

Annual indoor meeting, Friday 21st February, 2020

Our speaker Rupert Kirkwood, a retired vet, is now an ardent kayaker. He therefore aptly entitled his talk “Up the creek and.....beyond”. Since his enforced early retirement some 15 years ago he has kayaked around the coast of South West England and up most of the rivers as well, covering some 20,000 miles in the process. The silent approach of his kayak has enabled him to get very close on a number of occasions to a range of wildlife, and he has had some amazing experiences, such as beavers and otters as well as swimming badgers and roe deer. He witnessed a stoat attempting to lure some mallards to come within striking distance and a crow that tried to steal a newly hatched baby duckling as it's mother took her brood down to the river for the first time. He also showed a video of a great crested grebe struggling, but successfully swallowing a large pike. In fact given half the chance, the pike would have swallowed the grebe!

Many of the Devon and Cornish fishing villages were pictured from the flat calm sea backed by a pale blue sky. Real tourist boards snapshots - idyllic. However, it was when he went out to sea on lovely calm days that he got his real surprises. One day last August off Berry Head, he had some 30 dolphins and 14 porpoises. Some of which were leaping twelve feet out of the water and even swimming under his kayak. On another day on the coastal waters of Penzance, he not only saw the hump of a humpback whale, but saw it breaching as well. He has seen bottle nosed dolphins in Mounts Bay and Risso's dolphins near the Brisons rocks between Sennen and St Ives. In fact so relaxed is the wildlife around him that on one occasion a seal hauled itself out of the water and rested on his kayak.

On one lucky day he saw another humpback whale and a minke whale within minutes of each other off St Michael's Mount and during the same day he had common dolphin, porpoises and a giant blue fin tuna. During his trips he has observed an exceptional number of great northern divers several miles off shore. He had only just come back last week from a trip to Antarctica so we were the first people to see some of his photographs of wildlife in that area. His greatest impression was of an endless expanse of snow and rocks, devoid of any vegetation, reflected in the dead still, calm sea and apart from the chatter of the terns and the cackle of the gentoo penguins, the extraordinary silence. He was lucky enough to see a snow petrel and they also came across a mother humpback whale with her calf asleep on the surface of the water.

What an incredible show he put on in his relaxed, laid-back manner with not only superb colour photographs but lots of video clips complete with sound effects. We really could have stayed and watched all night. The only comment was “fantastic”. My thanks to all those who attended our Annual Indoor Meeting and in whatever way they helped to make it an enjoyable and profitable evening.

Seaton Wetlands, Sunday 8th March 2020

We set off under dark skies and continuous rain, skirting along the southern edge of Exmoor to our destination near the south eastern coast of the county. The Seaton Wetlands is a relatively new nature reserve created in 2008 alongside the River Axe. It comprises of a large area of saltmarsh, reedbeds and tidal lagoons. These can be viewed from a number of excellent hides, one of which, the island hide, is situated out in the middle of the flooded wetland and accessed by a man-made walkway. A number of artificial islands within the flooded area have been created. On one island close to the hide, a couple of large white eggs could be seen among the reeds, thought to be those of a pair of guarding Canada geese.

Last year the reserve won a Green Flag award given for it's high quality of management. Soon after we arrived, donning our walking boots, the clouds rolled away and the sun made a welcome appearance lifting everyone's spirits. Signs of Spring were all around us as we made our way along the path to our first hide. Alongside us the blackthorn had burst into flower and we were serenaded by a dunnoek in full song. We passed occasional clumps of celandine with their yellow petals showing brightly against the green of the verge-side grasses.

After a short stay in the first hide where a brown rat was seen feeding on the spillage from the bird feeders, we decided to head for the hide at the northern end of the reserve. This required a lengthier walk over largely

unsheltered terrain. After a few yards some dark clouds rolled in and we all dived for cover provided by a circular shelter which had a roof of reeds and supported by wavy wooden poles. The rain shower quickly passed and we continued on our way to the hide. Another heavy shower greeted our arrival, but this turned out to be the last of the day leaving us once again in bright sunlight together with the remnants of a rainbow. As we sat in this hide scouring the countryside with our binoculars, a tram passed by, not 15 yards in front of us, as it rattled along the Seaton tramway alongside the River Axe. Its passengers were like minded birdwatchers with whom we exchanged hand waves as they passed!

Retracing our steps, we headed for the “Island hide” where we ate a leisurely packed lunch whilst watching a pair of moorhens showing signs of mating behaviour. Some of the birds were displaying wonderful seasonal colours. Most outstanding, were the bright orange beaks of the oystercatchers and the green heads of the mallards resplendent in the Spring sunshine. The sighting of the day was a peregrine sitting motionlessly on a bank overlooking the river!

Our last visit was to the hide at Seaton Marshes, a short distance along the river, which produced tufted duck, little grebe and a chiffchaff. Walking back from the hide we decided to walk around an adjacent pond where we encountered a beautiful pair of mute swans which allowed us to pass without any fuss. Shortly afterwards we came across an elevated owl nesting box which had now been taken over by the resident kestrel. A perfect end to our day before travelling home back to North Devon and being greeted by a full moon.



N:B Please note that all BNA field trips have been postponed due to the current lock down situation as a result of Corvid-19. Please contact our branch chairman for further details.

Taw & Exmoor Branch Chairman, Brian Sims, can be contacted on 01271 343607

Stay Home, Safe Safe.

Halsdon Nature Reserve 19th April 2020 (or the trip that never was)

What wonderful weather we would have had on the proposed trip to Halsdon Nature Reserve. Initially when group outings were banned I was proposing to go and write up a report which would have gone something like “As the early morning mist rose slowly over the meandering River Torridge it might have revealed an otter or a kingfisher or sand martins nesting in the river bank, whilst the primroses twinkled in the early morning sun as the smell of the wild garlic pervaded the air. Would we have seen the wild service tree or the beefsteak fungus which we had on previous trips?” But that idea went out of the window when all but essential journeys were prohibited.

Hence, I came up with the idea that if everyone was confined to barracks or to their immediate vicinity then you could all report on what you have seen or heard from your garden or when out on your daily exercise walks. Thus, the habitats ranged from the edge of Exmoor to farmland to gardens on modern estates or established suburbia to very local reserves to riverside and beach locations.

Although it was not a competition, Norman with immediate access to the countryside and the river systems was the winner with 49 different birds. I thought I was going to get the most unusual bird seen from a garden when for the first time ever a red kite flew overhead but Norman beat that with an osprey flying along the River Taw but even Norman was trumped by Ray who saw from his patio a goshawk having a set to with one

of the local ravens. Margaret did the best write up with her quivering goldcrests, nest building chiffchaff and the views of drifts of bluebells. Still, she does bake a cake for the birds each week! So I shall know where to turn if I need someone to write up a report in future. Also, one member reported that the cat had brought a vole into the kitchen and he found his wife self-isolating on the kitchen chair. There was also a report of a wood pigeon that before even building it's rudimentary nest laid an egg on a branch with the inevitable consequence.

I noticed that the cleanest birds were blackbirds and sparrows but the other birds were quite happy to drink the subsequent bath water. Richard has a cock pheasant that has taken up residence in his greenhouse whilst his wife has been fattening the hen pheasants by hand feeding them. Little do they know what fate might befall them.

Anyway, my thanks to all branch members who took part in this little survey.

Field Irish Farm, May 17th, 2020 (or it should have been).

This would have been a new venue that John S had found for us so we were all disappointed that we couldn't go and explore it and perhaps have our first post outing cream tea of the year. John will try and arrange for us to go next year if we are all able to go out in a group by then.

Branch members were asked instead to make a note of any birds nests or fledglings or relevant breeding behaviour you found in your garden or whilst out on your local exercise walks. I received a very good response and have tried to make some sort of list from all your observations. Some members gardens were bursting with activity whilst others like mine where it cost me a fortune to feed the birds all Winter hardly had anything at all. At least my only nest was a success with four young blackbirds being seen around the garden being fed by their parents.

Apart from a rookery of about 20 nests, blackbirds seem to be the most frequently reported nests (or fledglings) followed by house sparrows with blue tits and great tits occupying nest boxes. The list below is where a nest has been seen or there has been probable breeding evidence (such a territorial behaviour, courtship displays, persistent singing or food being collected) or juveniles sighted or pairs hanging around together or discarded egg shells. Blackbird, wood pigeon, house sparrow, long tailed tit, blue tit, great tit, coal tit, starling, wren, dunnock, blackcap, dipper, siskin, great spotted woodpecker, song thrush, herring gull, robin, jackdaw, carrion crow, rook, goldfinch, greenfinch, collared dove, pheasant, redpoll, nuthatch. What a very good list. Other creatures of note that were seen, red deer, badger, fox, slow worm, pipistrelle and noctule bats and marauding grey squirrel. One member found a badger latrine and an otter spraint (I do wonder about our members sometimes). Thanks to all of you, who took the trouble to send in your observations.

Other news:-

- 1) I have noticed on twitter that other branches and organisations have now started to ask their members to report their natural history findings. So once again The Taw and Exmoor branch leads the way.
- 2) One of the white-tailed eagles that were released on the Isle of Wight has been seen in Somerset, so keep your eyes peeled as it could easily appear around here.
- 3) At the Devon Birds reserve at Godborough some enterprising person thought it would be a good place to grow some cannabis. It has been reported to the police and the plants removed.
- 4) The BNA head office has a new address.
27 Old Gloucester Street, London, WC1N 3AX. Tel no. still 08448921817

The next outing should have been to Braunton Burrows but instead, besides anything interesting to report, there are two things to look out for.

i) There has been a steady and worrying decline (about 50%) in house martin numbers over recent years. Devon Birds are carrying out a survey asking people to report any sightings of active house martin nests. If you could let me know the numbers and locations (Map Ref preferable) I will collate all the information and pass it on.



ii) Keep a look out for small tortoiseshell butterflies. Over the last 10 years there has been a slump in their numbers with a 50% reduction in the South of England. It is possible this slump has coincided with the arrival of a parasitic fly – *Sturma bella* – in the late 1990's which lays its eggs on the leaves of stinging nettles and are unwittingly eaten by small tortoiseshell butterfly caterpillars which is their favourite food plant. The fly's eggs develop inside the caterpillar's gut and literally eat them alive from the inside. So if you see any of these butterflies track them down to see if they lay any eggs on stinging nettle plants and collect a few of the subsequent caterpillars and if they hatch out then just release them but if a fly hatches out, send it to be identified. Full details from Butterfly Conservation at butterfly-conservation.org

iii) Finally stay safe. Better to be 6 feet apart than 6 feet under!

Sunday 28th June 2020 Braunton Burrows (or it should have been)



The sand dunes of Braunton Burrows are the largest sand dune system in the country extending to over 2000 acres. The area is a special area of conservation and a site of special scientific interest which in 2002 formed the core of the 55 square mile UNESCO biosphere reserve. The first one in the UK.

There is a wide range of habitats from the strand line, foredunes, dry dunes, dune turf, dune slacks, dune marsh, dune grassland, dune scrub plus ponds and salt marsh. There are some 1780 plants to be found in Britain and over 600 can be found on the Burrows. The winds are always changing the shape of the dunes and with the varying water table this enables this wide selection of plants to be found. This is why we would have needed John and Mary Breeds to lead the walk as they would know where to find some of the rarer flora such as sea stock, round-headed club rush, water germander and sand toadflax. Eleven species of orchids

have been identified there with the five most widespread being the early marsh, southern marsh, marsh helleborine, pyramidal and twayblade. On previous visits there we have clocked up over 100 plants in one afternoon. Many years ago I can remember visiting the area and easily finding lapwings nests but I don't think there have been any for some time now.



At home I have been visited on several nights lately by a hedgehog but I have yet to find any slow worms which usually inhabit one of my compost bins. Endymion also has had hedgehog sightings but other people have been plagued by grey squirrels. Hugh and Val reported seeing a roe deer from their property overlooking Kipling Tors. A young roe deer was photographed at the Devon Birds reserve at Godborough and one of my Rotarians photographed two roe deer on the Appledore lifeboat slipway. How they got there nobody seems to know!

Toad Photo: EB

The members of our Taw and Exmoor Branch continue to be busy and each month actively take part in a project. This month we have been involved in a house martin nest survey locally, and next month we are monitoring butterflies. Members Jackie and Maria via Rosie have put together a British bird puzzle to keep us all focused. Lock down hasn't stopped us from celebrating nature!

Countisbury 19th July 2020 (or it should have been)



It was a glorious day and the lush green hedgerows were full of ferns with swathes of meadowsweet, ox-eye daisies, hogweed and rosebay willowherb. It was an uneventful journey until we encountered the grockles at the top of the 1 in 4 Lynmouth Hill as they tried to negotiate it as if they were descending the north face of the Eiger. Then up Countisbury Hill and into the car park opposite the Blue Ball Inn only to realize it was for patrons only, but further up the road just past the cattle grid was a free National Trust car park with a large pot hole at the entrance.

Meadowsweet Photo: EB

Walking up Butter Hill to the trig point from where we could look down on the calm Bristol Channel gently lapping the Lynmouth shoreline some 300 metres below or out to the north to Foreland Point and then across to South Wales. Parasitic dodder entwined some of the gorse and some yellow brain fungus was seen on a dead twig as meadow pipits and linnets flitted hither and thither and tormentil sparkled on the ground along with ground ivy and ribwort plantain.

Down to Countisbury Church where a pair of swallows were nesting in the entrance porch and blackbird, willow warbler and green woodpecker were seen in the churchyard. Across the road and on to the moorland as we skirted around South Hill Common escorted by a buzzard, herring gulls and a song thrush. Meadow brown and gatekeeper butterflies were frequently observed along with the occasional small white.

By now it was getting quite warm as the midday sun beat down from an almost clear blue sky with just the occasional feathery white cloud drifting along. By now we were grateful to enter the comparative shade of Horner's Neck Wood as we slipped and slid along a path with stones loosened by the recent rains. A convenient seat enabled us to sit down and enjoy our picnic lunch as quite a few silver washed fritillary butterflies whizzed past in one direction but it was always the ringlets which came back the other way. Even a common blue and a frog put in an appearance as a nuthatch uttered one of its many song variations from above us.

Suitably refreshed we proceeded to descend along a stony path through a woodland of mature trees with an understory of whortleberries accompanied by a very inquisitive grey squirrel and some speckled wood butterflies. As we emerged from the woodland we saw a small skipper and a small copper. Now it was an uphill trudge past cow-wheat and rowan trees with their berries at varying stages of ripeness glistening in the sun whilst we were scolded by a wren and watched by a magpie, we heard a green woodpecker yaffling in the distance.

Then, up a lane and we came across Jane's lovely cottage which enjoys spectacular views of the surrounding farmland, moor and the deep wooded combs. Whilst she prepared a scrumptious cream tea we watched the birds on the feeders. Apparently she hadn't filled the feeders in the morning but waited until we arrived. So by now the watching birds were ravenous and forgot their



normal shyness as they tucked in with gusto including, greenfinch, chaffinch, robin, dunnoek, house sparrow, siskin, nuthatch, great spotted woodpecker, blue and great tits. A further surprise was the wasp nest inside the shed door.

We were grateful for a lift back up the 1 1/4 miles to the car park from where we had distant views of some red deer grazing amongst the cattle. Unfortunately, due to the corona virus the official outing to Countisbury had been cancelled but the above account will give you an idea of what we might have enjoyed.

Meeth nature reserve Sunday 16th August 2020 - or what we could have seen had there been an official outing

For many years the quarrying of ball clay, for use in the ceramics industry, had been carried out at this venue. This ceased in 2004 and now this large 150 hectare site is a nature reserve run by The Devon Wildlife Trust. The stormy winds of the last few days had eased a little as we wandered through the reserve. Underfoot the sticky clays varied in colour from reds and blues to yellow and creamy white. Over the years nature has embedded itself upon these soils in the form of scrubland, grassland and woods.

Huge quarries have now filled with water creating large lakes whose surrounds have been softened by nature. On one of these lakes was a pair of cormorants enjoying the vast freedom it offered. Overhead the grey skies did not create conditions suitable for the appearance of butterflies, damselflies or dragonflies for which the reserve is of note. When the sun did peep through the clouds it gave us occasional glimpses of them. One of these was a painted lady which has not been so abundant this year.

In between the larger lakes of the reserve are to be found smaller ponds one of which was dominated by water mint with its accompanying heavy scent. Another provided a suitable site for a picnic with the majestic, tall purple loosestrife bordering its nearby shore and shoals of fish seen when peering into the water.



Walking on, up over the higher part of the reserve we seemed to be surrounded by wild flowers. Swathes of fleabane, knapweed and ragwort were seen in all directions. Maybe the water retaining capacity of the clays helped the flora to survive through the previously dry spells earlier in the year.

Common Fleabane

Bird sightings were few and far between as they seemed to remain hidden following their post breeding moult. However, the clicking sound of a stonechat could be heard from somewhere amongst the abundant gorse. There were a few daytime moths flying around in their haphazard fashion. One of which was a silver Y which rested with its wings spread out to give us a splendid view. Trekking back along the broad pathways we encountered a small group of Exmoor ponies, which are used to control the excessive growth of certain plants.

Later, our obligatory cream tea was consumed sitting on an expansive lawn spreading out in front of an old Devon farmhouse. A chilly wind got up, so it was time to leave. Perhaps the dozen or so swallows flying around the farmhouse were having similar thoughts.

Tarr Steps is a clapper bridge nearly 60 yards long with 17 spans and is the longest one in Britain. It dates back to medieval times and although washed away in recent times it has been carefully reconstructed and is reputedly reserved as the devil's sunbathing spot.

As it was a lovely sunny day on Sunday all the world and his wife were out enjoying themselves before the new lock down guidelines came into force the next day. They also brought their dogs with them and although there were signs saying dogs must be on a lead and were not to swim in the river from August to December because of the migrating salmon and trout it seemed that many of the dogs couldn't read.

With that number of people, a one way system for walkers had been introduced and by and large it worked quite well. Robins and nuthatches could be heard above the sound of the river as it's shimmering waters crashed over the moss covered boulders. There must have been a recent hatching of pond skaters because on a calmer stretch of the river there were more pond skaters than you could possibly count. It was decided that the collective noun for a group of pond skaters was a "pool".

Time for our picnic lunch in the dappled shade provided by a variety of mature trees some of which were covered in some interesting lichens. On crossing the bridge from which we desperately looked for a dipper or a grey wagtail, all we saw was a wren having a bathe at the edge of the river and then further on some small trout and blennies were spotted in the clear waters.

Then we came across several fallen trees and large tree stumps where over the years lots and lots of coins have been securely wedged in the cracks in the wood. Who says money doesn't grow on trees!!

A quick detour now to a buddleia bush which proved very worthwhile as it produced red admiral, small tortoiseshell, brimstone, green veined white and a silver washed fritillary. It was now time for a cream tea where amongst the visiting wasps were chaffinches and surprise, surprise a marsh tit. Back up the steep hill to the car park, a few more flowers were added to the list including lesser stitchwort, pink purslane and dog violet. At long last a buzzard dove into view as it calmly circled in the warm Autumnal air against a background of a pale blue sky with the occasional wispy white cloud.



The River Barle E Beer

It had been a most enjoyable walk along by the picturesque River Barle, it was just a pity that to comply with the BNA and Government requirements we had to cancel the official outing.

Red deer on Exmoor, Saturday 17th October 2020

In the Autumn of every year, as far as man can remember, a red deer rut will take place in accordance with the sureties of nature. This is when the male stag will gather around him a cluster of female hinds for the purpose of mating and ensuring the future survival of their species, when the young appear in the Spring of the following year.

There is of course much competition amongst the stags for this privilege and will often involve fighting between the more evenly matched animals. More usually though it will be the larger animal who chases off a smaller (and wise) one. This results in the stronger animal mating with his group of hinds thus theoretically producing superior offspring.

Driving up over the lower slopes of Exmoor with the sun shining down from a clear blue sky, anticipation was high for a good sighting of deer. Gone now were the bright pinks of willowherb which line the roads in the

Summer months. Instead, now the hedges recently trimmed avoiding disturbance during the breeding season, clumps of late flowering hemp agrimony were occasionally passed still clinging on to life and providing food for various insects. The changing leaf colours seemed to be enhanced with the sun's rays bouncing off their glittering surfaces. All this was to change, as travelling higher up the moor, the cloud cover increased and a sneaky wind made its presence felt.

Meeting at our usual spot at Hillhead Cross, we set off over Stoke Pero Common to our first destination overlooking Bagley Combe. Straight away two groups of deer were spotted in adjacent fields. The larger group watched over by a magnificent stag consisted of some thirty five hinds. The smaller group, with a smaller but still impressive stag numbered around fifteen hinds. It was this group which provided us with the most suspense. Firstly a younger stag appeared from up the sloping field showing a clear intent to the stag in possession. After a semi-successful attempt at keeping his group in a tight pack and after much bellowing, he set off to face the intruder who at first held his ground until the larger stag broke into a run causing a partial retreat by the interloper.

Meanwhile, another younger stag appeared from lower down the slope causing the defending champion to change tactics and run downhill to chase him off. No sooner had he accomplished this when the uphill stag saw his chance and started to mingle with the unchaperoned hinds. Not to be outsmarted the "in house" stag ran back uphill and chased the newcomer away for good. His object having been achieved, for the present at least, he then lay down for a well earned rest.

Onwards now to another vantage point at Alderman's Barrow where we watched another group of deer whilst enjoying our packed lunches. Again there was a stag with about a dozen hinds, some of which were smaller and thought to be this year's young ones. Interestingly the colours of this group varied from smoky grey to a light fawn.

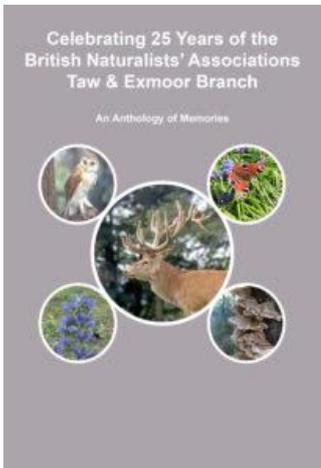


Opposite, the clear ripples of Chetsford Water ran away down a valley. To stretch our legs we decided to follow the stream downwards through the scattered hawthorn bushes now devoid of their leaves but covered in silvery lichen and sporting small red berries. We were hoping to see more deer or even a ring ousel as two had been spotted there a few days earlier. Around us the once purple ling had now changed to brown but brighter colours cheered our way in the form of the ever present yellow flowers of gorse, the occasional red of the bell heather, the blue of some scabious and splashes of yellow tormentil plus one lone foxglove.

Red Deer Hind on Exmoor T Beer

Neither deer nor ring ousels were seen, but almost in compensation, a red kite flapped its way across the sky overhead after being harassed by one of the local ravens. On arrival back at the cars, a small flock of fieldfares landed in some tall beech trees. Other birds seen up on the moor included stonechat, meadow pipit, blue tit, goldcrest, crow, buzzard and kestrel

A lovely rain free day was finished off by a member kindly inviting us back to her beautiful Exmoor home where we enjoyed a cream tea with whortleberry jam and home made banana cake.



During the pandemic, lock down put an end to members celebrating together a rather special Autumn anniversary. During November we embarked upon a project for a virtual celebration. Here is our official press release. The Taw and Exmoor branch of The British Naturalists' Association (BNA) celebrates a 25th Anniversary! The local branch, founded by Trevor Beer MBE, belongs to one of the oldest national nature charities The British Naturalists' Association, which was founded in 1905, and has various branches all over Britain covering different areas. Members have got together for a virtual celebration and have written articles, poems and sent in photographs which have been collated into a new members only booklet 'Celebrating 25 years of the British Naturalists' Association's Taw and Exmoor Branch - An Anthology of Memories.' The booklet has been well received and members are looking forward to resuming nature walks to explore and celebrate British flora and fauna just as soon as the pandemic is over. The outings are a great way for like-minded people to photograph, celebrate or learn about nature, and to enjoy time spent together. So, after so much isolation, why not join us! For further information please contact our Chairman Brian Sims on 01271 343607.

Stear Marshes, 6th December 2020

Had the official visit not been cancelled due to the Corona virus restrictions in tier 2, limiting the numbers to only six people outdoors, then this is what might have been reported. On the previous two days the weather had been grey, damp and miserable but Sunday dawned with a cloudless sky enabling the weak Winter sun to reflect off the overnight frost. As we proceeded, the temperature gradually increased from 0°C to a balmy 5°C on arrival at Steart.

There had been reports of an eastern yellow wagtail having been seen in the marshes which could have explained why the car park was practically full. So after a quick coffee we donned our cold weather gear and set off to search for this bird. Redwing and fieldfare were good early sightings plus the anticipated ones of meadow pipit, linnet and reed bunting. Several pintail were present in the flooded areas plus the occasional mallard mixed in with the grazing sheep.

We eventually arrived at the place where the wagtail had been seen but much searching of reeds, rushes and muddy pools only produced a pied wagtail. By now it was lunchtime so we thought it might appear whilst we were preoccupied with eating. Sure enough it flashed overhead (recognised by its call) and disappeared into the reeds never to be seen again. We were also rewarded by the sight of two displaying marsh harriers.

Out over the Bristol Channel large flocks of dunlin were giving amazing aerobatic displays appearing and disappearing as the sun caught their orientation. Back now to walk another section of the marshes and on one lagoon there were large flocks of lapwing, wigeon, teal and shoveler plus a single avocet and a couple of little egrets. High up on an electricity pylon was a peregrine and a pair of ravens. It was a beautiful day and it was a pity that the branch members could no have enjoyed it as a group. On the journey home the temperature slowly dropped to freezing again as the sun dipped below the horizon and the stars began to appear.