

MANCHESTER BIRDERS INVASION OF SPURN 2007

A trip report from our little day out in someone else's county!

by Simon Warford



Above: Star find: Juvenile Red-backed Shrike at Patrington Haven falls to the Manchester Birders (photo by Annette Cutts)

On the 27th August 2007 a number of Greater Manchester based birders set off from Birch Services on the M62 bright and early at 5am for a days birding at Spurn in East Yorkshire. Although Yorkshire had been relatively quiet for scarce and rare migrants in the previous week, especially compared to some other areas of the country, we were hopeful of a good day with those ready for the 'invasion' being Simon Warford, Alan Warford, Judith Smith, Dean MacDonald, Adrian Dancy, Annette Cutts, Simon Johnson, Sean Sweeney, Paul Hammond, Tom McKinney, Brian Fielding, Geoff Hargreaves, Ian Woosey, Jimmy Meadows, Declan Savage, Steven Astley and Ian McKerchar. With a light north westerly wind the weather looked set to be a generally sunny day, but we were not to be deterred in our quest to find some good birds.

Upon our arrival at Spurn we began with looking around the triangle area and canal bushes where a Barred Warbler had been seen the previous day. Several Yellow Wagtails were seen flying overhead and a few wheatears were noted around the triangle whilst a quick look from the canal scrape hide produced Little Grebe, Snipe, Reed and Sedge warbler. A juvenile Gannet was seen very distantly flying inland down the Humber and was quickly identified by Simon Johnson.



Above: (left) basking in the sunshine at the Bluebell car park from left, Ian Woosey, Judith Smith, Brain Fielding and Simon Warford contemplating their next move, whilst (right) the Manchester contingent scan the canal zone with Geoff Hargreaves (left of picture) taking group photos and Jimmy Meadows (front) scanning the Humber (photos taken by Geoff Hargreaves and Judith Smith respectively)

A search of the canal bushes failed to produce the Barred Warbler however, from the canal bank most of the group had good views of Turtle Dove, several Garden Warblers, 2 Whinchat, a small group of Tree Sparrows and a Lesser Whitethroat. Meanwhile a short distance away Ian McKerchar, Tom McKinney and Paul Hammond watched a Mediterranean Gull fly south close inshore. A look onto the adjacent Humber estuary produced lots of Knot, Golden Plover and smaller numbers of Turnstone, Grey Plover, Ringed Plover and Bar Tailed Godwit.



Above from top left, clockwise: Redshanks, Whinchat (Canal Zone), waders on the Humber (Redshank, Dunlin and Oystercatcher) and Whitethroat (photos by Adrian Dancy)

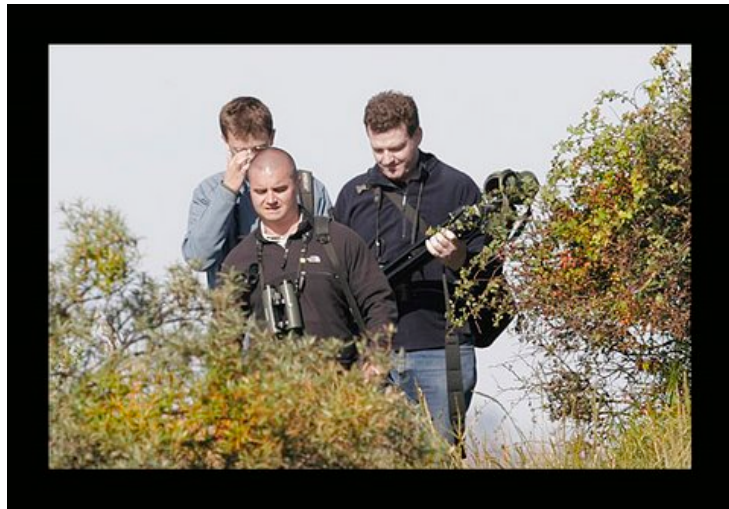
After a mid morning bite to eat most of us headed down towards the point, perhaps not the best idea to head down there in convoy on what was turning out to be a nice sunny day! Our first stop was at the tank blocks where there was a lot of coastguard activity on the sea and we saw what appeared to be a yacht in some trouble to say the least. Not much else of interest was seen other than a few Terns distantly offshore.





Above, the dramatic rescue of a yacht in distress tears the Manchester birders away from waders for atleast a few moments!
(photo by Arian Dancy)

By this time the trio of McKerchar, McKinney and Hammond were trying to see more species than everybody else and were even sea watching in an attempt to up there total somewhat, quickly adding 2 Arctic Skuas, Guillemot and Razorbill to their total.



Above, 'Team Hammond' failing to look up and see the Red Kite that apparently flew over Spurn mid-morning! (photo by Adrian Dancy)

We then carried on further towards the point and parked up at Chalk Bank/wire dump which is an area known in the past to produce good birds. Highlights in this area were a Wheatear perched on the hide itself and from the hide good views of a Whimbrel feeding on the shoreline were obtained. We then headed down to the point where I had guaranteed a café stop to please Ian Woosey, however he was very disappointed to find out the point café was in fact just a caravan although this did not stop him and others ordering portions of chips! Whilst eating our chips we watched some Sanderling feeding on the beach and a pair of Common Scoter on the Humber. The point itself was very quiet with just Wheatear and Blackcap seen, so we decided to head to the Crown and Anchor for some refreshments.



Above, post chips (from a caravan of all things, not in Wigan they don't!) the group scans the Humber from the point (photos by Geoff Hargreaves)

We chatted away in the pub despite the landlady getting rather annoyed that we had moved two tables together saying “how would you like it if I re-arranged all the furniture in your house”. Well the look on Tom McKinney’s face was one of total disbelief.

After a short while and still reeling from our telling off it was agreed to depart the Spurn area and go to either Patrington Haven or Blacktoft Sands RSPB on the way home. We almost managed to stay together in a convoy for the short drive to Patrington Haven where there had been a few interesting birds reported recently on the lagoons.

Upon arrival at a small car park in the middle of nowhere there was no sign of any lagoons in fact it just looked like a vast expanse of fields so we set off walking down the only track heading in the general direction of the Humber. I was a little anxious at this point because I wasn't certain we were going down the right path and there was no sign of any water, however our fortunes were about to change when Ian McKerchar found a juvenile Red Backed Shrike perched on a hawthorn bush only 50 yards from us across a drainage channel. This was special not only because it was a new bird for some of the group but that the Manchester birders had actually found the bird ourselves, on someone else's patch! The bird moved slightly further away but still gave good views perched on top of the hawthorn bushes. Tom McKinney promptly telephoned Birdnet Information Services (sponsors of the Manchester Birding forum) to inform others of our find and we watched the shrike for a good 20 minutes as it dropped down to a ploughed field to feed. At the same time we saw a Kingfisher fly down the drainage channel and a female Marsh Harrier quartering the field behind the shrike.



Above (left), 'grilling' the shrike at Patrington with Alan Warford (centre picture) doing what looks like a 'little dance' of celebration and (right) the group giving the waders a thorough checking (photos by Dean MacDonald)



Below, the highlight for many and certainly our best find of the day, the juvenile Red-backed Shrike at Patrington (photos by, from top left clockwise, Dean MacDonald, Geoff Hargreaves, Adrian Dancy and Annette Cutts)

Things improved even more when we found the lagoons as it seemed we had timed our visit just right for the high tide and there was certainly plenty to see. As we scanned the pools we saw 4 Little Egrets, 14+ Greenshank, 7 Black Tailed Godwits, and 3 Common Sandpipers amongst the many Dunlin, Ringed Plover and Redshank. This certainly was a cracking spot at high tide as the rising water level pushed several thousand Knot to the back of the lagoon. Probably the highlight was the hundreds of breeding plumaged Grey Plovers which also appeared at high tide with many coming exceptionally close. The 2 Spoonbills were quickly located as they flew into the back of the pools to roost, one of the birds was ringed and was known to be of Dutch origin and had previously been seen on the Isles of Scilly in October 2006 at both Cardigan in Wales and Titchwell in Norfolk in 2007. There was certainly no shortage of birds to look at here and we also saw Bar Tailed Godwit (50+), Little Gull (4), Green Sandpiper (4), Turnstone (20+) and Snipe (25+). A selection of ducks were also seen on the adjacent Humber Estuary which included Eider, Gadwall, Wigeon and Teal amongst hundreds of Shelduck.



Above (left), Marsh Harrier over Patrington and (right) the masses of waders roosting on the reserve there (photos by Adrian Dancy)

Due to the excellent birding we had lost track of time and so it turned out to be too late in the day to get to Blacktoft Sands but there was such a vast amount of birds to see at Patrington Haven that everyone seemed happy with the day's finale. It was a spectacular sight to see so many waders roosting at high tide and at such close quarters but it was now time to depart and head back to Greater Manchester with some relief that we had not missed any county megas back home! Despite the general lack of scarce migrants at Spurn a good day was had by all and it was certainly good to do some birding with fellow county birders. See you on the next one or somewhere in the county!!

Simon Warford, September 2007

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The Manchester birders invasion of Spurn, 27th August 2007 (photo by Annette Cutts)