

Thorndon Birdlife, March 2014

As the birding winter draws to a close it is no surprise that this winter, nationally, has been the wettest ever recorded. Fortunately, it has been nothing like as cold as the last three and so at least our birds haven't had to cope with prolonged periods of freezing conditions.



The wet weather was almost certainly responsible for displacing the grey heron that turned up just outside one surprised resident's window during February. High river levels will have made areas where it was accustomed to being able to wade into in search of fish too deep, forcing it to search for food elsewhere. Seen well, grey herons are impressive birds, not least because of their size. At up to 3'5", they stand over a metre tall and have a wingspan of almost 6' (1.75m) and they

are strikingly marked: grey above and white, with black streaks, below and a black line through the eye, added to which their long greenish legs and long, yellowish, dagger-shaped bill gives them an imposing demeanour. In flight, it is not just the length of the rounded wings that impresses, but their breadth. Grey herons are distinctive in flight because their legs and feet trail behind them and the long neck is folded back into the 'shoulders'.



During February two more nuthatches were seen along the Thwaite Road and it's worth looking out for these birds if you live in an area with mature trees. They will associate with blue tits and great tits in mixed species foraging flocks in the winter and will come to bird feeders, where they are especially fond of peanuts and suet.

Also along the Thwaite Road in February was a female blackcap. Blackcaps are primarily summer visitors to our shores and are one of the earliest to arrive. The powerful, sweet song of the blackcap is a sure sign that spring is on the way but in recent decades increasing numbers of blackcaps have been wintering in Britain. Interestingly, these are not birds that have bred here and simply chosen not to migrate south for the winter, they are birds from Europe that have migrated west to take advantage of our milder, maritime winter weather.



On 15th February I was pleased to see a tawny owl perched in a roadside tree along the Clint Road as I drove along after dark. Although quite a common bird, the strictly nocturnal habits of the tawny owl mean that although we hear them often enough we rarely see them.

In March, listen out for increasing amounts of bird song as many of our garden birds really set about establishing their

territories and start nesting. Winter flocks will begin to disband and migrants will be on the move as wintering birds head back north and the first of our summer visitors arrive.



I'm hoping that the golden plovers that I mentioned last month will still be around as they'll be moulting into their impressive summer plumage (gold above and black and white beneath) and I shall look forward to hearing the first chiffchaff of the spring, the true harbinger of the season.

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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