

## Thorndon Birdlife, November 2018

As I write, the very mild weather that we have had right up until the third week of October is about to come to an end, with much cooler conditions about to blow in from the North. There have already been redwings seen along the coast so I expect that they will be with us soon. Like many birds, redwings migrate at night so listen out for their "seep" calls as they fly over after dark.

I was very pleased to receive a report of golden plovers in the fields between Thorndon and Wetheringsett, but when I went to look for them I couldn't find them. This is not unusual because golden plovers can be quite skittish and they don't have to fly very far to find a field where they can't be seen from the road. I shall keep an eye out and I hope to see them in the coming weeks.

After the lapwings along High Lane at the end of August, I saw another 20 or so, and several skylarks, in fields near Brockford Street on 20th October.

I saw an unusual insect on 7th October that I knew I hadn't seen before. I found it on a window frame at home and, having read about it, I suspect that it was looking for somewhere to hole-up for the winter. I knew it was some sort of shield bug, but it was much larger than the usual green-coloured hawthorn shield bug that I see quite often, with a leg span as big as a 50p piece (which I placed alongside it for scale). I caught it in a pot and put it outside and it wasn't in a hurry to go anywhere, so I was able to get some photos in order to try to identify it.

This insect was spectacularly marked, with long legs and antennae. Essentially chocolate brown, it had a pointed head with copper-coloured eyes, two dark, diffuse triangles on its 'shoulders' and black triangles and brown, white-bordered, diamonds on its wings. The sides of its body and its hind legs were brown-and-white striped. Also, on both of its hind legs was a paddle-shaped swelling.

This super looking creature rejoices in the scientific name *Leptoglossus occidentalis*, the Western conifer seed bug, and is native to North America, west of the Rocky Mountains. Clearly not a native species, this bug was probably brought to Europe in a shipment of timber and was first recorded in Britain in 2007, in Dorset.

I've had good views of common buzzards recently and I saw one on the ground when I was looking for the golden plovers. I was told about another one on the ground that was feeding on a dead rabbit. The person who saw it was quite surprised at its large size, so it may have been a female (female birds of prey and owls are bigger than males). The buzzard flew off, but it won't have gone far as a rabbit is too good a meal to give up.

As I've said before, I'm no botanist, but I was curious about the identity of lots of white flowers that have popped up in the stubble field to the south of The Street and on the roadside verges along the A140. I thought they might be Michelmas daisies, but they are in fact another member of the Aster family of plants, scentless mayweed.

The tawny owls have started their "Tu-whit" (female) "Tu-woo" (male) duet so listen out for this atmospheric sound after dark in November anywhere where there are tall trees.

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