

Storton's Pits – a reason to be optimistic.

At Sixfields there is a small nature reserve which is managed by the Northamptonshire Wildlife Trust called Storton's Pits. Sandwiched between Edgar Mobbs Way and the A45 ring road, there are flooded gravel pit workings where wildlife abounds. It covers 58 acres and provides a valuable habitat for many winter birds and sometimes spectacular displays of starlings at dusk. It is a mixture of woodland, scrub, lakes and reed beds. The first lake you come to is probably the most interesting and you will find information boards placed alongside the path, but this is likely to be quite muddy so boots are essential. The lake further down the road has a cycle path along the one side and it is generally an easier walk as it is flat and the ground is firmer. It takes about 45 minutes to walk all around it.

When we visited the Westlake reserve in late November there was an abundance of bird life to be seen very easily. There were gadwall, goosander tufted duck, pochard, great crested grebe, cormorant, mallard, mute swan, black headed gull, common gull, black backed gull, Canada geese, moorhen, coot, grey heron and kingfisher on and around the lakes. In the hedgerows we saw redwings and fieldfares amongst more common species such as blackbirds, goldfinches, blue tit, great tit, long tailed tit and woodpigeons. There are platforms for viewing and pond dipping in the summer. Reeds have been planted to provide cover for nesting birds in the breeding season, and there have been sightings of the rare bearded tit there too. There are numerous bird feeders that are regularly refilled and we have seen a variety of small birds feeding on them. Besides great tits and blue tits, we saw reed buntings taking advantage of the seeds. The lift tower has also been used by peregrines to breed and to eat their prey in past years and, if they are about, they would be using the reserve as their hunting ground.

There is a series of old gravel pits along the Nene flood plain and Storton's Pits is one of them. Those from Clifford Hill at Little Houghton to Thorpe Waterville near Thrapston achieved recognition as being an area of particular value to wintering migrants in 2011 when it was confirmed by the Secretary of State as being deserving protection at the highest level. The Upper Nene Valley Gravel Pits is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and also a Special Protection Area (SPA). Storton's Pits is outside this designated area, but the birds are not aware of that, and who knows what may turn up there! Bitterns have been seen and heard in the reed beds at Grendon and there is a very similar habitat at Storton's Pits, so go with an open mind. You may be lucky and see quite rare birds there.

Recent sightings:- after the article in the December issue of LINK, there have been sightings of a red kite in the village. One over Baptist Close and another over the football field by the Community Centre. Both times it was being mobbed by jackdaws and rooks.

Don't forget the Bugbrooke Garden Birdwatch. You can still take part up to, and including, the first weekend in February. Let me have your results by 6<sup>th</sup> February. Tally forms are available online at [www.bugbrookelink.co.uk](http://www.bugbrookelink.co.uk) or from me at 1 Browns Yard.