



SANDWICH BAY BIRD OBSERVATORY TRUST



Restharrow Scrape Development Project

The Young Birder's Walk - 13th March, 2022

By Thomas R-Price (age 11)

Early on the Sunday morning, an enthusiastic group of Young Birders met in the car park in front of the Observatory. Ably assisted by Steffan and Greg, we had a brilliant morning of birdwatching and nature in general! The route we chose was across the Golf course, out to the Bay, towards Sandown, back across the Golf course, and then back to the Observatory via the Scrape and the Elms.

Before we left, Pam Worrall showed us a Wood Mouse which had been caught in a mammal trap, placed not far from the Observatory. She emptied the trap into a large plastic bag, caught the mouse, and weighed it. Then, we all got to hold the rodent - it was the first time I had held one, and it struggled to get out of the bag, but luckily the top was folded over!

As we walked in the Whitehouse, we saw a brown Weasel scouting about in the long grass - again, it was a first sighting for me - but when it spotted us, it ran off as fast as it could. Further down the path (near the Golf Club), we saw a Hare hopping around, trying to stay unnoticed. Soon after, the group saw a Golden Plover flying overhead. As we crossed the unusually quiet Golf course, one of the group pointed out a Reed Bunting - yet another first for me - and I heard and pointed out about five Skylarks (it was much harder to pinpoint the birds themselves than to hear them!) to the rest of the group. All the while, Bramblings were flying overhead!

Out on the Bay, we constantly spotted group after group of Chaffinches flying south over the Estate, in flocks of approximately twenty-five, with a Siskin flying with one group. I had never heard of a Siskin before, so I looked it up in my bird encyclopaedia when I got home. As we walked towards Sandown, one of the group spotted a Black Redstart sitting on the fence of a house called Sandilands. As we approached the Sailing Club, one of the leaders saw that on the fence line, a Stonechat was sitting (another bird I hadn't heard of before), perfectly still, waiting - or at least, until we came along and startled it off!

From then on, we didn't see much until we entered the new(er) Hide. On Restharrow Scrape we saw the usual Tufted Ducks, Gadwalls, Snipes, and Lapwings, all enjoying the best of the spring weather. One unusual thing we saw, though, was a Caspian Gull/Herring Gull hybrid, which nobody knew the proper name for.

When we got to The Elms, we saw lots of Robins, singing their songs and flying round us like we were leaves - the youngest member even offered some food, but then a gargantuan Sparrowhawk flew over and frightened them all off.

Overall, it was a fantastic experience for me, and I'm sure the rest of the group as well! A special thank you to Steffan and Greg for organising this brilliant event from all the birders who went on the walk, and I hope another event the same as this will attract even more young naturalists and increase awareness of all the species we're lucky enough to have in this area, especially those which are in decline.

(6 young birders attended)