



The Friends of Weir Wood Society
Autumn Walk – 2nd November 2024
Report

18 members (including 3 committee members) gathered in the car park for the Friends' annual autumn walk. The weather was mild and dry, if a little gloomy. Conditions underfoot were muddy throughout and distinctly wet in Whillets. Wellies were definitely the order of the day. Members noticed the very high water level in the reservoir and the impact this had on ground conditions across the reserve.

First off, we stopped to look at the bird feeders by the hide and saw the usual selection of small birds including, in particular, a Marsh Tit and a Treecreeper. Bob and Richard described the sedentary nature of the Marsh Tit and how it is threatened by the loss of habitat connectivity. Pochard and Gadwall were spotted on the reservoir and there was a very brief sighting of a Kingfisher.

We then made our way through the Study Area towards Pintail Point. On the way we were able to point out the woodland area the Tuesday work party had cleared of bramble in order to encourage bluebell colonisation. Small flocks of Long-tailed Tits were much in evidence in the woodland. Fungi were generally in short supply, but members were able to see nice examples of the following fungi: Candle Snuff, Jelly Ear, Stinkhorn, Turkey Tail, Alder Bracket, Hairy Curtain Crust and Glistening Inkcap and various small bonnets which we were unable to identify although Burgundy-drop Bonnet was likely to be one of them!



Candle Snuff Fungus



Turkey Tail Fungus

Given the mild autumn to date, it was no surprise to see a few flowers still in bloom including Red Campion.

Most of our high nest boxes are located in Study Area and John pointed out some of the boxes that had had successful outcomes for Tawny Owl, Mandarin Duck and Stock Dove this year.



In the Study Area

We stopped for a while on Pintail Point to admire the views westward across the reservoir. It was quiet on the bird front with just a few Great Crested Grebes on the water and a handful of Redwing overhead. We did get excellent views of a busy little Goldcrest in the boundary hedge though.

We then retraced our steps to the car park before proceeding to Whillets Meadows for the second part of the walk. *En route* we stopped to look at the heronry from Legsheath Lane and remarked on the number of Cormorants perched in the trees there.

In the first meadow at Whillets we pointed out some waxcaps, possibly Goblet Waxcaps or Honey Waxcaps, to members. We then slogged our way across the first and second meadows towards Meadow Pond. Some members were fortunate enough to see a

Sparrowhawk zooming at low level across the second meadow. Other than Woodpigeons, Jackdaws and a few Redwings and Starlings it was fairly quiet in the air.

At Meadow Pond the Willow Emerald damselflies spotted earlier in the week were sadly not to be seen. Bob explained how these damselflies laid their eggs in willow branches and how they were becoming increasingly more common in southern England with our warmer weather.

We then squelched our way to the reed bed viewing platform hoping to see some Reed Buntings come into roost and perhaps hear the squeal of a Water Rail and as dusk approached, the hoot of a Tawny Owl. Sadly we heard neither, but those with quick eyes were able to see 3 Reed Buntings fall out of the sky into the reeds at high speed.

By now it was starting to get dark and we made our way back to the car park. The consensus was that it had been an interesting and informative walk which had been enjoyed by all who came along. The lack of fungi was a shame, but it did not detract from a pleasant afternoon and members appreciated being able to see parts of the reserve not open to the public.

(All photos – Bob Johnson)

JE 04.11.24