

## REPORT

Keith welcomed our guest expert birder Pete Durnell to join us on this 54<sup>th</sup> MCV Creeks & Saltmarsh trip. Pete has been managing the Keyhaven to Lymington Nature Reserve (*and several others across south Hampshire*) for the past decade or more. He has a wealth of birding knowledge which he is always pleased to share. Pete represents Hampshire County Council on several high-level conservation committees, including the new Coastal Nature Reserve Forum and is working alongside many groups pursuing local nature recovery. He has given numerous talks and presentations to local groups MCV, Wings and LymNats. Pete and his wife Aimee are both consummate artists and lino-cut printmakers and Aimee can often be seen at the Lymington street-market. Aimee is also a popular wildlife author whose books can be found in Waterstones in Lymington. Pop over to the market to see her with Pete's artwork. *You will not be disappointed.*

Perhaps fortuitously (as it turned out) our skipper for our birding trip must have forgotten to set his alarm! However, there were two *silver linings* in that after waiting for his arrival at the ferry pontoon, we decided to take everyone over to the Bird Observatory where we met us with Chris Barrass our long-term bird recorder for the site. Chris arrives incredibly early every morning to record all the birds on the reserve. He rarely misses a day, and remarkably has recorded every single day in some years. He is a dedicated volunteer, and his recording achievements are renowned.

In glorious sunshine we were able to observe several birds we would not otherwise have seen out on the marshes. We saw at least two stunning *kingfisher*, one sitting on a mooring ring halfway up the harbour sea wall (see photo below). We also saw them several times flashing low over the water between The Pans and Avon Water.



*Male Kingfisher on boat mooring hook in Keyhaven Harbour*

Whilst there, we also saw a *coal tit* fly into the pine tree above the observatory and heard at least one, possibly two *goldcrest*, *house sparrows* and a lively *chiffchaff* who flew over our heads and into the pine tree to join the goldcrest and coal tit.

As mentioned earlier in this report, there was more than one silver lining to our birding trip. We had only been at the observatory for a short while before Andy Digby (*who skippers for Hurst Marine*) came to our rescue and to apologise for his boss having had an unintentional lay in!

Andy said that he now had the Dory ready (*a flat-bottomed boat to get us into shallow creeks and channels that other boats cannot*) ready to take us around the saltmarshes. We embarked and off we went on a brilliant bright sunny day.

It is estimated that *125,000* birds' winter in the Solent every year, including about *10%* of the global population of dark-bellied *brent geese*. These geese breed in the tundra of northern Siberia on the Tamyr peninsula. They arrive in our part of the Solent in October with numbers building to a peak by about February. Pete remarked how to date there are very few juveniles, who tend to arrive a little later in family groups, so keep your eyes out for young birds who do not have the white crescent marking on their necks like their parents, and can also usually be identified as they have distinctive white bar marking across their flanks when you see them at rest or on the water. We saw no juvenile birds today, but there were *probably five hundred adults* spread across the marshes.



*Two of the smaller groups of Brent's we saw during our trip*

Upon leaving the harbour into Keyhaven River we were delighted to see an estimated *three hundred golden plover* in one of their favourite locations on the mudflats just to the west as you look back towards Saltgrass Marsh. We made a point of returning to the same spot on the way back, but unfortunately, just as we were manoeuvring to get the sun behind us, a female *marsh harrier* was quartering over the saltmarsh heading their way. They all rose in a tight flock and headed towards Pennington and Normandy (see marsh harrier and golden plover photos below).



We saw numerous groups of *dunlin* and in one flock there were probably in excess of *one thousand* birds that wheeled away from us. Pete said that as they flew the birds would twist and turn, all showing dark wings one moment and then paler the next. He said they do this to distract raptors, but often it is just one straggling or weak bird that is caught. Fortunately, the dunlin did an excellent job on this occasion, or perhaps the marsh harriers had had their fill by that time? We estimate that there were probably nearer *1500* dunlin in total across the marshes.

During the trip we saw numerous isolated *grey plover* who tend to feed alone, or occasionally in very small groups. Pete pointed out that when they fly, they often show dark/black '*wing-pits*' (see fantastic photo by Steve Laycock below left). Alongside Steve's photo is one grey plover at rest next to the smaller dunlin.



*Steve Laycock's Grey Plover showing dark 'wing-pits' in flight and to the right a single Grey Plover alongside the smaller Dunlin on the saltmarsh*

### LIST OF BIRDS AND NUMBERS SEEN ON TRIP (54)

22<sup>nd</sup> November 2024 - Birds marked with an \* were seen at the Bird Observatory

Mute Swan	4	Herring Gull	20
Brent Goose	500	Redshank	10
Carrion Crow	3	Cormorant	10
Pheasant (heard only) *	1	Black-headed Gull	30
Oystercatcher	20	Black-tailed Godwit	15
Little Egret	4	Ringed Plover	21
Shelduck	6	Grey Plover	25
Turnstone	10	Marsh Harrier	3
Kingfisher * 2 x Observatory + 1 Marshes	3	Goldcrest * (heard only)	1
Goldfinch *	1	House Sparrow *	3
Golden Plover	300	Dunlin	1500
Little Grebe	15	Curlew	6
Knot	54	Great Black-backed Gull	7
Red-breasted Merganser	3	Linnet	25
Wigeon	300	Pintail	3
Gt Crested Grebe	2	Woodpigeon	1
Magpie *	2	Coal Tit *	1
Teal	50	Grey Heron *	1
Mallard	5	Lapwing	100
Pied Wagtail	2	Chiffchaff *	1
Blue Tit *	1	Jay *	1

A big thank you to both Pete Durnell and Andy Digby