Birding in the Cotswold Water Park

The Cotswold Water Park is an area of 40 square miles of the upper Thames valley. For the past 50 years or more, sand and gravel extraction has been ongoing, resulting in new habitats such as shallow wetlands, expanses of gravel, sandy cliffs, reed beds and willow carr, whilst the post-extraction restoration process produces lakes of varying sizes and shapes, ponds, reed beds, duck marsh and wader scrapes.

With more than 150 lakes, the CWP now has more than 20,000 wintering waterbirds and holds nationally important numbers of Great Crested Grebe, Pochard, Tufted Duck, Gadwall, Coot, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Smew and Shoveler.

Breeding waterfowl are important here, with good numbers of Great Crested Grebe, Mallard, Tufted Duck, Coot and Mute Swan, and with increasing numbers of Gadwall and Red-crested Pochard, plus the occasional Pochard, Teal and Shoveler!

But it’s not just about the ducks!

The CWP also supports locally and nationally important populations of breeding Little Ringed Plover, Sand Martin, Black-headed Gull, Common Tern, and Nightingale.

Who manages the Cotswold Water Park?

Many of the lakes are privately owned by gravel companies, developers, clubs and individuals but an increasing number of lakes are open for public access and activities.

The Cotswold Water Park Trust was set up as a registered charity to make the Cotswold Water Park a better environment for wildlife and people. With a team of staff and volunteers covering estates, biodiversity, membership, events, education and administration, the Trust manages the Gateway Centre, five Nature Reserves plus five car parks and many km of footpaths. The Trust also works with mineral companies, sport and leisure providers, local businesses, councils and communities to create a sustainable future for the Cotswold Water Park.

If you would like to find out more about the Cotswold Water Park, and the different ways you can help the Cotswold Water Park Trust, please visit the website at: www.waterpark.org

CWP Bird Blog

To find out what is around when you visit, check out the CWP Bird Blog, an excellent online resource kept up to date by volunteers.

Better still, why not send in your sightings to the blog at: www.cotswoldwaterpark.wordpress.com or via the Trust’s website at: www.waterpark.org

Where can I find out more…?

Gateway Visitor Centre, Spine Rd, South Cerney GL7 5TL Tel.01793 752413 Open 7 days a week Café / Visitor information / Toilets / Free parking

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Bittern
A scarce winter visitor in CWP. Very well camouflaged; most sightings involve birds in flight over reedbeds and a lot of luck!

Cetti’s Warbler
These skulking birds are resident in areas of dense, tangled vegetation near pit edges. Best located by their distinctive ‘outbursts’ of song.

Curlew
Every autumn a flock of about 30 Curlew appear in the CWP and stay through the winter, unless conditions become too harsh for them to feed.

Fieldfare
Usually with Redwings, but are larger and identifiable in flight by wingbeats which are slow enough to count (Redwing wingbeats are a blur).

Goldcrest
This arboreal bird can be numerous in autumn; with a sprinkling remaining through the winter. Often tag along with flocks of Tits.

Goldeneye
A shy duck which usually keeps well clear of humans. In flight the wings produce quite a strong whistling sound. Dives to feed.

Golden Plover
Often form mixed flocks with Lapwings, as they have similar habits. They migrate here after breeding on high ground further north.

Goosander
A large ‘sawbill’ duck which feeds by diving, with great agility, for fish. Modest numbers spend the winter in the CWP.

Scarce Gull
Thousands of Gulls roost in the CWP. If you like a challenge try finding the likes of: Iceland, Glaucous, Mediterranean, Kumliens or Caspian. Not easy.

Lapwing
A few thousand spend the winter in the CWP, feeding on farmland & resting on bare areas where water protects them from predators.

Lesser Redpoll
Best looked for in the Alders which fringe many of the pits and rivers. These Finches can also be located by their ‘chee chee chee’ calls.

Pochard
Occasional pairs stay to breed; but, as with most ducks, they are a numerous winter visitor. Can dive for food, as well as dabbling.

Red-Crested Pochard
A CWP speciality. A sizeable, resident population breeds well; making this the best place in the country to watch these striking birds.

Redwing
From October the hedgerows will be alive with these birds as they strip the berries. As the crop dwindles they switch to fields, often amongst livestock.

Siskin
Pretty little Finches, often associating with the Redpolls. Numbers vary each winter: with success of the Alder ‘crop’ having the greatest influence.

Teal
Easily the smallest duck to spend winter in the CWP. When mingling with other species their size gives them away, even when distant.

Tufted Duck
One of the commonest ducks in the CWP. Distant drakes appear black and white, but closer views reveal a lovely purple sheen to their heads.

Wigeon
Flocks of these birds will often come out of the water to graze on grassy areas. Have a very distinctive, and pleasant, whistled ‘wee-oo’ call.

Shoveler
The huge bill of the Shoveler makes it fairly easy to identify; particularly the females which otherwise look very similar to Mallard.

Smew
These nationally scarce birds usually appear in small numbers from December to late March. The drakes make black and white look very handsome!

Water Rail
Marshy areas with plenty of cover attract these secretive birds. Pig like squeals often advertise their presence. Occasional pairs stay to breed.

THE CWP BIRD BLOG

Recent sightings:
Check the CWP Bird Blog via www.waterpark.org

Lake/pit numbers:
Please refer to the CWPT Leisure Map for locations.

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Lake 74 scrapes: Best viewed from ‘Twitchers’ Gate on northern shore of Lake 74.

Enormous thanks to the following for kindly donating these superb images: Pete Blanchard, Dave Collins, Steve Davies, Dave Kilbee, Dave Soons & RSPB. Thanks also to Bob Philpott and Gareth Harris for maintaining the CWP bird blog.