

FIRECRESTS & PEREGRINE FALCONS at RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch 2023 - Report

Firecrests were the highlight of the Birdwalk at the RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch (BGBW) on Sunday 29 January 2023

Despite the overcast conditions, with a cold chill (9c) and mist in the air, NW LONDON RSPB GROUP were out in force for the BGBW at Alexandra Palace / Park lake.

Once installed at the boathouse, courtesy of the highly recommend Lakeside Café, we set out counting the birds on the adjacent lake. All the time encouraging other folk to do likewise either here or in their own garden.

Wildfowl included a pair of Shoveler, circling filter feeding, plus another colourful male, and four (3m & 1f) Common Pochard among the 20 diving Tufted Ducks. An oversized Mallard with a plump rear-end (bred for the table) always draws comment. Oddly, the Mute Swan (Colour Mark: ON(4FAU) Ring No. W50636 – originally ringed 18 May 2021 at Rickmansworth Aquadrome) was considered, in a very local context, to be an unusual visitor (details from Mike Reed via Stephen Middleton).

Feathers fluttering in the breeze revealed the presence of a large female Peregrine plucking its prey high on the palace mast around mid-day. While a male perched vigilantly above. Passing members of the public were invited to view the dramatic sight through fixed telescopes.

The vista from the front of the palace failed to produce any sign of the reported Common Buzzard so we headed towards the green fenced “Bunker” (map ref: 299 902) in search of a Firecrest. Here we eventually glimpsed two hovering and feeding Firecrests in the Holly and Ivy covered Trees. Even a Goldcrest put in an appearance. Nearby Great Spotted Woodpeckers were drumming & calling, four Goldfinches soon became six and a Stock Dove uttered its guttural song from below us. Several Redwings, Ring-necked Parakeets and a calling Nuthatch enlivened our return route.

The Event was supported by the Friends of Alexandra Park (Stephen Middleton) with assistance from the Alexandra Park & Palace Charitable Trust and the Boating Lake Café. Also a big thank you to the local birders (APOG) for latest birding information and of course our own RSPB stalwarts – Bob, Marian, Fay, Sue, Robin & Barbara and especially Clare for running the RSPB Sales & Information Stall. Plus Frank O’Sullivan and Tony Clancy.

Species list: 8 Canada Geese, 4 Greylag Goose, 1 Mute Swan, 3 Shoveler, 10 Mallard, , 4 Common Pochard, 20 Tufted Duck, 24 Feral / Rock Dove, 1 Stock Dove, 7 Wood Pidgeon, 2 Moorhen, 2 Coot, 73 (same number as in January2022!) Black-headed Gull, 7 (inc. one 1w) Common Gull, 1 Herring Gull, 3 Great Spotted Woodpecker, 1 Kestrel (FO’S), 2 Peregrine Falcon, 6 Ring-necked Parakeet, 3 Jay, 2 Magpie, 20 Carrion Crow (& 2 nests) 4 Blue Tit, 2 Great Tit, 2 Firecrest, 1 Goldcrest, 1 Nutchth, 1 Common Starling, 8 Redwing, 2 Blackbird, 4 singing Robin, 1 Chaffinch, 6 Goldfinch. Total: 32. (Also reported Common Buzzard). (BOURC British List – issue: 22 December 2022)

Bob Husband, RSPB Group Leader