

## Thorndon Birdlife, June 2014



On 3rd May I took a walk along one of the tributaries of the River Dove and heard the distinctive scratchy, chuntering song of a reed warbler. These birds are not easy to see because they favour areas of dense reed growth and they sing whilst perched about halfway up a reed stem. However, with a little patience, they usually show themselves as they move around their territory, either in flight over the reeds or when they come to reeds at the water's edge. There were certainly two males singing there and, eventually, I had good views of them.

A Reed warbler is one of the common host species for the cuckoo and although I didn't see or hear one in that area that day, the following day one was heard calling along the Thwaite Road. Another cuckoo was heard in the same area, briefly, about a fortnight later. It is possible that these two reports related to the same bird but it is also possible that two different individuals stopped off in a promising-looking area whilst on passage.

In May bird song reaches its peak and as well as the reed warblers on 3rd May I heard blackbird, robin and blackcap in song. I have also heard song thrushes singing their distinctive powerful and repetitive song in gardens along The Street and the High Street. The song thrush's song is characterised by repeated sets of notes, which almost make it sound as though they can't remember what comes next. A common one sounds as if the bird is repeating the question "Did he do it? Did he do it? Did he do it?", then answering with a surprised "He did do it! He did do it! He did do it!"



Also on 3rd May I was delighted to see a stunning male reed bunting. Like the reed warbler, the reed bunting breeds in reed beds and along reed-fringed rivers and the males of these sparrow-sized birds have a black head and a white collar. They have a white stripe that runs down the side of the neck from the base of the black bill and that white stripe separates the black head from the black chin, throat and upper breast. They really are very handsome birds and they have a very simple, but nonetheless distinctive song.



The swifts finally arrived on 9th May, about a week later than is typical. It may be that they were held up by adverse weather on their remarkable migration back from their southern African wintering grounds, but they're here now, feeding over the village with swallows and house martins, so it is possible to see all three species together and appreciate their different plumage and habits at the moment. Later in the summer the swifts will form their distinctive 'screaming parties' as groups race around the rooftops

in the village at improbable speed, making their characteristic screaming call, which is surely one of the most quintessential sounds of a summer's evening.



Another sound that conjures-up balmy spring and summer weather is the gentle purring song of the turtle dove and I was very pleased to hear of two along the High Street. Unlike the other members of the pigeon and dove family that are with us all year round, turtle doves migrate to sub-Saharan Africa for the winter and it's not that long ago that they were a common bird here in the summer. Sadly, turtle doves have undergone a massive population decline over the last forty years and they are getting ever harder to find, so, let's hope that they breed

here successfully this summer.

During June look out for more young birds as the breeding season reaches its peak. In addition to the blackbirds that I mentioned last month, I have seen juvenile starlings begging noisily for food from their parents in my garden (they love mealworms) and have watched a male great tit busily foraging and flying back to his perched youngsters with insects.

I am always pleased to receive reports of birds and other wildlife of interest in and around Thorndon, Rishangles, Hestley Green and Braiseworth and in June I would especially welcome reports of turtle doves and the last of our summer visitors to arrive, spotted flycatchers.

Stephen Dean