

WINTER BIRDS at MARSHALL's ARM

Now that the migrants have all well and truly gone the wintering birds are busy feeding up to survive the cold winters days and nights. Redwings and Fieldfares have migrated here for the winter from an even colder Scandinavia in search of food. Over 100+ Redwings can be seen daily feeding on whatever pickings can be found on the Hartford Campus adjacent to the outer edges of Greenbank and Clough Woods. Easily distinguishable from the Fieldfares by their smaller size and red under wing and large cream supercillium.

An excellent way of viewing many species is to enter the reserve from the bottom end of Stones Manor Lane then follow the path through Greenbank Wood to the reedbed at the bottom of Pignut Hill and after exploring the reserve return up the hill and through the campus to view the areas just outside Greenbank and Clough Woods. . Grey Wagtails with their striking yellow underbelly and their constantly bobbing tail inhabit the brook as it wends its way down towards the river. Great tits, Blue tits can be seen in good numbers and now is a good time to see the Goldcrest now there are no leaves on the sycamores. This little bird is smaller than the wren and is difficult to see during the summer months unless the call is known. Nuthatches, Tree-creepers and Jays frequent the woods with good numbers of Greater Spotted Woodpeckers and very small numbers of the elusive Lesser Spotted Woodpecker. As one comes out of Greenbank Wood the Kingfisher may be seen perching over the holding pool, or one may hear the screeching of the Water Rail in the reedbeds (it sounds similar to a pig) as the Moorhens scatter into the reeds..

Redpolls, often up to 20 of them, have been seen feeding on the tiny seeds in the reedbed. Normally quite a difficult bird to see, they have been seen daily since the beginning of November often in the company of Reed Buntings. Listen for the plaintiff call of the Bullfinch flying overhead, with as many as 6 being seen at any one time, a striking bird with is pink breast and striking white rump and black cap. The alder trees on the reserve are often home to a large flock of Siskins. These trees are found by the waters edge. Explore the reserve as far as Northwich Boat Yard with its ancient oak trees that now contain a pair of Willow tits, flocks of Long-tailed Tits with Greenfinches and Chaffinches. The other way towards Hartford Blue Bridge has a flooded meadow which is home to Black-Headed Gulls, Mallards and a large number of Meadow Pipits.

On the river itself watch for Little Grebes that appear to inhabit the reedbeds on the reserve but prefer the deeper water to dive and feed in. Finally last year we had some 10+ Waxwings on the reserve. These are extremely uncommon visitors to this part of the country but last year was a bumper year country wide for this species as they arrived from Scandinavia in huge numbers. One single bird has been seen here in November but the expected influx hasn't as yet happened.

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