

A Trip back to where it all started! - Dylan Wrathall Hertfordshire/Buckinghamshire borders 6th – 7th Feb 2004



I had to go up to see my family for a couple of days, so made the most of my time by revisiting some of the places that I used to call my “Local Patch”

Thursday 6th Feb 2004

Grabbed a couple of hours and went across to Wilstone Reservoir. It's always nice to go back to old haunts and the feeling of excitement was just the same as I climbed the steps from the car park up onto the exposed bank. My first scan revealed a large number of Wigeon and other waterfowl. The Grey Herons are already back at their nests in the trees on the centre bank and 40+ Cormorants were loafing along the shingle bank. I did give them a grilling, hoping to find a colour ring, but to no avail. Great Crested Grebes were very numerous and several pairs were going through their courtship routine.

A walk to the hide allowed me to see a nice assortment of ducks, Tufties and Pochard being the most numerous of the diving species, I did manage to find single Smew and Goldeneye amongst the massed birds. A drake Pintail was amongst a large group of Mallards over the far side of the reservoir, a nice surprise. The walk through the wooded area, before the hide, gave me the chance to watch two Chiffchaffs and a Goldcrest, but very little else. From the hide itself, I was able to scan the mixed flock of gulls and Lapwings that were using the centre bank as a loafing area. There were at least 6 Lesser Black-backs and 2 Herring Gulls amongst several thousand Black-headed Gulls and a couple of hundred of Common Gulls. Two Snipe and a Kingfisher made up the best of the rest.



Common Snipe from the hide at Wilstone Reservoir

Friday 7th February 2004

I had decided that I was going to have a drive over to Christmas Common and see the Red Kites. The Chiltern re-introduction scheme has been a resounding success story and the roll model for many similar schemes since. All the agencies involved should be congratulated on this fantastic project and the wonderful spectacle that these birds provide visitors to the magnificent woodland of the Chiltern Hills. Christmas Common is a brilliant spot to view across miles of wooded hillsides, without the risk of disturbing these magnificent raptors.

I couldn't have chosen a worse day. The rain was relentless and there was a mist covering the area. My drive around the M25 and M40 was an adventure in itself; by I arrived and could hear the evocative cries of Red Kites as I got out of the car. The rain had changed to a steady fine drizzle of a type that soaks everything. Redwings were present in the hedgerow around the car park in large numbers and I hadn't walked 50 yards before I flushed a kite from a large beech tree along the footpath. Cursing my stupidity, all I could do was watch as the bird flew across an open field and away over the woodland beyond. I could still hear kites calling and another scan revealed several birds perched in trees back along the road from where I had just driven. Retracing my footsteps, I walked back up the lanes and found a group of three birds sheltering in a tree. The light conditions were terrible, but I did get some images despite of this.

I saw a further fifteen birds perched around various spots, one bird was sat high up on a Ministry of Defence radio mast looking more like a Peregrine!



Red Kite really looking miserable in the steady drizzle

I returned to the Christmas Common watch point and wandered around the area seeing nice flocks of Chaffinches and a couple of Marsh Tits. Green Woodpeckers were very obvious, feeding on the close - cropped grass of the viewing area. I only saw one Common Buzzard on this visit, but have seen many here over the years. It was hardly surprising under the circumstances. I drove back towards Stokenchurch and the M40, seeing another 20 or so Kites perched in various places along the route. The rain had eased off and I saw a pair displaying high over the motorway, just outside High Wycombe. They are magnificent birds and well worth the trip to this area for a day out. I have no idea of the size of the population, but there are a large number of birds present around the Chilterns, many of which are un-tagged and look as wild as you could wish. I cannot recommend this experience highly enough to anyone who wants to see large numbers of birds in spectacular surroundings and so much easier than a trip to Wales!



The view over the Chilterns from the Christmas Common watch point



Two Red Kites sitting out the drenching conditions

