

Thorndon Birdlife, September 2018

Having got used to hot, sunny and settled conditions over the summer, autumn is now well and truly with us and we seem to be back into more typical, predominantly westerly weather.

I finally saw my first hummingbird hawkmoth of the summer on 7th July, but I've only seen one other individual so far. They really seem to like the multi-headed Valerian flowers. I have also received a report of one other individual, in a garden along The Street, which was the first one the observer had seen. These insects are a real treat and they really do look like tiny hummingbirds, with their long proboscis looking like a down-curved bill. They have quite a broad abdomen, with characteristic black and white markings and the orange on the inner wing can be seen even when the wings are a blur. It is amazing to think that they fly here from the Mediterranean and North Africa.

Other moths that I have seen included a male vapourer on 1st July, a riband wave on 3rd July and a common footman in the middle of August. Flicking through any field guide to moths shows what a great variety we have and also what wonderful - often literally descriptive - names they have.

I was delighted to receive a report of two oystercatchers flying over Briswell Green, which the observer located from their distinctive "kleep-kleep" flight call. I've never seen one in our area but I was astonished, shortly after this report, to hear that they had bred successfully last year, near Eye, so I shall keep my eyes peeled.

I haven't seen another red kite since the flush of sightings in June, but I did receive a call about another one seen not far from here. It will be interesting to see if they spread to colonise our part of the country.

I know that skylarks have bred successfully somewhere on the east side of the village this year because one resident brought me a recently-fledged juvenile that her cat had brought in. Adult skylarks have narrow white tips to the inner wing feathers, which give them a characteristic white trailing edge and I was interested to see that this juvenile hadn't yet acquired these. What was also remarkable was the impressive length of the hind claws. Other ground-dwelling birds, such as the meadow pipit, have long hind claws, whereas those that live in trees (such as the tree pipit) have much shorter hind claws.

In the hot weather I saw plenty of peacock and large white butterflies, but not many red admirals. I've seen a holly blue in the last week and in early August there were a few gatekeepers on the wing.

Today, 23rd August, there were quite a lot of lesser black-backed and black-headed gulls on a newly tilled field between Thorndon and Thwaite and these mixed-species flocks of gulls are quite a feature of the autumn. I hope to have a chance to look through some of these flocks in the coming weeks to see which other species I can find.

By the time you read this 'our' swifts will be back in the skies over the Congo. I last saw the ones that were breeding in my part of the village on 1st August and I haven't seen one here since 4th August.

I am very pleased to report that the hedgehog has become a nightly visitor to my garden. I am putting out hedgehog food (with a few mealworms) for it and it seems to be doing well. I also make sure that there is a dish of water for it to drink.

There is a tremendous amount of bird migration going on in September and, especially if the wind is in the east or the south-east, anything can turn up. One of the most obvious signs that birds are preparing for their migration is when swallows and house martins gather on overhead wires, so do take a few moments to enjoy that spectacle because by the end of September most of them will have left for their wintering grounds in Africa.

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

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