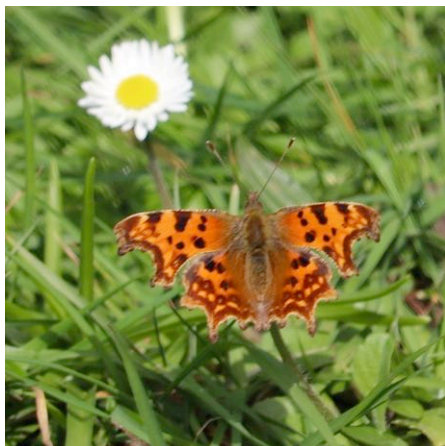




## ‘What’s About’

## No 53 Winter and Early Spring 2020

For the village, it's been a relatively mild winter with no prolonged periods of severe frost, but it has been much wetter than usual. My garden rain gauge showed 450mm during the period Oct 2019 to March 2020, but only 260mm of rain in the same 6 months of 2018 -2019. The blue skies of the last few days have been wonderful and surely have lifted spirits.



*An early Comma. Alexis Smith*

The 24<sup>th</sup> March was a particularly good day for those who were able to get out for exercise: **Chiffchaffs** were calling along the woodland path near the school and in the woodland below Manor Cottage, and also at Hemley and Kirton Creek. **Peacock**, **Comma** and **Brimstone** butterflies were drawn out of hibernation in several gardens, but I'm yet to hear of the first **Small Tortoiseshell** and **Red Admiral** that are likely to be flying now. A **Blackcap** was singing along Fishpond Rd on the 25<sup>th</sup> March.

The winter period saw somewhat reduced numbers of **Widgeon** and **Teal** on the river - a harsh winter would have brought more birds to the area. Nevertheless, in mid-November when I watched a **Marsh Harrier** quarter the saltings I was surprised to see how many birds were put up. There are many more birds feeding in the channels of the saltmarsh than at first is apparent.

During the winter a large flock of **Lapwings** was in the area of the island and the saltings down from the dinghy park, and 150 **Golden Plover** often roosted on the island and fed on the nearby intertidal mud.

Using a telescope, a count of duck on the Sutton side is possible and on the 30<sup>th</sup> Dec 53 **Shelduck**, 37 male **Pintail**, 31 **Avocets**, 97 **Black-tailed Godwit**, 230 **Dunlin** and 12 **Grey Plover** were notable.

Another count on the 6<sup>th</sup> March showed 21 male Pintail, 94 Shelduck (between Methersgate and the island) 3 **Great-crested Grebes**, about 250 Dunlin and, towards the island, about 100 Golden Plover.



*Grey Plover Chris Baldry*

The stretch of water on the reserve has been a favoured site for **Widgeon** and **Teal**, more so than in previous years. Before the new year a maximum of 150 Widgeon and a similar number of Teal were counted there, but

during the day, as the path became busy with walkers, they soon dispersed to quieter parts of the river. At times a couple of dozen water birds remained on



*Teal (male) Alexis Smith*

the lagoon throughout the day and they seemed to be more intent on pairing routines than on passers-by. By mid-March numbers of Widgeon had reduced to about 8 birds and the Teal to about 30 individuals. Birds on the river were also in much reduced numbers.

A pair of **Shovellers** was seen on the 4<sup>th</sup> Nov and then intermittently through the winter.

A pair of **Tufted Duck** was on the reserve on the 18<sup>th</sup> Nov then again in mid-Feb and on into March.

A **Water Rail** was seen on the edge of the nearest island to the river wall, on the reserve on the 29<sup>th</sup> Nov. This was a new species for the reserve.

**Little Grebes** have been on the reserve lagoon and out on the river, with 6 being counted just off the reserve on the 9<sup>th</sup> Dec.

A **Snipe** was seen on the reserve on the 15<sup>th</sup> Jan.

3 **Mute Swans** were on the reserve on the 11<sup>th</sup> Feb and they remained for a few days. A pair had returned by 9<sup>th</sup> March and hopefully they might nest successfully this year.

On a particularly high tide on the 11<sup>th</sup> Feb 20 **Redshank** crammed onto the only section of the Manor Cottage jetty that remained above the high tide. The rusty hulk on the salting nearer the village is another good location to look for high tide roosting birds and often, when nothing appears to be in sight elsewhere on the river, **Turnstones** and **Redshank** and even the occasional **Grey Plover** will gather there, with easy viewing from the river wall.

25 Avocets were on the tideline below the reserve on the 8<sup>th</sup> Nov.

On 31<sup>st</sup> Dec 15 **Fieldfare** were on the grass field just out of the village along Woodbridge Rd, but this hasn't been a noteworthy year for Fieldfare or Redwing and even in the coldest periods there were very few reports of them coming into gardens to feed.

Between 20 and 30 **Curlew** often fed on the fields below Sandy Lane and in mid-March it was good to hear their bubbling call, an indication that most would soon be off to their moorland breeding grounds.

**Brent Geese** were heard on the Waldringfield part of the river on the 23<sup>rd</sup> Oct and about 20 were seen on the 24<sup>th</sup> Oct. The number had increased to over 300 by the end of Nov. During the winter they roosted in the safety of the channel behind the island. By mid-Feb the number roosting behind the island had reduced to about 200, but about 400 birds would visit the corn fields adjacent to the river and downstream of the village. The Brent that visit us are **Dark-bellied**, breeding on the tundra of central Siberia, but a single **Black-bellied Brant**, the sub-species from Arctic Canada, has been seen regularly in the flock on the Falkenham marshes. It may well have visited our part of the river too, but identifying it in a flock of 400 birds is not an easy task!



*Brent Geese Alexis Smith*

**Tawny Owls** called from various locations throughout the village during the early winter and into the new year then quietened somewhat, but one was heard during the daytime in Waldringfield Heath on the 20<sup>th</sup> March.

A large flock of **Linnets** was noticed by Jane Hall in late Oct on the fields below Rudd's Barn.

A **Stonechat** was seen by Pam Crawley on the river wall on the 27<sup>th</sup> Oct. and on the reserve fence by Chris Baldry on the 9<sup>th</sup> Nov and a pair were there on the 21<sup>st</sup> Jan.

There have been several **Yellowhammers** and **Reed Buntings** seen around the reserve. On the 20<sup>th</sup> Jan about 30 Yellowhammers were gathered in the upper branches of a large oak along the track from School Lane to Chapel crossroads. Christine noted that occasionally they flew up and whirled around together, looking like a 'flock of canaries', then descended to the tree. Nearby there was a feeding flock of **Long-tailed Tits**, **Goldfinches**, **Chaffinches** and **Blue Tits**. 2 **Grey Wagtails** were around one of the larger puddles on the track and 1 was seen there on the 4<sup>th</sup> Feb. 6 **Pied Wagtails** were seen regularly in the area in early March.

A **Treecreeper** was seen on the trunk of a tree with insect-holding flaking bark in Fishpond Rd on the 20<sup>th</sup> Nov and again on the 27<sup>th</sup> Jan.

Good numbers of **Goldcrests** had migrated from Scandinavia in early November and towards the end of that month a few were noted around the village and in Waldringfield Heath.

A pair of **Bullfinches** was in the garden here on the 16<sup>th</sup> Dec.

10 **Magpies** were gathered on Woodbridge Rd near the village on 17<sup>th</sup> Dec. and a flock of 20 were on the first field out of the village along Ipswich Road during the 1<sup>st</sup> week in Feb. What was this parliament of magpies plotting?

On the 27<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> Dec and the 9<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> Jan a **Kingfisher** was seen on the pond at Howe's Farm. A Kingfisher has been seen quite regularly at Church Farm sluice and also perched and flying near the quay. Noted in front of Debenair and Crystal Creek.



*Leucistic Blue Tit in Ros' garden*

An unusually marked bird came to a peanut feeder in Mill Rd on the 5<sup>th</sup> Nov. It was Blue Tit-like in shape and behaviour, but showed much white feathering. Clearly not albino, this bird, showing a significant amount of white feathering, is described as leucistic. The **leucistic Blue Tit**, if that is the species, appeared next in Sunnyhill on the 7<sup>th</sup> Nov. It visited a garden in Sullivan Place (possibly) at about that date, and was again in Sunnyhill on the 29<sup>th</sup> Dec. Chris and Tony Lyon watched the bird on a feeder in their garden on the 7<sup>th</sup> Feb and it was in Serena's garden on the 12<sup>th</sup> Feb. It put in appearances on the peanut feeders

in Pam and Sally's gardens through to the 12<sup>th</sup> March.

A male **Blackcap** became an intermittent winter visitor to Pam Crawley's garden feeder.

**Skylarks** were singing over the stubble field just along Woodbridge Road on the 26<sup>th</sup> Jan and they've been heard over several fields around the village since then.

By the end of Jan, 2 or 3 **Song Thrushes** were heard singing around the village and Christine watched a **Robin** gathering nesting material in Waldringfield Heath on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Feb.

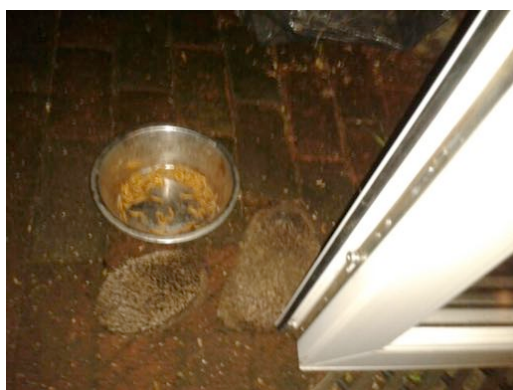
By early March **Rooks** were bringing twigs to their nests in Fishpond Rd and by the 20<sup>th</sup> there were two groups of 21 and 16 nests.

**Sparrowhawks** have again been noted, mostly zipping though gardens as they hunt relatively easy prey gathered at garden feeders. Elsewhere the set-aside sunflower patch by the wood on Mill Road where finches have been feeding has been a haunt of Sparrowhawks, whilst small rodents have been the preferred prey of **Kestrels**, which have often been seen there. A dead road casualty **Barn Owl** was found on Mill Rd not far from the sunflower patch on the 19<sup>th</sup> Feb. Barn Owls have been seen hunting intermittently over the set-aside field towards Newbourne and the reserve here in the village, as well



as over adjacent farmland hedgerows that offer some cover for their rodent prey.

The usual species of birds have been coming to garden bird feeders, but owing to the general mildness of the weather **Brambling, Siskin and Redpoll** have been absent this winter. **Chaffinch** numbers have dwindled and there is national concern about their loss. A few **Greenfinches** have appeared but it has been **Blue Tits, Great Tits and Long-tailed Tits** that have been the most numerous here, with the added pleasure of a couple of **Coal Tits** making regular appearances. **Great-spotted Woodpeckers** have been noticeable on fat balls and even a seed feeder here, and they have appeared in several other people's gardens. **Coal Tits** have been visitors to other gardens, including Les Humphrey's garden in Waldringfield Heath.



*Young Hedgehog feeding at Jan Kerry's house in late Oct*

A **Hedgehog** was seen on the road by the quay on the 29<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> Oct, and another in Jane Norris' garden on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Nov. A **Hedgehog** family was reported from Crystal Creek on the 4<sup>th</sup> Nov.

**Otter** spraints were found on the river wall on the 24<sup>th</sup> Oct and later during the winter, and also by the reservoir at Church Farm.

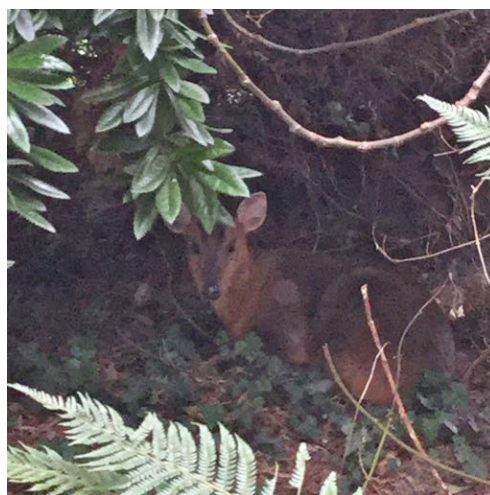
A **Stoat** was seen several times during Dec on the patio of a house in Fishpond Rd and in early January in the garden at Greenaway and along Woodbridge Road near the golf course.

A **Fox** was barking in the cricket field valley on the 6<sup>th</sup> Jan, and 2 **Foxes** have occasionally been seen in the vicinity of the reserve.

A herd of about 20 **Fallow Deer** was seen crossing the fields south-west of Plum Tree Cottage on the 8<sup>th</sup> Feb.

On the 7<sup>th</sup> Jan it was warm enough by 7.00am for **bats** to fly along the road at Newbourne Springs and along Mill Rd from White Hall to the Church. A **bat** was flying around the Fishpond Rd/Sandy Lane corner at dusk on the 22<sup>nd</sup> Feb.

Several road casualty **Badgers** have been seen along Newbourne Rd., towards the Foxhall roundabout, and by the T-junction at Walk Wood. Alexis watched a **Badger** poking around under the bird feeders in her garden during the evening of 1<sup>st</sup> March.



*Muntjac happily reclining and not easily disturbed, 10ft from Anne and Michael Parkinson's back door.*

**Hares** became more active and noticeable in late Jan and Feb with up to 4 being seen on a local field in mid-Feb. Single Hares were reported from 2 gardens in late Feb. They may be females searching for safe cover for their litters to be born.



*Frogspawn in Christine Fisher Kay's garden pond.*

2 dead **Toads** were found on Mill Rd not far from the Church on the 25<sup>th</sup> Feb and on the same day **frogspawn** was observed in Christine's garden pond. Another dead **toad** was found on Fishpond Road on the 11<sup>th</sup> March.

The 4<sup>th</sup> Feb was a warmer morning and **Honey Bees** and early **Bumblebees** were in flight and feeding in the garden. In sheltered places early hedgerow plum trees were in flower. On a walk around

Brett's pit on the 6<sup>th</sup> Feb Christine watched 5 **Redwings** and a pair of **Bramblings** in the area adjacent to the Moon and Sixpence. There were several **Skylarks** there too.

On 13<sup>th</sup> Feb **Celandines** were flowering on the track to Manor Cottage. And on the village verges cheery **Crocus** and **Snowdrops** were flowering too. **Wild primroses** were flowering on the verge at Novocastria and on Howe's Farm verge on the 17<sup>th</sup> Feb. By the 26<sup>th</sup> Feb the first **Hawthorns** were coming into leaf. **Stitchwort** was flowering along several verges by the 8<sup>th</sup> March.



*A less usual visitor to a bird feeder !  
Pam and Bob Crawley*

For this edition I am grateful to the following contributors: Chris Baldry, Joe and Kit Clark, Stephen Clover, Pam Crawley, Janet Elliott, Rosalind Erskine, Serena Gold, Les Humphrey, Christine Fisher Kay, Jan Kerry, Chris and Tony Lyon, Anne Maddison, Janet and Toby Mace, Anthony and Celia Mason, John Ogden, Anne and Michael Parkinson, Max and Margaret Pemberton, Sally Redfern, Ros, Alexis and John Smith, Linda and Jon Wilkins, Neil Winship, Jill Winter

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