

Thorndon Birdlife, May 2017

For much of April our weather was firmly influenced by high pressure and the clockwise circulation of air around these systems means that if they are right over the country, so that we are on the eastern flank, we get a northerly airflow. This affects the migration of our summer visitors because they are battling a headwind to get here from Europe. This has the effect of slowing down the arrival of our summer visitors and delaying the departure of our winter visitors. Once the high pressure slips to the east, so that we are on the western flank, the warmer southerly airflow opens the proverbial floodgates and our summer visitors are able to get here much more easily.

I often see my first swallow of the summer in our part of Suffolk along the road between Rishangles and Thorndon Hill and this year the first one I saw was on the roadside wires at Rishangles on 9th April. There is something about seeing the first swallow of the year that really gladdens the heart; it is like seeing a long-absent friend. Seeing this bird, perched on a wire, I marvelled at all that it had gone through to migrate to Africa last autumn, survive the winter and then fly all the way back. Astonishing!

On 1st April I was surprised to see a grey wagtail at the water treatment works on the Clint Road because these birds are mainly winter visitors to Suffolk. As a breeding bird they prefer fast-flowing streams and rivers and are much more a bird of the west and north of the British Isles, although a few pairs do breed in Suffolk. Although grey on the head and the back, it is the bright yellow underparts that are their most arresting feature and they have a much longer tail than the aptly named yellow wagtail.

The same day I saw a flock of at least 51 fieldfares feeding in a field along the Clint Road. They looked absolutely beautiful in their bright summer colours and will no doubt have been feeding up in preparation for the long migration to their breeding grounds somewhere in central or northern Europe.

On 8th April I saw a group of large gulls along the Clint Road, which included 10 adult lesser black-backed and two adult herring gulls and also two younger lesser black-backs. Although it requires a little effort, it is possible to work out the approximate age of the large gulls and these two immature birds were in their second calendar year.

The same day I saw my first male orange-tip butterfly and dark-edged bee-fly of the spring. The bee-fly was hovering around some forget-me-nots and probing their flowers with its long proboscis.

On 18th April I was delighted to receive a report of a turtle dove at Hestley Green. These once common summer visitors are now very scarce and I hope that this one's mate will not be far behind and that they will remain to breed here. The purring song of the turtle dove is one of the loveliest sounds of the English summer.

By the end of April we should see our first house martins of the summer, followed shortly after by the first swifts, usually in the first week of May. By the end of May I hope that our first spotted flycatchers will have returned (although they often don't arrive until June).

The breeding season will be in full swing so look out for birds nesting in your garden and do keep putting food and water out for them.

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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