

## Thorndon Birdlife, October 2016

It was interesting that even with remarkably high temperatures up to 15th September there were fewer flying insects around and I think that most of the swallows used that period of warm, clear weather to head off. Certainly, by 18th September the only ones that still seemed to be in the village were those with recently fledged young and I was delighted to receive a report of a pair rearing a second brood at one site in the village.



Field grasshopper

On the subject of insects, I was very pleased to see a field grasshopper in my garden on 30th August as we don't get many here and the following evening heard one stridulating, which is the perfect sound on a balmy evening.

On 3rd September I saw what I expect will be the last hummingbird hawk moth of the summer.



Hummingbird Hawk moth

There were four common buzzards enjoying the sunshine and the thermals over The Wash on 11th September, two of which were sparring with one another. Common buzzards are very variable in their plumage, from almost white to almost black, but most are brown, typically with a noticeable pale crescent across the breast. In flight, common buzzards soar on raised wings, which is very distinctive.

We have had some drama with 'our' hedgehog, which began when we started seeing it during the day; never a good sign. It was feeding and drinking well enough, and seemed pretty quick on its feet, but it did sound a bit wheezy. So, I 'phoned a vet friend of mine, who recommended lacing its food with some medication, which we did, but on 30th August we found it curled up on the pavement on the opposite side of the road (this one was identifiable by the dimple on its forehead) so I picked it up and put it back in our garden. Later in the day it was still in the same place, now in direct sunlight, and with a lot of flies' eggs on it (called 'fly-strike'). This was clearly serious and so I rang the hedgehog rescue service, who came out. Examination of the hedgehog showed it to be a female (fortunately not nursing young) and they thought that cleaning the flies' eggs off, getting her re-hydrated and giving her appropriate antibiotics and steroids would work. They took her away on the understanding that if she recovered we could go and pick her up and bring her back. Sadly, despite their best efforts, 'our' hedgehog didn't make it.

I've had another report of one found dead in a garden in the village and, more happily, two coming to cat food in another garden where one youngster has been seen. So, keep putting food and water out for them and do check any bonfire you have for Guy Fawkes' night before you light it because hedgehogs do have a habit of thinking that they make ideal places to hibernate



Turtle Dove

I was delighted to receive another report of turtle doves, a pair that spent the summer at Hestley Green. The fact that they summered suggests that they may have tried to breed. I certainly hope so because they are really struggling in the UK. This once common summer visitor struggles to find places to nest and food to eat in the British countryside, they then have to survive the rigours of migration, be able to survive the winter in Africa and then migrate back here. I hope that these ones make it back to purr again next spring.

I was also very pleased to hear of two female grass snakes that laid their eggs in a muck heap in a garden in the village and that in the ponds nearby there have been water voles.

One of the classic signs of autumn is the arrival of flocks of lapwings in the stubble fields. These have become less common in recent years and I was pleasantly surprised to see a flock of about 50 near Occold on 17th September. I hope that they will remain for the winter and be joined by others because they are really beautiful birds. On the ground their distinctive up-turned crest, white body, iridescent black upperparts and wings and buff-brown undertail are really striking and when they take flight their languid flight on broad, rounded, black and white wings is a joy to see.



Lapwing

October is the month to clean out your nesting boxes and do make sure you keep your bird feeders and bird baths clean. There is no need to use anything other than warm, soapy water and a bottle brush, and keeping these things clean really helps to prevent the spread of nasty diseases to your garden birds.

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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