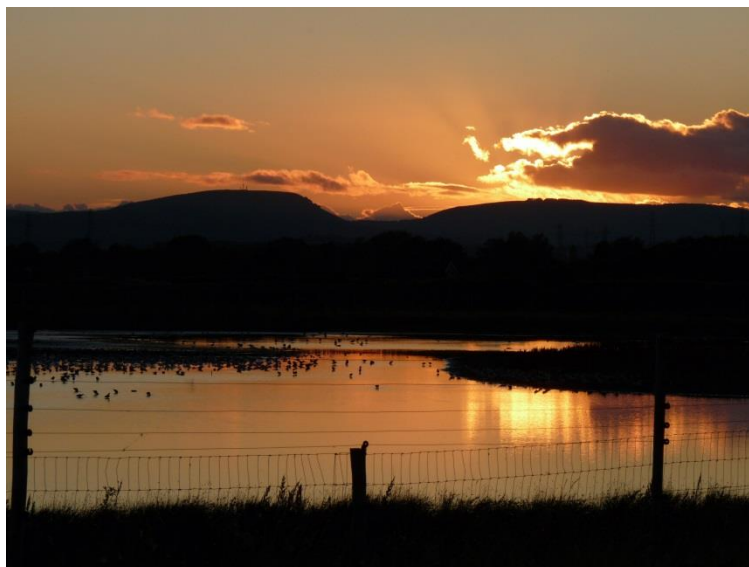


Itinerary for Wetland Wildlife An Autumn Exploration of the Gwent Levels between Newport and Magor November 1st – 3rd 2022



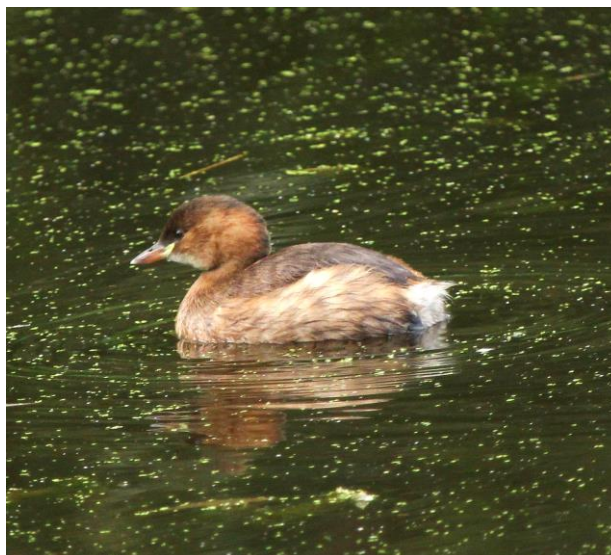
Sunset at Goldcliff lagoons

Famous for reed beds and mistletoe, saltwater lagoons and wading birds, the Gwent Levels offer amazing wildlife including its famous murmurations of starlings in the autumn and winter, as well as spectacular winter waders and wildfowl. With its reens and pills, it's one of the UK's gems.

Tues 1st Nov - Magor Marsh and Goldcliff Lagoons at dusk

Meet ~ 13.30 at the Old Barn Inn
14.00 Visit Magor Marsh reserve.

The 90 acres of Magor Marsh is the last relatively natural area of fenland on the Gwent Levels. Threats to this surviving fragment of wetland were felt so strongly by a small group of naturalists that in 1963 they banded together to form what is now Gwent Wildlife Trust, making this its first nature reserve. It has now been designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest because of its outstanding range of habitats and associated insects and other wildlife.



Dabchick / little grebe at Magor Marsh Pond

We'll head along the boardwalk and see large clumps of mistletoe that does well in this highly humid environment, and other remnants of late wild flowers typical of this type of habitat. There may also be tits and possibly wagtails that will be our first welcome to the reserve. We'll walk towards the pond, which was dry in September, but hopefully will have become a pond again by November. Along the boardwalk, we'll enter what seems like another world. Darker overhanging trees and scrub

provides excellent habitat, shelter and feeding ground for a great biodiversity. As we turn a corner, we approach the pond and hide where we'll look out for its resident moorhen, little grebes, and cormorants or grey herons over in the trees by the railway line. This time of year we might also spot some teal lurking in the margins. We also need to listen out for the impossibly loud resident Cetti's warbler that tend to call all through the year. It's also worth looking for the elusive water rail that breeds here.



Mistletoe at Magor Marsh

We'll carry on round the boardwalk in the dense scrub, and we may be lucky enough to spot some scarlet elf cup fungi here as well as some of the late flora and plant life of this habitat, such as ragged robin.



Scarlet Elf Cup and Ragged Robin at Magor Marsh

We'll leave the boardwalk and emerge into the reserve's precious hay meadow. There are two hay meadows in Magor Marsh which are maintained using traditional methods and are grazed during autumn and winter. We can get a good view over neighbouring fields for potential birds of prey or geese / Whooper or mute swans grazing or flying over.

As we leave the hay meadow and come back to the wetlands, we need to tread and look carefully along the reens just in case there's evidence of the otters that are sometimes spotted here, and water vole breed here too. Snipe and redshank are here too, so they could be along the reens or around the pond margins.

16.00 Back at the car park, we'll have a quick snack and drink, and if we have time, we'll head off a little way over to Goldcliff, by the estuary if there is water in the lagoons, to see whether any waders are coming in to roost at sunset. We'll get back to the Old Barn Inn around 17.30.



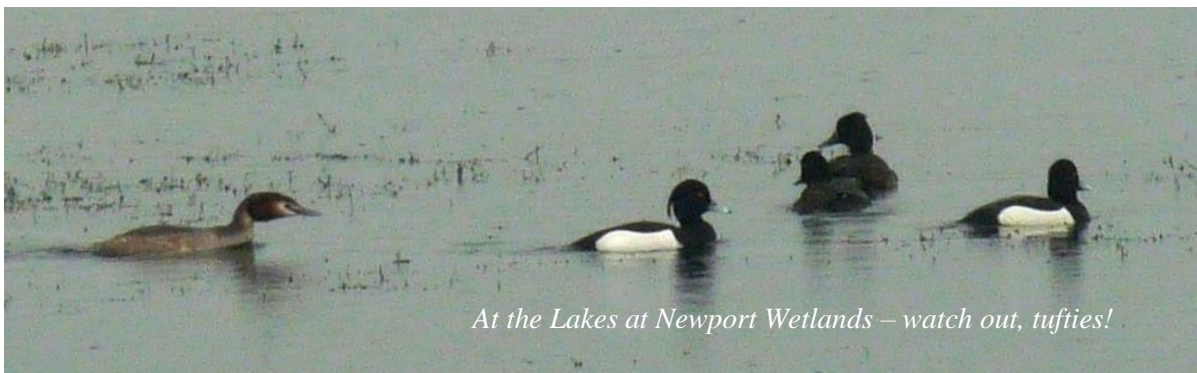
Sunset curlew at Goldcliff Lagoons

Wednesday 2nd Nov

A day at the Newport Wetlands for waders, wildfowl, starlings, and other wetland birds

Meet ~09.45 at the Old Barn Inn before heading to the Newport Wetlands

We'll set off for an investigation around the lakes and reedbeds, looking out for little and great crested grebe on the lakes, along with shovelers, shelduck and tufted duck, and of course, an ever-watchful eye for water rail. Look out for a flash of blue, too, there is an occasional kingfisher here as well.



At the Lakes at Newport Wetlands – watch out, tufties!

As we continue through into the reedbeds and boardwalk towards the lighthouse, we'll have a look for fish in the ponds – a good spot for roach.



Where the roach swim – Newport Wetlands

As we continue, this is where our spotting skills need to come into their own. We should be able to spot the reed buntings quite easily, hanging onto the reeds and swaying up and down in the wind, as well as looking out for warblers. But Newport Wetlands is the only breeding site in Wales for bearded tits so we'll spend some time listening and looking out for bearded tits whizzing across the tops of the reeds. They perch up on the stems in calm weather and feed on fallen seeds on the mud at the base of the reeds.



East Usk Lighthouse



Reed bunting at Newport Wetlands

Once we've had a good look, we'll head down to the sea wall to arrive by around 11.15, two hours before high tide. We'll set up with our chairs to watch for waders coming in, and maybe even a short eared owl hunting if we're lucky, before heading back to the Visitor Centre.



Curlew at Newport Wetlands



Flatholm Island and lighthouse

12.45 Lunch at the Visitor Centre cafe with views out over the ponds and reed beds

13.30 After lunch, we'll have a chance to look for some smaller birds around the Visitor Centre, such as charms of goldfinches which come together in feeding flocks in the winter, or even starlings gathering on the overhead power lines! We'll meet the RSPB guide at the Visitor Centre at about 14.45. Soup will be on offer before we head out, but we will have just had lunch



Juvenile goldfinch in autumn at Newport Wetlands

We'll go back out to the reserve with the guide. We may or may not cover some of the ground from the morning - it depends where the starlings are roosting, but even if we do, it will be useful to gain RSPB staff insight into the reserve. The guide will show us some of the best potential spots to see the starlings gathering to roost, as well as other insights into the reserve. We should start to see them coming together by around 16.15ish, half an hour before sunset.



Autumn starlings feeding

17.00 We return to the car to drop you back to the hotel for about 17.30.

Thursday 3rd Nov
Goldcliff Lagoons and Whitson

09.45 - Check out of hotel to meet at 10.00.

We'll head to Goldcliff again, to the lagoons which were constructed some years ago as mitigation for the Cardiff Barrage and Cardiff Bay development. Even if the lagoons are still dry, this can be an excellent spot, not just for waders, but smaller birds feeding on the hawthorn, kestrels and other birds taking cover in the reens and ditches and even the possibility of green woodpeckers feeding on the short turf.



Birds of Goldcliff meadows and hedgerows in autumn, clockwise: long tailed tit, kestrel, green woodpecker, late chiffchaff

. If there's water in the lagoons, we'll go into the hides and take our time watching, and as high tide is mid afternoon, we might start to see more waders coming in soon after midday. We should be looking for curlew, godwit, redshank, oystercatcher, egret, herons, tufted duck, teal and shelduck as well as mute swans. If we're lucky, we may even see pintail flying over.



Pintail at Goldcliff



Godwit and oystercatcher at Goldcliff Lagoons

As high tide approaches, we can go on over to the sea wall at Whitson to watch the movement of waders and have a late picnic lunch near the Goldcliff Priory site as the tide is coming in. We should look for feeding waders and seabirds that feed on the estuary, as well as the great views down the estuary of Steep Holm and Flat Holm islands. Birds could include curlew, shelduck, possibly dunlin, ringed plover, as well as grey heron, egrets and gulls.

I'll take you back, finally, to the Old Barn Inn for around 14.30 to collect your car - or later if you'd like!



Mute swan family in autumn at Goldcliff

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