



‘What’s About’

No 49 Summer and Autumn 2018

Cold winds and rain from the east have not only brought me indoors to write this newsletter, they have encouraged winter migrants – waterbirds, thrushes and goldcrests - to cross the North Sea from eastern Europe. (Brexiteers note they will have left by next March.) Wary migrant blackbirds take flight from the garden at the slightest disturbance, but you might be lucky and spot a Goldcrest spider-hunting its way through the needles of a fir tree. On the river there has been a steady increase in the number of duck and waders.

The summer might have been exceptional, but judging from the sightings that you have sent me bird numbers around the village have been average and the number of butterfly visits to gardens has been unimpressive. Where were the Small Tortoiseshells, Red Admirals and Painted Ladies during July and August? Perhaps the answer to that is that the heat reduced the amount of nectar produced in many flowering plants, and plants on which caterpillars would feed withered in the drought. After the rain in August plants did put on a growth spurt and freshly blooming flowers brought a few of our late summer butterflies and moths to take nectar from buddleias and Michaelmas daisies.



Hummingbird Hawkmoth feeding on late flowering honeysuckle in Chris Morton's garden on the 3rd November.

Photo: Chris Morton

Fewer insects and worms burrowing deep to moist, cool ground meant less food for birds dependant on these sources – no wonder there were fewer nesting birds and far fewer fledglings around the garden.

In the county it was considered to be a poor year for voles, an important food source for Barn Owls, but our birds did well raising two broods with four birds fledging successfully. Surviving the first winter is difficult for inexperienced owls, prolonged periods of unfavourable weather cause many fatalities, we wish them no worse than moderate winter weather. There were few sightings of the Barn Owls during the summer months but one was seen sitting in the Reserve dead oak on the 9th Sept. Tawny Owls were heard calling during the late summer months, less so now as winter approaches. Parents have shooed young owls away and new territories have been established. The BTO is conducting a winter survey of calling Tawny Owls, it's easy to take part - 20 mins listening for calls during an evening of your choice each week. Details at

<https://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/project-owl/tawny-owl-calling-survey>

Swifts have probably nested under the tiles of two village houses, single nests at both locations. Screaming parties of swifts, 8 and 5 birds, were overhead on the 22nd and 27th July.

A Green Woodpecker came to feed on the lawn of Sally's house on the 25th July and one was along Mill Rd, just outside the village houses on the 28th July and another sighting on a lawn on the 28th July.

By the 2nd August Little Egrets were congregating on some of the dead oaks on the Reserve. 12 birds on the 2nd increased to 33 in the oak and on the lagoon on the 8th.



Little Egrets – some perching on the oak, others feeding in the lagoon on 2nd August.

Photos: Stephen Clover



Green Sandpipers (2) were on the Reserve on the 8th Aug. A Wheatear was on the river wall path on the 10th and 27th Aug. A Greenshank and a Whimbrel were both calling over the saltmarsh on the 14th Aug. A Greenshank was calling on the 29th Aug and it was heard several times during the first week in September.

Alexis noted a large number of juvenile Blue Tits were visiting her garden in mid Aug. There must have been a good supply of caterpillars in the oaks around there.

Freshly broken open House Martin egg shells indicated another generation was being raised on Blaxhall in Fishpond Rd on the 17th Aug. Hobbies are uncommon breeding birds which nest not far away. They are known for hunting dragonflies in particular, but they will also take small birds whilst in flight. One was seen flying through a flock of House Martins and Swallows around Blaxhall on the 12th Aug and again in the early morning of the 26th Aug. 100 + Swallows and House Martins, preparing for their migration south, were over the quay and moored boats on the 27th Aug. 20+ House Martins were over Fishpond Rd on the 14th Sept and 50 over Chapel crossroads...and they were gone, south to their wintering ground.

4 Robins in fairly close proximity were 'singing at each other' in Fishpond Rd on the 20th Aug. Territories for winter and next season were already being decided.

A Kingfisher was watched flying upstream and parallel to the beach on the 6th Sept. Have any winter Kingfishers been seen yet?

Sandwich Terns fished in the river well into September, one being seen taking a rest on a mooring buoy off Swan's Nest on the 9th Sept and another in that area on the 15th Sept.

An Osprey was seen over the river on the 23rd Sept by Sally and Serena, and on the 24th and 25th was seen by several people, with particularly close views off the quay by Mark Barton and Rosalind.

A male and a female Tufted Duck were on the reserve lagoon on the 27th Sept.

Two Treecreepers were watched whilst they worked their way through a hawthorn bush near Manor Cottage on the 30th Sept.

A late Swallow flew near Howe's Farm on the 1st Oct

Two Barn Owls were visible in the hole of the Reserve oak on the 4th Oct and at the same time further along the line of oaks a Little Owl was watched. Although Little Owls have been seen at the top end of Sandy Lane, the Reserve is a new location. The habitat is good so there's no reason why they shouldn't have been there in the past, although with the number of Barn and Tawny Owls in that area they would have had to endure stiff competition for food.

Two Shovellers were on the Reserve lagoon on the 4th Oct and then for several days after that. As the days passed the male bird's plumage became smarter as it moulted into its winter feathers.

50+ Avocet were seen feeding in the area of the Rocks on the 5th Oct, but few ventured upstream of the quay until November.

A Kestrel, a Jay and a Green Woodpecker were seen on Church Field on the 16th Oct.

Two Goldcrests were in a Fishpond Road garden on the 25th Oct.

Little Owls used to be seen frequently along Woodbridge Road near the track to Martlesham Church but this year there have been very few reports. However one was seen there on the 27th Oct.

In late October and early November 30+ Teal and 25+ Widgeon congregated on the Reserve lagoon. 2 Shovellers were there, together with 3 Tufted Duck, 8 Mallard, 3 or 4 Moorhens and up to 6 Little Grebes. 14 Avocets were on the tide's edge on the 3rd Nov.

A Skylark was singing over the saltmarsh on the 4th Nov.

A Sparrowhawk, unseen for much of the summer when prey was dispersed through the countryside, has started to make a tour of gardens. Seen since early autumn in Cliff Rd and Fishpond Rd.

50+ Widgeon were on the Reserve at dusk on the 12th Nov and on the 13th 50 Avocets and 20+ Black-tailed Godwits were up river from Swans' Nest. (Should Swans Nest have the apostrophe before or after the s ?!) 74 Avocets were counted on the 15th Nov.

25 Curlews were feeding on the stubble field adjacent to Manor Cottage on the 15th Nov and they will become fairly regular feeders on the fields over the winter months.

10 Magpies were standing about and looking alert, and presumably feeding, on the manure heaps 200m along Woodbridge Rd on the 15th Nov.

On the 18th Nov a walk around the perimeter path of Brett's Pitt brought sightings of a Woodcock, 2 Stonechats along the lower track by the shed and a number of blackbirds feeding on the berries of the fantastic cotoneaster hedge just within the BT fence west of the 'dishes'. Birds feeding there when cold weather brings large numbers of them in ought to be a special sight. Perhaps a flock of Waxwings will put in an appearance.

A flock of about 200 Golden Plover were on the far bank 400m downstream of Methersgate quay on the 18th Nov.

On the 19th Nov 123 Shelduck were counted in the bay between the Tips and The Hams, a further 18 up to Methersgate and 22 downstream to the island. A total of 163 Shelduck all on Sutton shore. There will have been more birds, but a much smaller number, on this side of the river. 81 Brent Geese and 200+ Dunlin. Out on the water 4 Goldeneye.



Excitement in July when 3 Hedgehogs - an adult and 2 young - were photographed at night in a garden in Deben Lane.

Photos: Richard Morris



No doubt they were the same hedgehogs that commuted between gardens and crossed Cliff Rd. in that area.

A Hedgehog was recorded in Hemley by Celia on the 1st Sept.

Rabbit numbers have reduced considerably in many places - myxomatosis, hemorrhagic disease, predators and vehicles are formidable adversaries.

A Stoat was seen to cross Woodbridge Rd a few yards uphill from the crossroads on the 15th Sept.

A Grass Snake was found dead on the road by Walk Wood T-junction on the 29th Sept.

A Weasel was seen by the Moon and Sixpence on the 21st Oct.

We are used to Muntjac in gardens and the occasional Badger too (although the lack of recent Badger activity has been noted), however a Fox visited Christine's garden at 8.30am on the 3rd Nov.

4 Fallow Deer, one of which had antlers, was seen at Hemley on the 4th Nov.

A Stoat was found as a road casualty near Martlesham House on the 14th Nov.

Wasps were abundant in mid summer, particularly around the time of the plum crop, and in some gardens became a thorough nuisance, but by August their number

reduced considerably and this can't be explained entirely by 'pest control'. Hornets, on the other hand, have been fairly plentiful, flying well into the mild autumn.

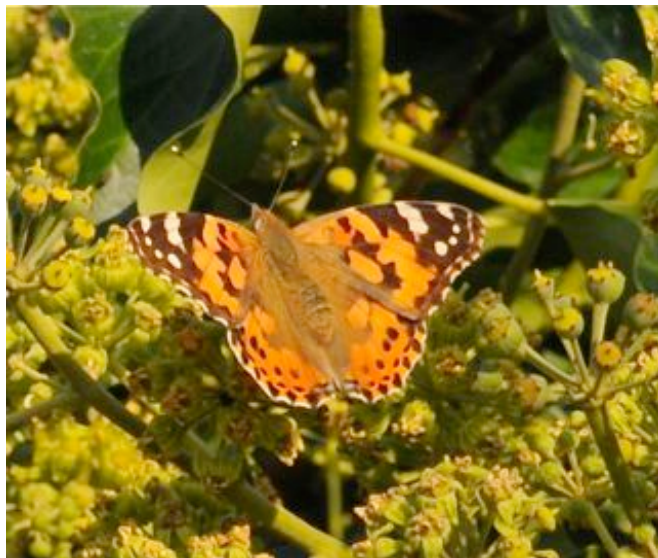
When the water level in the reservoir was unusually low this summer some fish, possibly Crucian Carp, were visible breaking the surface. It was observed how quickly plants took advantage of the opportunity to colonise the newly exposed banks and how quickly they set seed (Celia).

A less often seen Purple Hairstreak butterfly that came down from the oak trees in Christine's garden in late July.



19th Oct – a warm, sunny day when 6 Red Admirals, 1 Speckled Wood and 1 Painted Lady together with late bumblebees, Ivy Bees, Honey Bees, a few wasps and a Hornet were feeding on the flowers of our 4 metres long by 2 metres high ivy hedge. A buzz of autumn life! Ivy is a most important source of nectar and is a hibernation site for so many insects - if you enjoy butterflies and bees in your garden spare some ivy from the autumn tidy-up and the ivy berries will be an important source of food for birds in the winter and spring.

Last Saturday, the 17th Nov was a sunny day when 2 late Red Admirals were seen 'soaking up the rays' on roadside hedges near the cricket field and the nearby crossroads.



Painted Lady feeding on ivy on the 19th Oct

For this edition I am grateful to the following contributors: Chris Baldry, Mark Barton, Joe and Kit Clark, Stephen Clover, Janet Elliott, Rosalind Erskine, Serena Gold, Christine Fisher Kay, Sue and Olaf Kirchner, Chris and Tony Lyon, Janette and Toby Mace, Anne Maddison, Anthony and Celia Mason, Richard Morris, Chris Morton, John Ogden, Sally Redfern, Di Renselar, Alexis and John Smith, Linda and Jon Wilkins, Neil Winship, Jill Winter.

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