Our Conservation Group met at RSPB Titchwell Marsh on the 15.04.19. After details of the morning’s activity were described by John, the Group were told that individuals could do whatever they chose whether it was sticking to the paths, or locating in the various hides, in order to see the various bird populations.

Members of the GVCG collected their maps of the site and hired out binoculars where necessary. Most in fact had come ready prepared with their own binoculars. On the path from the café and shop the bird song was noisy. Every effort had been made to encourage and support insect life, from the bug hotels made from giant logs to the masses of cut wood just left in piles. Even the small birds felt the site was kind to them since the car park Robin was prepared to sit on the hand of the attendant to take food while a Blackbird hopped about people’s feet hoping for crumbs. The same lack of fear was shown by the many wood pigeons and a colourful Chinese pheasant picking food from a cleared area of ground. On the hard footpath to the beach alongside the sea wall, the vegetation was dominated by tall plants of Alexander, an edible import brought in by the Romans. In trees beyond the side of the path, a number of small birds cavorted. These were identified as Dunnocks, who had an unusual life style strategy whereby two males courted and mated with one female and both males looked after the young because there was a chance that they belonged to one of them. This was considered not to be an unusual form of behaviour amongst our human species.

The path emerged from the protection of the trees and into the area of the flat, treeless flood plains. Great excitement was generated by the sight of distant Marsh Harriers brought into sight by our binoculars. The Marsh Harriers floated around on broad wings rather like Buzzards. Our watching was disturbed by a flight of two very noisy Pink Footed Geese flying over our heads followed immediately by another. This might have been a courtship flight of the pairs. The fresh water lagoon was packed with gulls floating on the water or standing on the exposed mud. The amount of worms and shell fish and crustaceans required to fuel all of these birds was discussed while taking shelter from the searing cold wind in one of the hides. To one side of the dry middle lake, where there were only mud flats, Mike pointed out the remains of a World War Two concrete lookout and gun emplacement. We wondered who of the Dad’s Army Brigade had sat in there for five years watching and waiting for the invasion. It was agreed it would have been very cold and very boring. A further concrete emplacement was also seen half buried in the water filled third lake. A more ambitious structure to meet an invading army had been built directly
on the beach. Here the sea rather than bombs had done their work and demolished this hugely thick building. Approaching the water’s edge we could smell the wonderful odour of salt, sea and sand but it was not possible to stay there for long as the howling wind was carrying a low level barrage of sand that was proving to be painful even against our trouser protected legs.

On the return to the nearest (saline) lagoon we saw an unbelievable sight. There were two swallows swooping over the salt water lake. It was impossible to imagine any cold blooded insect could actually fly at this low temperature to provide food for these birds. Surprisingly swallows were actually seen on the 21st March at the RSPB site when it was equally difficult to see what they could live on at this early time. On the salt marsh a distant white blob was thought to be an egret but looking at through the binoculars it was only a white post. An egret was in fact seen nearby and in the air it demonstrated its very large wing span. Further away from the sea and in the shelter of the trees noisy bird song returned. Beyond the ditch and over the grassland, a Falcon hovered, a Marsh Harrier floated and a Hare lolloped. After that we sought protection in the café where it was thankfully wind free, warm and the soup delicious.

Before leaving for the RSPB a tour was made around the Salters Sanctuary. Here it was noisy with birdsong, litter free and the seats in the meadow were now more robust and very securely fixed to their concrete bases. It is hoped that the local youth just sit on them rather than trying to destroy them.