

Nature Photography in the Carnforth Area with Peter Madeley

Photographing Birds at Leighton Moss

This month we head to the nearby RSPB Reserve of Leighton Moss which is nationally renowned for its resident Bitterns, with a deep booming bottle-top blowing honk heard for miles along the valley. The reserve offers easy access for all with superb facilities and an excellent Visitors Centre. It is particularly suitable for less able bird watchers and photographers. If you are interested in nature of any kind you will find a wealth of subjects.

Feeding station

There have been 255 recorded species at the reserve, though photography is limited to those which are more approachable or come close to the fixed hides. At the feeding station you will find blue and great tits, robin, blackbirds, jay, nuthatch, the resident cock pheasant and woodpeckers, Green and Lesser Spotted. The feeders are beneath foliage so the light is relatively poor throughout the day and either fast film or flash will be needed and a long telephoto lens. You need to view and photograph through a wooden screen with fairly narrow slits and a beanbag is the most effective support. The best time to photograph robins around the picnic tables is in the afternoon when this area is sunlit. Although approachable to within 3m, the robins flit around quite quickly, so a monopod is more effective than a tripod.

Paths

Stroll along the paths near the Lillian hide and you may find robin, thrush and jay and, if lucky, catch sight of the nesting wrens in the willow. Britain's smallest bird is also one of the quickest, rarely staying still for a second. The birds tend to be in foliage so it's better to use faster film to keep shutter speeds up. With morning light coming through the leaves you need a faster film. The birds are most in evidence before the visitor traffic gets too intense when they disperse into the woodland and reedbeds.

Hides

Lillian Hide is the most comfortable of the hides, being carpeted and having an audio system for the hearing impaired. There is a large viewing window, which is ideal for less able watchers and this hide has slope access for wheelchairs. There is a wide view over the main mere and at the right time of the year Marsh harriers can be seen hunting over the far reed beds. This is an excellent viewing hide and it's worth a look in to see what is about. I have had good binocular views of snipe, teal, mallard and heron from this hide and have seen buzzards over the distant fells. Photography with shorter lens though can be difficult.

Tim Jackson/Grizedale hides are a short walk along the reedbed fringed gravel path. It is in these reeds that the rare bearded tit can sometimes be seen. There is a long creek on the way to the hides which can offer good views of moorhen, coot, rail and Mute Swan.

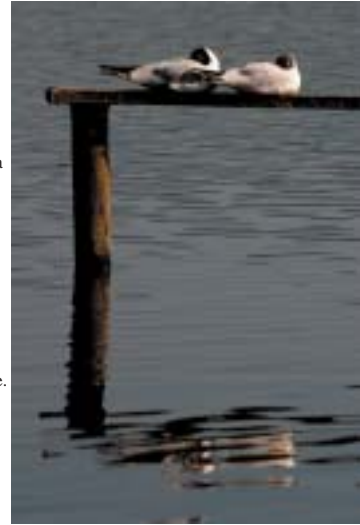
I have often seen deer from these hides and the heron is ever present. Depending on the time of the year there is a great range of wildfowl present. Although I have never been fortunate enough to be in the right place at the right time, the bitterns do come out onto the meres when they are frozen over. To get decent sized images a monster lens will probably be required for good image size.

The Public hide is a short walk from the main road along a causeway directly across the reserve and overlooks a small flat island which is often a good place to view rarer gull species which often perch on the posts directly in front of the hide, offering ideal photography opportunities. In November this hide can be ideal for seeing and photographing the roosting Starlings flight patterns.

Car Park Photography

Lastly, don't overlook the car park as a photography location. There are many sparrow families and robins and the birds are brought in by the temptation of picnic throwaways, so often the birds will come to you. I have even stalked and photographed hen pheasant on the grass mound in the centre of the car park.

Leighton Moss keeps me coming back time and time again. You get a sense of a changing habitat throughout the seasons and a feeling that each visit is 'wait and see' photography as just about anything can turn up. You have to work at getting the shots and it won't all come at a single visit, but time spent in the field can pay off.



Gulls and reflections photographed from the Public Hide at Leighton Moss

christmas sunday service

carnforth connect

Go Christmas Shopping in Kendal or Visit the Leighton Moss RSPB Reserve

with FREE entry for bus ticket holders

For further information about the Sunday Service contact the Carnforth Connect Office on 01524 734311 or visit www.carnforthconnect.co.uk

The current Limestone Line service will run until 21st November when it will be replaced by this Christmas Sunday Service. The Limestone Line will recommence on Sunday, 9th January 2005.