

Thorndon Birdlife, February 2014

Having now left the winter solstice well and truly behind us the days are gradually getting longer and our birds respond to the lengthening days by starting to sing and display. Of course, the coldest winter weather can be in February but this won't deter those birds that breed early, such as the Mistle Thrush. Listen out for their wistful, short phrases, which always suggest to me a Blackbird that hasn't quite got into its stride. Mistle Thrushes like to sing from exposed perches such as tree tops, especially in breezy weather, which is where their old name 'storm cock' comes from.



Mistle Thrush



Collared Dove

On 12th January I heard Collared Dove and Woodpigeon singing and a Great Spotted Woodpecker drumming. The collared dove's simple song is a three-note phrase "Hoo-Hooo-Hoo, Hoo-Hooo-Hoo", repeated several times, with the emphasis on the middle note of each three-note phrase. The Woodpigeon's song is similar, but is deeper in tone and consists of five notes "Hoo-Hooo-Hoo-Hoo-Hoo" with the emphasis on the second note. If you listen carefully you will hear that most times it ends on the first note, almost as if it's been interrupted.

Great Spotted Woodpeckers don't have a song, instead their territorial proclamation is mechanical. They drum a short, rapid phrase on a tree branch or trunk. Pheasants have a combination of two loud notes that are uttered vocally, followed by rapid whirring of the wings, so their repertoire is part vocal and part mechanical. Both the drumming of the Great Spotted Woodpecker and the wing-whirring of the Pheasant carry a long way and are typical sounds of the early spring.



Great Spotted Woodpecker - female

I've seen more Blackbirds around the village since the start of the New Year and this may be because some of the winter visitors from the Continent are coming into gardens in search of food as supplies in the wider countryside diminish. We tend to think of Blackbirds as resident because we do see them all year round, but our truly resident population is swollen in the winter by many that fly here to escape the colder weather of northern and Eastern Europe.



Fieldfare

Another thrush that has been more evident of late is one that is only with us in the winter, the Fieldfare. These impressive birds are almost as big as Mistle thrushes and are similarly long-tailed, with a languid flight. They are very striking birds to look at with a grey head and rump, vinous-brown back and black tail. They have a yellow bill and very white underparts with dark chevrons and a pale brownish wash across the breast. I've recently seen them perched in bushes at Thorndon Hill and feeding on the ground in fields along Stoke Ash Road. Fieldfares breed in Scandinavia,

central and eastern Europe and Russia so those that we see in the winter have travelled a long way to reach the comparatively mild conditions here.



Golden Plover

The period between Christmas and New Year was enlivened on 29th December, when about 75 golden plover were in the fields between The Street and the High Street. They may well remain in our area for several more weeks so do look out for them. Golden plovers fly in tight flocks like many other waders and they feed in looser groups on the ground. In the winter they are essentially golden brown above and

whiter underneath and when you see them in flight they have an indistinct pale wing bar. On the ground

golden plovers are rather compact looking, with a proportionately small, rounded head, short black bill and shortish black legs and, because they don't have any prominent markings on the head, they have a rather open-faced, benign look. Golden plovers do breed in northern Britain but many of those that we see in the winter have come here from Iceland and Scandinavia.

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

Stephen Dean 678093.