



THE OBSERVER

SECOS Newsletter

Promoting and fostering an interest in ornithology by observation, research and record-keeping

"Jewels of the Gambia"

March 2026

Ashley Grove

Friday 13th March

The Gambia is one of the best known birdwatching destinations in the world. It boasts close to 600 species, many of them colourful, approachable and perfect for photography. In this talk, Ashley takes us on a journey starting on the coast, travelling upriver and back again. While the tour highlights kingfishers, bee-eaters and rollers, the magnificent supporting cast of multicoloured species will provide an entertaining evening.



Little Bee-eater - Ashley Grove



RSPB Dearne Valley Old Moor - Dave Pickersgill

Field Trip

Dearne Valley Old Moor

Sunday 22nd March

A wetland reserve in South Yorkshire that's just waking up for spring. With its lakes, reedbeds and open grassland, the reserve offers a rich tapestry of habitats.

For trip details, refer to the Chairman's Note email, visit the SECOS website or contact the trip leader.

February Highlights (first reports this month)

1st Green Sandpiper, Pink-footed Goose, **Shore Lark**, Water Rail, White-fronted Goose; 2nd Curlew, Fieldfare, Goldeneye, Little Grebe, Oystercatcher, Pochard, Raven, Red-legged Partridge, Redwing; 3rd Black-tailed Godwit, Caspian Gull, Chiffchaff, Goosander, Great White Egret, Redpoll, Yellowhammer; 4th Blackcap, Little Egret; 8th Barnacle Goose, Cetti's Warbler, Common Gull, Egyptian Goose, Marsh Harrier, Pintail, Whooper Swan, Yellow-legged Gull; 10th Snow Goose; 13th Kingfisher; 14th Common Sandpiper; 15th White Stork; 18th **Tundra Bean Goose**; 19th Siskin; 21st Mandarin Duck; 22nd Mediterranean Gull; 24th Ruddy Shelduck, Snipe, Tawny Owl; 28th Sand Martin

Sightings EHF/PHF/MGT/RF - Feb

Wildfowl	Count
Shelduck	regular, max 18
Wigeon	regular, max c380
Gadwall	1, 3 rd
Teal	regular, max 57
Mallard	regular, max 40+
Pochard	regular, max 5
Shoveler	regular, max 6
Tufted Duck	regular, max 20+
Pintail	4, 28 th
Mandarin Duck	2, 21 st
Goosander	max 5, 24 th
Greylag Goose	regular, max 1
Canada Goose	regular, max 50+
Tundra Bean Goose	1, 18 th
Pink-footed Goose	regular, max 1
White-fronted Goose	regular, max 59
Little Grebe	max 2, 8 th
Coot	regular, max 83
Moorhen	regular, max 11
Mute Swan	regular, max 2



CF = Crabmill Flash

EHF = Elton Hall Flash

FF = Fodens Flash

FFF = Fields Farm Flash

GF = Groby Flash

MGT = Maw Green Tip

OTF = Oak Tree Flash

PHF = Pump House Flash

RF = Railway Flash

TLF = Tetton Lane Flash

WF = Warmingham Flash

WLF = Watch Lane Flash

Blue text indicates place first seen.

Underline indicates high flock count (see Feb 2020 Newsletter, page 8).

Sightings EHF/PHF/MGT/RF - Feb



Moorhen - Dennis Swaby

Gulls & Terns	Count
Black-headed Gull	regular, max 60+
Lesser Black-b Gull	regular, max 4
Great Black-b Gull	1, 3 rd
Herring Gull	regular, max 9
Mediterranean Gull	1, 22 nd , 28 th
Common Gull	max 3, 21 st
Caspian Gull	1, 3 rd , 20 th
Yellow-legged Gull	1, 8 th

Waders	Count
Water Rail	1, 20 th
Oystercatcher	regular, max 5
Lapwing	regular, max 200+
Curlew	max 3, 3 rd
Snipe	1, 24 th
Black-tailed Godwit	regular, max 2
Green Sandpiper	1, 1 st



Oystercatcher - Dennis Swaby



Green Sandpiper - Dennis Swaby

Herons & Egrets	Count
Grey Heron	max 2, 8 th
Little Egret	max 6, 22 nd
Great White Egret	max 2, 22 nd

Raptors & Owls	Count
Buzzard	max 3, 17 th
Peregrine	1, 13 th

Northwich Woodlands - 3rd February



*** A clean sweep of British woodpeckers! ***

14 members attended a trip to Northwich Woodlands on a cold, cloudy, breezy day.

Bird species seen/heard: Canada goose, greylag goose, mute swan, shelduck, mallard, teal, pochard, tufted duck, goosander, woodpigeon, moorhen, coot, great crested grebe, oystercatcher, lapwing, curlew, black-headed gull, common gull, herring gull, lesser black-backed gull, cormorant, grey heron, buzzard, **lesser spotted woodpecker**, great spotted woodpecker, green woodpecker, jay, magpie, carrion crow, raven, coal tit, willow tit (seen, not heard), blue tit, great tit, long-tailed tit, blackcap, wren, nuthatch, treecreeper, song thrush, redwing, blackbird, robin, dunnock, chaffinch, bullfinch, greenfinch, redpoll, goldfinch, siskin, reed bunting

Thanks to Tom Graham for leading the trip.

Trip Count = 51 species

North Wales Coast - 22nd February



Thirteen members travelled to the North Wales coast on a fine and mild day (11°C). A brisk 19 mph wind kept us well wrapped up but did nothing to dampen enthusiasm.

Llanfairfechan

On the rocky shore, many oystercatchers and a few curlew were feeding, while herring gulls and black-headed gulls loafed nearby. Turnstones foraged along the water's edge, and a redshank stood watchfully among them. A great black-backed gull dominated the shoreline.

Sea-watching revealed small numbers of common scoter and great crested grebe, and a little egret flew in to settle on a distant sandbank.

On the inland pool, a red-breasted merganser was dozing, its distinctive punk-like head feathers making it instantly recognisable. We then followed the River Llanfairfechan in search of dipper and were rewarded with two birds, along with a grey wagtail.

Llyn Celanedd (formerly Spinnies Aberogwen) Nature Reserve

Unfortunately, flooding at the end of the approach lane prevented access to the beach car park. Most members managed to find space along the lane, while others sensibly headed on to RSPB Conwy.

North Wales Coast (continued)

The high water level on the pool limited opportunities somewhat, with little grebe and mallard the only species present there.

The woodland and feeders were much livelier, attracting blue tit, great tit, coal tit, long-tailed tit, chaffinch, goldfinch, nuthatch, siskin, great spotted woodpecker and house sparrow.

From the beach hide, many waders, ducks and grebes were present on the River Ogwen estuary and the Traeth Lafan tidal mudflats. Two greenshank stood on a sandbank. Bar-tailed and black-tailed godwits were added to the day list. On the tideline, groups of redshank, turnstone, knot, dunlin and sanderling were present. On the sea, there were good numbers of goldeneye and shelduck, with smaller numbers of wigeon, common scoter, pochard and great crested grebe. A distant red-throated diver was spotted.

RSPB Conwy

The feeding station gave excellent close views of tits and bullfinch, while a greenfinch was heard nearby.

At the Tal-y-fan and Carneddau hides we added Canada goose, tufted duck, gadwall, shoveler, coot, moorhen, lapwing and lesser black-backed gull to the day list. A small group of dunlin huddled together on one of the islands, sheltering from the wind.

From the Benarth Hide, looking across the lagoon towards the estuary, there were six or seven curlew in a row on the spit, with three whimbrel in between them, so it was easy to compare the two species. A red-breasted merganser was spotted close to the estuary side of the lagoon.

Old Colwyn and Llanddulas

Some members rounded off the day with stops at the Fishing Pier at Old Colwyn and Llanddulas before heading home. At both sites, there were lots of common scoter and several great crested grebes at both, but no sign of surf or velvet scoter.

Despite the blustery conditions and the occasional logistical challenge, we amassed an excellent coastal winter list and enjoyed a wide range of habitats, from rocky shore and estuary to woodland and freshwater lagoons. Good birds, good company and North Wales scenery. A fine way to spend a February Sunday!

Thanks to Tom Graham for leading the trip.

Mike Tonks

Sightings Elsewhere - Feb



EHF/PHF/MGT/RF: Sand Martin, Chiffchaff, Redwing, Fieldfare, Grey Wagtail, Siskin

FFF: Goosander, Great White Egret, Kingfisher, Raven, Redwing, Fieldfare, Redpoll, Siskin, Yellowhammer

GF: Water Rail

TLF: Barnacle Goose, Greylag Goose, Tundra Bean Goose, Pink-footed Goose, White-fronted Goose, Great Crested Grebe, Oystercatcher, Curlew, Yellow-legged Gull, Great White Egret, Kingfisher, Peregrine, Raven, Fieldfare

WLF: Oystercatcher, Black-tailed Godwit, Common Gull

Alsager: Barnacle Goose, Pink-footed Goose, Whooper Swan, Pintail, Curlew, Black-tailed Godwit, Little Egret, Marsh Harrier, Cetti's Warbler, Stonechat

Alsager - Treatment Works: Grey Wagtail

Astbury - Astbury Mere CP: Pink-footed Goose, Goldeneye, Goosander, Little Grebe, Great Crested Grebe, Siskin

Balterley Heath: White-fronted Goose

Brereton Green: Tawny Owl

Brereton Heath - Bagmere: Water Rail, Sparrowhawk

Checkley: Red-legged Partridge

Chorlton: White-fronted Goose

Congleton - River Dane: Goosander

Doddington - Doddington Pool: Snow Goose, Pochard, Little Grebe, Great Crested Grebe, Oystercatcher, Common Sandpiper, Raven, Redwing, Fieldfare,

Doddington - Lemon Pool: Great Crested Grebe

Gawsworth - Gawsworth Hall: Goosander,

Middlewich: Pink-footed Goose, White-fronted Goose

Middlewich - Treatment Works and environs: Sparrowhawk, Grey Wagtail

Mow Cop: Lapwing, Curlew, White Stork, Shore Lark (present from 16 January to 28 February), Siskin

Newsbank, nr Congleton: Green Sandpiper

Rode Heath - Rode Pool: Egyptian Goose, Ruddy Shelduck, Mandarin Duck, Goosander, Little Egret, Great White Egret

Scholar Green - Rode Mill House: Egyptian Goose, Little Egret

Wheelock - Forge Fields: Little Egret, Sparrowhawk, Blackcap



This is a small selection of species seen in the SECOS Recording Area.

A full listing is on the website:

<https://www.secos.org.uk/sightings/>

Sightings Elsewhere - Feb



Treecreeper - Dennis Swaby



Mark Woodhead kindly waived the fee for his talk, "*The Canary Islands*", on 13th February. In appreciation, SECOS has donated £100 to the RSPB.

Diary Dates



3rd Mar 10.00 am

Tuesday Field Trip

Moore NR

Leader: Mike Tonks

13th Mar 7.30 pm

Indoor Meeting

"Jewels of the Gambia"

Speaker: Ashley Grove

22nd Mar 10.00 am

Sunday Field Trip

RSPB Dearne Valley Old Moor

Leader: Tom Graham



SECOS Website: <https://www.secos.org.uk>



SECOS Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/SECOS1964>



Sandbach Flashes: This medium does not do justice to the images that Dennis Swaby captures at Sandbach Flashes. Some of the images have been uploaded to <https://sandbachflashes.co.uk/>