

Bird-watching walk on 19th March 2024 at Dorney

As we were waiting for the others to join us, we spotted two Bluetits flitting in the trees. A Robin soon joined them. A Song Thrush, with its repetitive call, was singing loudly in the distance, alerting any females nearby to its presence. A Grey Heron flew over followed by a Red Kite. We were also lucky to see a lone Lapwing in flight.

We walked along the side of the river and saw a Cormorant spreading out its wings. It looked like it was standing in the water, but it must have been perched on a branch. There were some Tufted Ducks on the river and several Swans. While we were looking at the water the loud, explosive sound of the Cetti's Warbler heard, one of the several we heard throughout our visit. Sadly, none of the elusive LBJ's was seen on this occasion. Another elusive bird was also heard – a Chiffchaff singing in the hedgerow. We wondered if this was a new arrival or whether it had over-wintered in England.

We walked over the first bridge and spent a great deal of time watching the mating rituals of two pairs of Canada Geese. A lot of head bobbing and loud honking occurred, but did not appear to result in success for the male! Apparently, it could also bite the neck feathers of the poor female as part of the ritual. A pair of Great Crested Grebes were swimming and diving near the bridge, as well as one Little Grebe.

Moving along the rather muddy path towards the field in front of the motorway, it was lovely to spot a beautiful clump of cowslips hiding in the undergrowth. We stood looking over the ploughed field and Pat was able to spot a single Lapwing (without the aid of binoculars!) Then with the aid of Ron's scope, we were able to get a view of its beautiful crest.

It was very quiet on the next part of the walk. I was wondering if we may see or hear Skylarks and sure enough one did appear, singing beautifully before diving into the grass. A Red Kite was gliding overhead. Len spotted a pair of ?Lesser? Great Black-backed Gulls flying across. Just as we neared the river again, Ron saw a male Reed Bunting just quickly enough to see the very distinctive black plumage on its head. However, it quickly dived down into the undergrowth before many of us saw it. Egyptian Geese were heard in the distance.

In the sheltered part of the river there were three Cormorants perched on branches and a couple of – new term – “dodgy”* Mallards. Several Swans, Coots, Tufted Ducks, Mallards and a Moorhen were quietly swimming along the river. Lots of little birds were seen flitting into the bushes, but not identified apart from one Dunnock, identified by its song.

A group of Cormorants of varying ages were seen perching on the booms at the weir. The juveniles had white underparts, while the adults in their breeding plumage had white patches on their thighs.



Cormorants – adults on left showing thigh patches and white-flecked heads of breeding adults, juvenile on right with white front. Note the spiky crests on the extreme left-hand pair. I can't say that I have ever noticed this before. (Lorna Walding)

It was lovely to hear the birds singing again on this (fairly dry!) spring morning.

Barbara Howse with Lorna's photos.

**Dodgy Mallards – hybrids with domesticated ducks, resulting in odd plumage variations on 'standard' male Mallards.*