

A Winter Walk at Pitsford Water.

Pitsford Water is a good place for a winter outing and an excellent one for seeing a wide variety of wildfowl that you would be unlikely to see in Bugbrooke. The path around it is flat and provides easy walking, cycling and jogging. It is an ideal place to go to see lots of winter wildlife without getting too muddy and is easily accessible. The Lodge end of the reservoir (close to Holcot) has a free car park where many birds congregate because they know that people go there to feed them. Mute Swans, Canada Geese, Greylag Geese, Black-headed Gulls and Mallards are very bold, but if you look out on to the water you can see those birds that are quite happy keeping away from you. There are always a good number of Great-crested Grebes and quite a few Little Grebes, but it is a case of now you see them and now you don't as they dive for food, often reappearing at quite a distance. Coots and Moorhens, which were common along the canal in Bugbrooke before mink virtually eradicated them, can be seen in large numbers. There are lots of other ducks besides Mallards. Tufted Duck, Teal and Wigeon are common, and Gadwalls and Pintail are there in smaller numbers. Wigeon can often be seen in fairly large flocks grazing on the banks, taking to the water, with their characteristic whistling call, as you approach. Migratory ducks from Scandinavia and Siberia such as the shy Goldeneye and Smew overwinter here and can be seen keeping their distance on the water. Off the water many other species can be seen. On the water margins, look out for waders such as Dunlin and Redshank and flying across the reservoir, Shags, which can be distinguished from Cormorants by their straight necks as they fly. In the fields surrounding the reservoir, you can see geese grazing and migratory Redwing and Fieldfare feeding on the hedgerow berries.

Books for Christmas: There are many and varied wildlife books available, but I would like to suggest a few that may be useful. For bird identification-Collins *Bird Guide*, by Mullarney, Svensson, Zetterstrom and Grant; RSPB *Birds Of Britain and Europe*, Rob Hume. For general wildlife information-BWP, *Guide to Garden Wildlife* by Richard Lewington; RSPB, *Garden Wildlife* by Peter Holden and Geoffrey Abbot. An excellent bat guide for those who have developed an interest in bats this year is *Bats* by Phil Richardson, published by Whittet books, (but be careful to get the right one as there is another book by the same name and author but published by the Natural History Museum which is a world-wide guide).

Bugbrooke Big Garden Birdwatch is on 29th-30th January 2011. More information will be available online at www.bugbrookelink.co.uk and at Petstop in the new year, or if you would like to have a tally sheet or identification chart, please call me.