

Thorndon Birdlife, November 2017

In the very mild, sunny weather on 14th October there were red admiral and large white butterflies on the wing, but by the time you read this the clocks will have gone back to Greenwich Mean Time and we'll be in the last month of the birding autumn when one of the things to listen out for after dark is the thin "seep" call of redwings as they fly over.

These winter visiting thrushes have already been seen along the coast, having crossed the North Sea from Scandinavia, and as they move inland we should start to see them on feeding on berry-bearing bushes and on fallen fruit. Redwings are about the size of a song thrush but a little darker brown on the head and back, with whitish underparts with dark streaks, but their most striking feature is the prominent white stripe that runs above the eye across the otherwise dark head (called the supercilium). When you see a redwing perched you can see that the reddish colour under the wings (from which the bird gets its name) extends on to the flanks. It is quite common to see redwings in flocks, when their fast, direct flight is very obvious.

This is the time of year when it is vitally important for hedgehogs to feed-up in order to put on weight to see them through their hibernation and I was very interested to hear from a reader who drew my attention to an article in the British Hedgehog Preservation Society newsletter about mealworms. The issue that arises when they eat too many mealworms is that mealworms have a high concentration of phosphorous, which can deplete the hedgehog's calcium levels, which may cause weakness in their bones. In the same way that we can sometimes be very partial to foods that are not very good for us, hedgehogs enjoy mealworms and what needs to be avoided is hedgehogs becoming reliant on them to the exclusion of other food.

There are other hedgehog foods that can be bought, in addition to which they are keen on dog food, cat food and cat biscuits (chicken, rabbit and turkey being the easiest for them to digest, apparently). So, hedgehogs should only have small quantities of mealworms and if you can provide them with a bit of variety that will help them to put on the necessary weight. Do remember, too, to provide them with a bowl of clean drinking water.

I was very pleased to hear of two nuthatches being seen along the Thwaite Road and these may be the same ones that have been coming to feeders in a garden not far from there. These attractive, stocky, short-tailed birds have quite a long, pointed black bill and are a delicate grey-blue colour on the head and upperparts, which contrasts with their whitish underparts, black eye-stripe and rufous-brown under the tail.

Nuthatches will often consort with other small birds in roving feeding flocks in the winter and so it is not unusual to see them with blue tits, great tits, coal tits, long-tailed tits and even goldcrests and treecreepers. Nuthatches can be quite dominant

at garden feeding stations, seeing other birds off from feeders containing peanuts and sunflower seeds.

If you haven't already done so, November is the month to clean out any nest boxes that you have up in your garden. As the days continue to shorten, small birds such as tits and wrens will use them to roost in.

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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