

Llandudno. A 5 Day Bird Watching holiday 25th – 29th January 2019.

The trip was organised by Mike Briggs for SBBOT with our Chairman, Ken Chapman, adding a number of bird watching locations in North Wales and Anglesey. Daish Holidays provided the coach, a driver and the accommodation at the Somerset Hotel, Llandudno.

Friday 25th Jan. We departed from the Field Centre, Sandwich at 07.00hr. Dawn had yet to arrive on what was forecast to be a grey, damp day on the outward leg of the journey. The coach was comfortable and the journey uneventful. It included two stops at services which produced, amongst others, Pied wagtail, Long-tail tit and Red kite - of course.

As we approached Llandudno, the driver offered a short detour to visit St Margaret's Church, Bodelwyddan. The church is in a Decorated, Gothic style with impressive wood carvings and includes over 14 different types of marble. The cemetery holds over 120, mainly Canadian, graves of Commonwealth soldiers from the 1st World War.

On arrival at Llandudno around 16.30, the coach driver provided background information on Llandudno, the town's links with Alice in Wonderland and Great and Little Orme. Check-in was efficient and we were soon allocated our rooms. Dinner was served at 18.30 and there was entertainment each evening. Drinks from the bar were half price for the first three evenings. What's not to like?

Saturday 26th Jan. A small group walked before breakfast to a location almost 1 mile away, where a Rose-coloured starling was known to feed at a bird table. The bird was not located but was found two days later by Phil B. Breakfast was served at 08.30 and the coach was boarded by 10.00. We headed east along the coast to RSPB Conwy. This is an attractive reserve overlooked by Conwy Castle. It held a variety of ducks, geese and passerine. Kingfisher, Ruff and Golden-eye were probably the star species found. Returning to Llandudno for lunch, we then headed west toward Bangor and Llanfairfechen as the weather deteriorated into horizontal sleet with storm force wind.

Cowering behind the sea wall, we eventually had to break cover and head for a shelter along the promenade. Others were already in the shelter and we learnt from fellow walkers that a Dipper had been seen on the river in the village. We headed into town. As our leader, Mike, pointed out a Grey wagtail, Alan raised his arm to indicate the Dipper had been located. Mike joined Alan just as the Sparrowhawk spotted the Dipper. The rest of the story is now enshrined in folklore....

Sunday 27th Jan. Today, we set off toward Caernarfon through Snowdonia National Park, via Betws-y-coed (prayer house in the wood). We stayed for just over the hour - searching the attractive wooded waterfalls and River Conwy for wildlife. Mistle thrush, Blackbird, Song thrush and tits were located here.



We travelled into the mountains and stopped for a photo opportunity by a large body of water. It was bitterly cold at altitude. The lake was vast and almost devoid of birds...except for a solitary Goosander – *Mergus merganser* is partially concealed behind the large boulder...!



Following lunch at Caernarfon, the coach dropped us 2.5 miles south-west of the city onto the Welsh Coastal Path that led back to the city. The road borders the southern part of the Menai Strait. The wind was gale force although the day remained dry and reasonably bright. There was much to be seen along this stretch of coast including Eider, Ringed-plover, Pale-bellied brent, Raven, Knot and much more. The coach was able to pick up members at various points along this trail when the wind became too much!

Monday 28th Jan. This was the day we went to Anglesey. The forecast had indicated it would be the brightest and mildest day of the trip. Expectations were high as we entered RSPB South Stack and Ravens were soon identified. We were looking for Chough however. The walk was wonderful and the scenery spectacular but the birds were mostly absent. Even gulls were far and few. As we left, Chough were spotted from the coach and most on board were able to see the birds.

Holyhead harbour failed to add anything to the list. The Divers and/or Grebes that had been anticipated were nowhere to be found.

Everything changed as we arrived at Penrhos Coastal Park (Beddmanarch Bay). The weather was bright, the wind had dropped and Pete's Burger bar was open for business! A scan across the water fronting the car park showed plenty of ducks, geese and waders. A Black Guillemot and Slavonian (Horned) grebe were swiftly found as well as scores of Ringed plover. A Red-breasted merganser and Grey Heron flew over as well as Pale-bellied Brent geese. Shags were also to be seen.

A walk into the wooded area revealed Blue, Coal and Great tit. Nuthatch and Robin were also easily located. Further on, up to 5 red squirrels were easy to see. The Country Park yielded more than 30 species and we rejoined the coach for the journey back to Llandudno very well pleased.

Tuesday 29th Jan. We checked out of the Somerset Hotel at 09.00 and the journey home was uneventful but delayed around 45 minutes by stationary traffic. Many thanks to Margaret D for putting two quizzes together that helped pass the time on the coach. Thanks also to Sue B, Penny D and Martin by obtaining suitable cards, making a collection and providing the vote of thanks on the coach. The Group Species List for the trip totals 90 birds. Grateful thanks also to Mike and Ken for putting a successful holiday together.

Peter Harrison