

WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR IN NOVEMBER AND DECEMBER

Although visible migration is winding down, there is still the chance of a big **WOODPIGEON** day

Early November is the best time to see thousands of these birds streaming south to south-west over “vis-mig” hotspots such as Redmires, Ramsley Moor and Ewden Height, but they can be seen all over the area from good vantage points. Contrary to the view of one famous past speaker to SBSG, these birds are migrants, rather than purely dispersing from local roosts and the numbers can be enormous; 76680 moved south over Ramsley on 4 November 2012.

Early November is also the best time to see large movements of **PINK FOOTED GEESE** moving south-east over the area. Clear anti-cyclonic mornings are best and, with the clocks altered, the best time is usually between 8.30 and 10.00 am, with the birds presumably having left Morecombe Bay at first light on their way to the North Norfolk coast. Sightings take place all over the area, but the best places are probably moorland fringe areas with open views to the west, looking for the tell-tale straggly lines in the distance which turn into the classic “V” formations as the birds move overhead. Listen out for the distinctive low “barking” call which often gives the birds away.

WHOOPEE SWANS are another winter visitor which is regularly seen in the first weeks of November, with parties often seen on visible migration watches, but with parties occasionally putting down, usually on upland reservoirs to the west of the area.

If it is going to be a “**WAXWING**” year, then birds will usually start to turn up during November. They are occasionally seen moving west with flocks of starlings on visible migration, but hopefully larger numbers will settle in traditional spots such as the Ecclesall Road/General Cemetary area, and Manchester Road in the Crosspool area. In recent years it has been discovered that these birds move out of the city to roost in the evenings in conifers to the west, such as at Redmires or possibly even Derwentdale.

Wintering flocks of finches are worth studying closely at this time of year, as they may hold something a bit more unusual. **TWITE** is now a rare bird in the area; once seen in large, post breeding flocks at sites in the west, particularly the former Barbrook Res, a tiny breeding population hangs on in the west of the area. However, in recent years, odd birds have turned up in flocks of linnets at places such as Orgreave Lagoons and Peat Pits. Similar in size to a linnet, it is generally buff in colour, with a neat yellow bill, and can often be picked out by its drawn out nasal call and noticeably “bouncier” flight.

Flocks of finches and skylarks could also hold a **SNOW BUNTING** or even **LAPLAND BUNTING**. Again, Orgreave is the best spot, but November is also the best month for finding snow bunting “on the deck” at upland sites such as Topley Moss, Big Moor and Ewden.

Duck numbers start to build up at the main lowland sites, and this is a good time to look for **GOLDENEYE**. In recent years, this species has been found almost exclusively to the east, and Rother Valley CP is the premier site, along with smaller numbers regularly at Thrybergh CP. Similarly **GOOSANDER**, a bird almost exclusively found in the west in the 1990's, when 90+ roosted at the former Barbrook Res, is now found in bigger numbers to the east, with Orgreave Lagoons the best site by far for double figure counts.

Finally, keep a look out for **CHIFFCHAFFS**. Our summer visitors will have departed by the end of October, but from mid-November reports start to be received from lowland sites to the east of the area, usually near water. The best site is Carr Vale NR, where up to four have been found on the railway embankment, and this is also the best site for birds of the race "*tristis*" or **SIBERIAN CHIFFCHAFF**. These birds are noticeably greyer than the nominate race "*collybata*" on the mantle and crown, with black bill and legs and the hint of a wingbar. The call, however, is the giveaway; if you hear the plaintive call of a bullfinch which, when you find it, turns out to be a *phylloscopus* warbler, look at it very carefully! One of these birds was found in November some years ago in a shelter belt at Middleton Moor, so they could turn up anywhere.

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