

Thorndon Birdlife, October 2018

As I write we have passed the autumn equinox and we are in another spell of settled high pressure. Of course, by this time of year, although this can mean lovely warm days the clear skies make for cold nights as all the heat evaporates. This is one of the changes that triggers the urge in our summer visitors to pack their metaphorical bags and head south. A couple of weeks ago, in somewhat cooler and more blustery conditions, there were lots of swallows and house martins hawking for insects over the stubble to the south of The Street, and they will almost all have gone by the end of October.

One of the sure signs of the onset of autumn used to be large flocks of lapwings in our fields, but in recent years I've not seen more than 50 together. I was delighted, therefore, to receive a report of about 200 along High Lane, and I went to have a look. The finder's estimate was very accurate because the first time I counted them I got to 192 and they took off on my second count, as I had worked my way to the edge of the flock, and had got to 202.

30 years ago, in my misspent youth watching birds in the Gipping Valley, the first lapwings of the 'autumn' used to appear in June (presumably reasonably local breeding birds) and the numbers would build to a peak in mid-August before they dispersed into arable land for the winter. So it was a real pleasure to see so many again and it will be interesting to see whether they stick around and whether they are joined by golden plovers.

Since my last piece I have received further reports of two red kites and I saw one of the two that were seen over The Street on 28th August. The one I saw was soaring quite high and there was a common buzzard soaring even higher, which made for a nice direct comparison of their shapes.

I thought that the long hot summer would have been very good for butterflies, but I didn't see the big numbers that I have seen in previous years. The range of species was also fairly typical. I was pleased, therefore, to receive a belated report of two brimstone butterflies at Braiseworth. These are often one of the first butterflies to be on the wing in the spring and there are relatively few on the wing by high summer as this species has only one brood, so this is an interesting sighting.

I've seen plenty of herring gulls and lesser black-backed gulls on recently ploughed fields and on 22nd September I saw a nice mixed flock of black-headed and common gulls.

In October the last of our summer visitors will depart and we can expect to see redwings, fieldfares and goldcrests arriving from the north and east.

Enjoy the autumn colours as the leaves on the deciduous trees turn and look out for colourful and varied fungi.

The hedgehog in my garden is still coming every night for hedgehog food and mealworms and I have heard of others being seen elsewhere along The Street, where the lucky creatures get cat food. I created a log pile several years ago and I hope that it where 'my' hedgehog will hibernate. In the meantime I shall keep putting out food and water for it.

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

Stephen Dean 678093