

Tophill Low field trip Wild Things October 2025

On a beautiful autumn day thirteen of us managed to navigate the road closure to Tophill by a circuitous route via Hutton Cranswick. I'd been warned about this the week before by one of our group but foolishly trusted the ERYC website which told me work was finished. Marilyn gave up but carried on to Bridlington where, she assured me, she had a lovely day in the glorious sunshine.

Tophill was quiet except for the birdsong, and laden with mellow fruitfulness.



Above: Spindle, Guelder Rose and Sloe.

A helpful volunteer in the main hide showed us the four Red Crested Pochards on the main reservoir although we lamented the disappearance of the Black-necked Grebe, which had made off just as we arrived, at the same time as the noisy grass-cutting machine. A few did manage to spot a Kingfisher at the Northern Marsh Hide, and Phil and I picked up the raucous screech of a Jay just before we left. I prefer its Latin name, *Garrulus glandarius*.



Above: male Red-crested Pochard; male and female Common Pochards.



Above: female Northern Shoveler.

Left: male Tufted Duck.

Over: two males and a female Red-crested Pochard.

A Willow Flea Beetle which might be looking for a hibernation spot among the log grooves.





Two photos from Paul: as we approached the main hide we all were stopped in our tracks by an ivy covered in Red Admirals and myriad bees, wasps and flies. The late and fragrant flowers are vital nectar sources for invertebrates.

A Great Crested Grebe.



Today's weirdest fungi find was the patch of Giant Puffballs. Kath spotted nine of them hidden behind bushes, looking like aliens had landed.



Edible when young, they soon become unsavoury as the spores turn brown and are released. According to <https://www.wildfooduk.com/mushroom-guide/giant-puffball/> they are excellent fried like steak and each produces up to 7 trillion spores, more progeny than any other species known to man. Fortunately for the survival of other species they are beloved of many small creatures. I'd never heard of Lycoperdonosis, which is a respiratory disease caused by inhaling the spores. I certainly wouldn't fancy this specimen for tea, and I probably got too close.



There were plenty of Inkcaps too, which entertained us in their various stages of deliquescence.



Left: a Shaggy Inkcap, young, and one in a late stage of deliquescence (below).

A keen forager might want to collect these young inkcaps for a breakfast fry-up but would have to be quick as their edibility window is short. It was once thought that they were poisonous if served with alcohol but this theory seems to have been recently debunked.

Apparently the liquid black spores were historically used for ink.





Left: another lovely inkcap, commonly called Hare'sfoot Inkcap, with the Latin name *Coprinopsis lagopus* due to its resemblance to a rabbit's foot when young. The picture below shows its characteristic deliquescence, with the edges curling up.

The picture overleaf shows another group of Inkcaps, which may also be the lagopus, splitting into what look like flowerheads.





Below is a 'Deceiver', *Laccaria laccata*, which can be a real colour-shifter, confusing a mycologist until you see the distinctive wavy gills underneath. Below right is a Birch



Milkcap, producing mildly bitter-tasting 'milk', which turns yellow after a while. The lick test is a safe if sometimes surprisingly hot or acrid clue to species, though I always have few takers on this particular challenge.





Above: the lovely Conifer Blueing Bracket, a saprobic fungus that grows on decaying wood, here on a patch of native Scots Pine.

Left: Oyster Mushroom, another saprophyte

growing near the car park on a dead hardwood trunk.



We loved the herd of dairy goats grazing and chilling behind a barbed wire fence. Excellent for controlling scrub and bramble.



Above: a pair of ichneumon wasps, from a vast family of parasitic wasps, hard to ID, which lay their eggs in various creatures such as caterpillars. I suspect the female (left, larger with ovipositor clearly visible) might be being pursued for mating purposes by a smaller male of the same species, but gender dimorphism in wasps is variable and I could be wrong. They were too fast in the woodpile for me to catch up.



On the other hand, a more familiar species, left, *Homo sapiens var. Angela*, was definitely having a slow-down on this conveniently planed-down log.

Thanks to Trisha for the bird list overleaf. She only recorded birds seen, not heard, so we could definitely add Jay, Cetti's Warblers and Water Rail, the latter two being notoriously noisy but visually elusive species.

TOPMILL LOW RESERVE, 6/10/25

Great Crested Grebe

Little Grebe

Cormorant

Mute Swan

Pink-footed Geese

Shoveler

Red-crested Pochard

Tufted Duck

Pochard

Kestrel

Moorhen

Coot

Wood Pigeon

Kingfisher

Great Spotted Woodpecker

Grey Wagtail

Coal Tit

Great Tit

Blue Tit

Wren

Chaffinch

Goldfinch

(22)



A Long-jawed Orbweaver spider, a wetland-loving species, in huge numbers seen today but well-camouflaged.

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