

With the bright sun reflecting on the water it made identification rather difficult but we counted over a hundred Canada Geese along with a group of around thirty Lapwing, and a Dunnock flitting around in the undergrowth.

After lunch we took the track on the right into the Nature Reserve area and with the sun now at our backs were able to pick out a Great Black-backed Gull, Teal flying in and more Goosanders on the water.

Further along the track we saw a small flock of Siskin feeding on Alder seeds to the left of the track.

Taking the path to the right we came down to Netherthorpe Lake where a group of around thirty Canada Geese swam along in front of us led by an unusual looking goose with a brown stripe down the back of it's neck. After further investigation and a posting on iSpot, it was decided it was probably a Swan Goose/ White-fronted Goose hybrid.

They waded onto the grassy bank opposite and we then noticed a Barnacle Goose amongst them. Further left was a Little Grebe diving in the still water.

We walked between the two lakes on the narrow strip of grassland and as we walked uphill between the trees we spotted our only raptor of the day – a Kestrel which was about to settle on a branch but flew off as we approached. We picked up the track leading back towards the Visitors Centre and as we scanned

Meadowgate Lake from this side we added Shoveler to the list of sightings. We then followed the river and re-crossed the bridge and continued left towards the southern end of the main lake.

There were two Mistle Thrushes foraging on the large grassy area as we walked towards the water Ski Centre and further down a group of Wigeon were also on the grass bank. To get a better look at these and to see if there were any other species with them, we skirted around a thicket of trees and walked towards the centre to find a pair of Egyptian Geese on the grass. They obligingly got to their feet and walked up the slope and right past us.

At the southern end of the lake there were still icy patches on the path where it had been in shade all day, so we walked on the verges past these. Plenty more sightings along here, including another group of fifteen Goosander, Tufted Duck, Teal, Great Crested Grebe, Coot, Moorhen and Mallard.

With the sun now sinking, it was beginning to turn cold again so we didn't waste any time in returning to the car park where we added our last sighting of the day when a group of Starlings settled on the power cables above.

A really pleasant day in the January sun, but cold in the shade as the sun disappeared.

Reporter Graham Gill

SPECIES LIST FOR

ROTHER VALLEY COUNTRY PARK SUNDAY 7<sup>th</sup> JANUARY 2018

BIRDS

Greenfinch	Kestrel
Chaffinch	Shoveler
Goldfinch	Mistle Thrush
Bullfinch	Egyptian Goose
Great Tit	Starling
Blue Tit	<u>Later identified</u>
Wood Pigeon	Swan Goose/
Magpie	White-fronted Goose
Wren	Hybrid
Blackbird	
Redwing	<u>TOTAL 47</u>
Goldeneye	
Coot	
Great Crested Grebe	
Black-headed Gull	
Mute Swan	
Grey Heron	
Pochard	
Canada Goose	
Goosander	
Tufted Duck	
Gadwall	
Cormorant	
Wigeon	
Lesser Black-backed Gull	
Carrion Crow	
Robin	
Moorhen	
Mallard	
Herring Gull	
Kingfisher	
Pied Wagtail	
Greylag Goose	
Jay	
Duncock	
Lapwing	
Great Black-backed Gull	
Jackdaw	
Teal	
Siskin	
Barnacle Goose	
Little Grebe	

MAMMALS

Grey Squirrel

TOTAL 1

FLOWERS

Gorse

Hazel Catkins

Alder Catkins

Dandelion

Daisy

TOTAL 5



PAIR OF GOOSANDERS

MUTE SWAN



ALDER CATKINS





COOT

ROBIN



SWAN GOOSE / WHITE FRONTED GOOSE HYBRID





**EGYPTIAN GEESE**