

Montgomeryshire Birds - Lake Vyrnwy



Willow Tit at Lake Vyrnwy.

Lake Vyrnwy is managed and organically farmed by The RSPB in partnership with Hafren Dyfrdwy. The 10,000 hectare reserve contains a number of SSSI's and is particularly important for peat bog moorland and Western Atlantic oak woodland.

Birds at Lake Vyrnwy are closely associated with particular habitats and the specialist species are described below under their preferred habitat. Many of the summer migrants are particularly associated with Mid Wales and Lake Vyrnwy is a good place to see them all especially during May or June. Outside of the breeding season birds can be difficult to find at Lake Vyrnwy as it is a large area and there are relatively few birds. The majority of rarer species have declined dramatically over the past few decades and in the case of some (Hen Harrier, Merlin, Curlew etc) extinction as a breeding species is a significant possibility. The fact that this loss is happening on a well run nature reserve with excellent habitat illustrates the problems facing birds and the environment in the wider world.

Habitat and Bird Species

1) The Lake

The man made reservoir is 5 miles long and the perimeter road (which offers a nice flat walk or cycle) is an 11 mile circuit. Goosander, Mandarin, Mallard, Great Crested Grebe and Little Grebe breed in small numbers. A few Teal frequent the lake margins viewable from the Lakeside Hide at the north end of the Lake. Cormorant are often visible from the Dam. Passage Common Scoter can sometimes be found in early summer and prefer the deep water just off the Tower (best viewed from north shore picnic site). Swallow, House Martin and Swift feed over the lake in summer. Common Sandpiper breed around the lake margins and other species include visiting Kingfisher and Grey Heron.

Whilst not on a main migration flight path the large water body can attract infrequent visitors and in recent years there have been sightings of various Gull species (Gulls are surprisingly scarce at Lake Vyrnwy), Great Northern Diver, Whooper Swan, Sandwich Tern and Oystercatcher. A Surf Scoter in 2013 was a notable rarity and does illustrate anything is possible!

Grey Wagtail and Dipper breed along the streams that feeding into Lake Vyrnwy.

2) Coniferous Woodland and margins

Vyrnwy shares many specialist species of conifers with the neighbouring Dyfnant Forest. Goshawk are best seen February to March but are present all year round and can be seen over any coniferous part of the reserve. Crossbill, Siskin, Goldcrest and Coal Tit all commonly breed. Species making use of conifer plantation regeneration and margins include Nightjar, Tree Pipit and Willow Tit.

3) Deciduous Woodland

The RSPB feeders at the Hide near the shop provide year round viewing of Nuthatch, Great Spotted Woodpecker, all woodland Tit species and finches - particularly Siskin. In the woods, Pied Flycatcher are easy to see in patches of Western Atlantic oak woodland dotted around the Lake (the RSPB Blue trail is recommended to see this species between mid April and mid June). Redstart can be harder to find but are relatively common, whilst a few pairs of Spotted Flycatcher also breed around the reserve. Singing Wood Warbler males can be heard in a range of woodland habitat from May to June (and will use coniferous plantation too). The mature beech woods, whilst walking along the north shore road of the Lake, are perhaps the most reliable place to hear Wood Warbler at Lake Vyrnwy. The north shore road/beech is also a good place to look for winter Brambling in January. Resident woodland species include Marsh Tit, Tawny Owl, Red Kite and Buzzard.

4) Fridd- Moorland Edge

Just above the tree line and before the moor, is a scrubby mix of gorse, hawthorn, birch scrub and grasses. This is the best place to see breeding Lesser Redpoll, Redstart, Stonechat, Whinchat and Wheatear. The latter two are perhaps easiest to see on passage during April along the Dinas Mawddwy road at Gadfa, or the Bala Road. Here also in spring there is a chance of passage Ring Ouzel and late flocks of Fieldfare. Wintering Great Grey Shrike is not annual but the best chance is along the Bala Road or the RSPB Red Trail (south of the Lake).

5) Moorland

Rare breeding birds at Lake Vyrnwy include Hen Harrier, Merlin, Black Grouse, Red Grouse, Curlew and Short-eared Owl. The chances of seeing any of these species is small given the large size of the area (most of which is out of bounds) and the sparsity of birds. The best hope of seeing any of these species is to visit the aforementioned roads to Dinas Mawddwy and Bala, and with patience, you may get lucky. In the summer, Meadow Pipit and Skylark breed on the moors, as do Cuckoo, and there is a possibility of Kestrel and Hobby overhead.