

Thorndon Birdlife, October 2014

We have now passed the autumn equinox and so, little by little, the days are getting shorter. As plant life begins to die back and deciduous trees shed their leaves, flying insects become less obvious and the migratory birds that feed on them have to head off for warmer climes. Trees and shrubs that produce berries and fruit are now coming into their own and they provide an important food source for other migratory birds that come here for the winter to escape the harsher conditions further north and east, such



Fieldfare

as fieldfares and redwings, as well as our resident birds, such as blackbirds, song thrushes and mistle thrushes.

October is a great time for mushrooms and toadstools as many species develop their fantastic fruiting bodies, which serve to distribute their spores. These fungi appear in a bewildering array of shapes and colours, filling our woods with their exotic forms and sometimes bright colours. If you can find a guided 'fungi forage' to go along to you'll find out more about the

fascinating lives of these bizarre organisms that science now places in a kingdom of their own: neither plant nor animal. Whilst I love to see the emergence of fungi in the autumn, my approach is always to admire them where they are and not interfere with them, i.e. to look but not touch.

Another thing that happens in the autumn is that some of our mammals hibernate. The best known example of this is the hedgehog and they need to be feeding voraciously during the autumn to build their weight up to the point where they can go into hibernation with enough fat reserves to see them through the winter. If you're lucky enough to have hedgehogs in your garden then try putting out some dog food, cat food or mealworms for them, as well as water for them to drink. Please don't put out bread and milk as this really isn't good for them.

I put out mealworms after dark and I have been treated to visits by at least two adult hedgehogs and one juvenile over the summer. Sadly, hedgehogs are nothing like as common as they used to be and this year the Suffolk Wildlife Trust is carrying out a survey to try to find out where they are. If you see one you can report it via their website: www.suffolkwildlifetrust.org/hedgehogs

I mentioned that I had 'dead-headed' the Buddleia in my garden in the hope that it would flower again later on in the autumn and attract more butterflies and I'm pleased to say that it has. Although the flowers are smaller, they have attracted mainly red admiral butterflies and on 6th September the second hummingbird hawk moth of the year.



Goldcrest

During the autumn many birds form mixed-species foraging flocks and I was pleased to receive a report of a mixed flock of great tits and long-tailed tits with a single goldcrest on 5th September. Birds will also be venturing from their home territories during the autumn in the search of new places to feed and possibly set up their own territory for next year and a report I received of a lone nuthatch in Braiseworth may well have been such a wandering individual.

As I've said before, common buzzards are seen much more often in Suffolk than was the case twenty or so years ago and there have been five together a couple of times recently over Thwaite Road. These may well be birds that have bred locally.

If you've not been feeding your garden birds over the summer then October is the time to start doing so. Don't be too surprised if it's a bit quiet to start with because while the weather is good and there's plenty of food in the wider countryside birds won't necessarily come in to our gardens in search of a meal. October is also the time to clean out any nest boxes that you have in your garden in order to get rid of any parasites that might be living in them. This will make them better places for birds to roost in over the winter if the weather gets cold.

Finally, if you're having a bonfire party in November, please make sure that there isn't a hedgehog trying to hibernate in your bonfire. They do like to hibernate in log piles and piles of brushwood and many get caught out mistaking a bonfire for just such a suitable hibernaculum.

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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