

Thorndon Birdlife, March 2016

Having just had the coldest night of the winter so far, the snowdrops and hazel catkins have looked very typical of this time of year and we can now look forward to March, which is the first month in the birding spring. We should start to hear more birdsong as birds get on with the all important business of nesting and rearing their young, so make sure your nest boxes are up and ready to receive occupants

The fact that we've had such a mild winter has meant not only that there has already been a good display of primroses and even some daffodils in flower, but that we've seen far fewer of the usual winter visitors, with very small numbers of fieldfares, for example, in their favoured localities. During March the exodus of winter visitors to their breeding grounds in the North and the East will be happening in earnest and so it is quite possible that we'll see fieldfares, redwings, bramblings and maybe even golden plovers, as they stop off on their way through.

I was very pleased to receive a report of a mistle thrush feeding on fallen apples in a garden along The Street and to hear that they've been heard singing nearby, in Occold. Also feeding on fallen apples along Stoke Road was a fine male green woodpecker that a resident sent me photos of. Although green woodpeckers are often to be found feeding on the ground - they're very partial to ants, which they catch with their astonishingly long tongue - I don't think I've ever seen one feeding on fallen fruit so this was a very interesting observation.

I've been seeing barn owls quite a bit recently near Rishangles, which is encouraging, and I was very pleased to hear of one being seen to the south of The Street, heading in the direction of Stanwell Green.

Last month I mentioned a white pheasant that had been seen along the Thwaite Road. It's been seen again and it has red skin around the eye and so it is a male and is not a true albino. Remarkably, I've received a report of another all-white pheasant, this one a female, in Occold.

Usually in March we can expect to hear the first chiffchaffs of the spring as they return from their wintering grounds to the areas around the village with taller trees. Another of the early summer visitors is the blackcap and I really look forward to hearing their wonderful loud song, with its almost explosive mix of sweet notes and scratchy phrases.

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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