

## Thorndon Birdlife, July and August 2014

As we pass the Summer Solstice the day length begins to shorten, a change in Nature's cycle that is detected by all living things. With the breeding season coming to a close during July and August you will notice less birdsong and more juvenile birds. Initially, many of our common birds are still dependent on their parents for food or protection after they have fledged and over the last few weeks I have seen blackbirds, starlings, blue tits, great tits and



Dunnock

dunnocks slowly learning the essentials of survival that they will need if they are to make it through their first winter.

As well as being differently marked from their parents, these youngsters are also a little clumsy when it comes to learning the knack of landing elegantly. Juvenile blue tits and great tits are paler than the adults, blackbirds are brown and blotchy, starlings are uniform greyish-brown and dunnocks are very heavily streaked.

I heard blackbird, wren, song thrush and blackcap all singing on 22nd June but as the summer progresses the chorus of bird song will diminish.

There seem to be two pairs of turtle doves along the High Street but I have not seen or heard any others elsewhere in and around the village. If you've got them near you I'd be delighted to hear.

I'm pretty sure I heard a spotted flycatcher calling along the High Street on 23rd June but I haven't yet seen one. They often arrive from their wintering grounds very late in the spring but they should be well and truly with us by now. Again, if you've got them in your garden I'd be very pleased to hear.



Painted Lady

On 31st May I was delighted to see my first painted lady butterfly of the year. It was feeding on valerian, which is a good food source for insects. Indeed, on 17th June I watched a hummingbird hawk moth and six small tortoiseshell butterflies on valerian. On the Gardeners' World television programme recently it was

said that

hummingbird hawk moths like honeysuckle, but I've never seen them hovering round honeysuckle flowers. In my garden they seem to prefer valerian and buddleia.

On 23rd June I found an insect that had me reaching for

my field guide. About an inch long, narrow bodied and with translucent wings with bold black spots, the most striking feature was the bright red tip of the abdomen, which was curled upwards rather like the tail of a scorpion. Perhaps not surprisingly, this turned out to be a male scorpion fly, which, despite its striking appearance, is completely harmless.



Hummingbird Hawk Moth



Male Scorpion Fly

I hope that we'll be treated to some more good summer weather and if we are please do take a little time to enjoy the swallows, house martins and swifts that are over and around the village at the moment. The swallows and house martins will be with us until September or even October, but the swifts will take their leave of us, usually in the first ten days of August, when they head back to Africa for the winter.

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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