

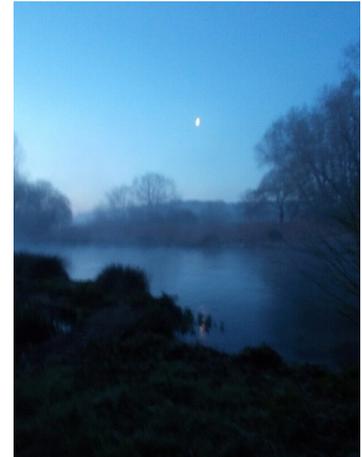


**Martyr Worthy
Dawn Chorus Walk
Sunday 1 May 2016**



With a waning crescent moon still shining overhead and a sheen of white frost glistening on the fields, a dozen brave souls set out from Couch Green car park at 4.30am for the annual Dawn Chorus Walk.

Members of the Worthys Conservation Volunteers joined with The Watercress Way team under the guidance of Wilf Simcox to hear the wakening birds ring out their calls. Meandering along the old railway line, at first all we could hear were blackbird and robin. Too dark for them to feed, they sing out their territorial claims, reiterating their stake to a particular area, loud and clear. As we clambered out of the old railway cutting and headed down the lane to Martyr Worthy the variety of birds changed - goldfinch, chiffchaff, great tit and wren joined in the chorus.



Meeting the ghostly river Itchen just after 5am with mist rising eerily through the reeds we were rewarded by the sight of a heron and the sound of a sedge warbler - churring in the reeds. Onwards to Easton where we noted the high pitched, mincing cry of the goldcrest hiding in a conifer; it's one of the UK's smallest birds and difficult to see! Then along the lane to Chilland partnered by woodpeckers; we heard the oft repeated yaffle of the green one and saw the bouncy flight of the greater spotted.

Back over the River once more we heard warblers again - not only the Sedge but a loud burst of song from a Cetti's warbler too. Then we saw our rarest bird of the day. At first glance this bobbing creature could have been mistaken for a wagtail but in fact it was a common sandpiper - probably on its migration further north for the summer. One other (recently) rare bird we heard was the yellowhammer. Loss of winter habitat in the form of stubble seems to have reduced its numbers in Hampshire. Let's hope its distinctive "*little bit of bread and no cheese*" call is not lost completely.



Walking along the north bank of the river, the group took in the view across the valley to Avington Park as the sun now rising rapidly lit the tops of the trees. The White British cattle that the Hampshire & IoW Wildlife Trust has grazing on the recently cleared water meadows seemed to skulk warily through the marshes here. Apparently they're a breed that can trace their ancestry back to the indigenous wild white cattle of Britain. Now they're being used to maintain and increase the biodiversity of the land - selectively grazing the vegetation and so encouraging a wider range of wildlife to co-exist.

A very welcome hot drink and some bacon filled croissants then helped to warm the group's frozen fingers. Grateful thanks to Wilf for his identification of the birdsong...and to Jackie and Mark Porter for their hospitality so early in the morning.

Breakfast finished, we walked back along the old railway line to Couch Green adding mistle thrush and Nuthatch to a list that finally totaled 30 species. We returned home shortly after 7am.

Bird guide: Wilf Simcox

Report: Charlotte Smith



Bird list

Robin	Gull (seen)
Blackbird	Chaffinch
Pheasant	Blue Tit
Cockerel	Yellowhammer
Wood pigeon	Green woodpecker
Rook	Great Spotted woodpecker
Song Thrush	Chiffchaff
Great Tit	Common sandpiper
Heron (seen)	Mandarin duck
Mallard duck	Blackcap
Sedge warbler	Long-tailed tit
Cetti's warbler	Goldfinch
Dunnock	Peacock
Goldcrest	Mistle thrush
Crow	Nuthatch
Total = 30	

Recorder: Bruce Graham

Bird reference sites:

RSPB: <http://www.rspb.org.uk/discoverandenjoynature/discoverandlearn/birdguide/name/a/>

BBC Tweet of the Day: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01s6xyk>