**Dawn Chorus Walk Sunday 30 April 2023**

The day dawned not quite so bright; the overnight rainclouds were beginning to disperse and there were hopeful signs of a warm and sunny day ahead. 5.45 in the morning is not everybody’s idea of a great start to the day but this didn’t put people off and Lady Bay Birdwatchers led a group of 23 people through The Hook Nature Reserve to experience the wealth of birdsong that exists right here on our doorstep. In such a small area the key is to keep the noise down and the group were very well behaved with hardly a sound!

The walk began at Holme Grove steps. We’d only walked 25 metres and first birds immediately on the list, were a beautiful male Blackcap, at least three Wrens, two Common Chiffchaffs and a superb Song Thrush all singing at their limits and vying for top spot and ; the Song Thrush won hands down. Common Whitethroats could be heard with their scratchy song coming from at east three locations. After a few patient minutes the birds came out into the open with regular display flights and everyone got good views. Canada Geese honking drew our attention upwards and the first Swifts of the year for The Hook appeared overhead and while not screaming, they were great to see. A couple of Black-headed Gulls and Cormorants followed them across the sky.

Further towards the river  it became evident that our more common birds were not that common. Blackbird, Robin, Greenfinch and Goldfinch were in short supply but not to worry; the walk continued with more Wrens and Whitethroats singing, two more Song Thrushes adding to the symphony and a couple more Chiffchaffs. Great Tits then woke up with two or three increasing the noise and then at last we did hear both Greenfinch and Goldfinch singing but views were difficult.

Crows, Jackdaws and Magpies were around but obviously in breeding mode and not particularly vocal.

As we approached half-way a Great Spotted Woodpecker was heard drumming and then what was possibly the same bird was viewed heading south towards the residential area. At least two more Blackcaps could be heard and at one point they were singing at the same time as the Chiffchaffs and the Whitethroats; it became a real test for people to distinguish the difference in song. Our fourth warbler then joined in the fray; a Sedge Warbler began its song but then decided to give up; a few minutes later the same thing happened and this time it gave up completely. This was a shame as its song is a fantastic mix of warbles and scratchy and  fluty notes. Close to this location a male Reed Bunting was hiding in the Hawthorn bushes but was unfortunately quiet.

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As we approached the end of the stroll our second Blackbird was singing away and not to be outdone we had a great finale with Dunnock, Chiffchaff, Whitethroat, Wren and at least our fourth Song Thrush of the morning all joining in. Pure teamwork.

26 species were seen/heard and there were lots of smiles all round as the sky cleared and the promised sunny day ahead seemed to be appearing.

Keith Rainford