

Thorndon Birdlife, November 2013

November is the last month of the birding autumn and sees the arrival of the bulk of our winter visitors and changes in the behaviour of our resident birds as they adopt survival strategies to see them through the winter.



Long tailed tits

One of the most obvious is the formation of flocks; those birds that form flocks to feed benefit from having more pairs of eyes to look out for food and to look out for predators. Many birds also roost communally, which helps them to reduce their heat loss. All of these things are vitally important and as autumn gives way to winter you will see flocks of gulls, rooks, jackdaws and starlings in the fields and all of these species roost communally as well, forming often spectacular pre-roost gatherings in the late afternoon. In your garden you should start to see mixed flocks of

blue, great, coal and long-tailed tits, often with goldcrests and treecreepers, and studies have shown that the birds in these mixed flocks actually spend more time feeding because individuals have to spend less time on the lookout for threats.

Also during the winter, birds will range more widely from their breeding areas in search of food and this process starts straight after the breeding season. The three cormorants that I saw flying towards Thorndon over Brockford Street on 29th September may have been birds from inland breeding sites heading towards the coast to feed and the grey wagtail that I saw between the Fen and the Clint Road on 5th October will almost certainly have been one from further north or west that has moved down to the lowlands for the winter.



During the late autumn and early winter listen out for tawny owls in areas of mature trees around the village. I heard two along the High Street on 1st October. As well as the well known drawn out hoot, tawny owls utter a distinctive "ke-vick".

On 5th October I watched a female great spotted woodpecker (black crown and nape (males have an obvious red patch on the nape)) perched near the top of a tree on the set-aside. It remained in the same spot for several minutes, from where it was calling and seemingly listening out for a reply. As I watched, a carrion crow landed on the very top of the tree, just above the woodpecker and she flew a short distance before returning to the same bare trunk but a little lower down.





Also on 5th October a nuthatch was caught, ringed and released along the Thwaite Road and again this is likely to have been a bird that had wandered from its breeding area in search of new feeding opportunities. It will be interesting to see if it remains in that part of the village for the winter.

During November listen out for the "seep" calls of redwings as they fly



over after dark, especially if it's cloudy or misty. On 10th October there was a sizeable arrival of redwings and 7500 were recorded at Landguard Bird Observatory near Felixstowe and I saw about 50, all flying south, to the south of the village. These birds will have been newly-arrived from Scandinavia, having crossed the North Sea, and over the coming months you should see them feeding on berries in the hedgerows. Redwings are superficially similar to song thrushes but are darker brown on the back, have an obvious white stripe over the eye and the red colour under the wings extends onto the flanks and so is visible when they are perched.

I am always pleased to receive reports of birds and other wildlife of interest in Thorndon, Rishangles, Hestley Green and Braiseworth.

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