

Thorndon Birdlife, September 2017

As I write, the wheat field behind my house has been harvested and baled and as we head towards the autumn equinox the light is taking on a very autumnal feel. The shortening days and cooling temperature will prompt our summer visitors to head off south to warmer climes.

From the beginning of August I keep an eye out for swifts as they are the first of our summer visitors to depart and by the time you read this they will be well on their way to their wintering grounds in tropical Africa. I knew they were gearing up to head off when there was a screaming party over The Street on 7th July, there were still a few around on 5th August and the last ones I saw were two on 11th.

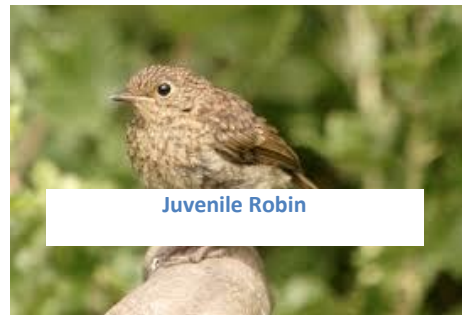


Spotted Flycatcher

I was very pleased to hear of a family of spotted flycatchers being seen near the Church, others in a garden on the north side of The Street and I was delighted to see one myself at Pond Farm on 2nd July.

On 23rd June I saw an adult dunnock with three young in my garden and on 2nd July I saw an adult robin carrying food, so it was obvious that they had young nearby and on 15th I saw a juvenile. Whereas juvenile dunnocks are like heavily streaked versions of the adult, juvenile robins are very different, with speckled markings on the head, back and breast.

Sometimes the most common birds can surprise you and on 8th July I heard a woodpigeon uttering a rather different song. Normally, their song comprises five notes, the second of which is emphasized: "two beers please, my man; two beers please, my man" and so on, and the song tends to end on the 'first' note, making it sound as though the bird has been interrupted. The one on 8th July was singing six-note phrases: "two beers, two beers, my man; two beers, two beers, my man" and was



Juvenile Robin

doing so very consistently. Might he have impressed the ladies with his novel rendition of an old tune, I wonder?

The pair of blackbirds in my garden had a second brood from the same nest (they may have had three broods in total). It was interesting to see the difference in behaviour between the male and the female as the male would fly straight to the nest with food for the young but the female was much more circumspect, not flying in to the nest until she was satisfied that I was out of her line of sight. The young fledged on 10th August, when one of the juveniles was perched on a window sill, no doubt trying to make sense of the hard, transparent surface that reflected the shrubs behind it.



Chiff Chaff

I don't often see chiffchaffs in my part of the village because there aren't that many tall trees nearby and so the adult that was at the bird bath in my garden on 13th August may have been a migrant. Wherever it came from, it was a very welcome sight.

I'm no botanist, but I was intrigued by the profusion of purple flowers along the roadsides this summer. I took a detailed look at some at Rishangles on 6th August and was able to identify them as great willowherb, which has the charming old name of "codlins and cream".

On the non-birding front I was very pleased to receive a report of a grass snake at a site near the Church where they've been seen before and I've been feeding a regular hedgehog in my garden (there were two on 21st July).

It's not been a great summer for butterflies, but I did see small tortoiseshell, red admiral, large white and meadow brown on 2nd July, peacock on 8th July, painted lady on 8th and 9th July and gatekeeper on 16th July. It has been pretty good for hummingbird hawk moths, however, and I saw singles on 2nd and 20th July and 13th August and two together on 8th July. Like the painted lady butterfly, these insects

are migrants from the Mediterranean and North Africa. I've seen only one southern hawker dragonfly in my garden so far, on 7th August, but if we have some settled weather in September there may be others. Look out for them quartering your garden and if you see one and stand still it may fly up to you to have a good look. They look quite formidable but are completely harmless.



Southern Hawker Dragonfly

September is the first month of the birding autumn; there are a lot of birds on the move and almost anything can turn up. Do enjoy the house martins and swallows; they will be with us for a little while yet, but I've already seen them gathering on overhead wires, so they're thinking about heading south over the next few weeks.

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

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