

Thorndon Birdlife, April 2018

The very cold and snowy weather that we had at the end of February and the beginning of March was remarkable in its severity and its extent. Conditions like that are very difficult for birds as they struggle to find food and have to spend most of their time doing just that in order to stay alive.

I had wonderful views of a redwing and three fieldfares in my garden as well as about 20 starlings, several blackbirds and one song thrush, feeding on mealworms and apples that I put out. The quality of the light in the afternoon of 28th February, with the low sun reflecting off the snow, was astonishing and the flock of about 20 goldfinches and a couple of greenfinches that I saw along The Street looked absolutely radiant.

After an improvement in the weather, we were then plunged back into very cold conditions over the weekend of 17th/18th March, when the "lazy" Suffolk wind from the East was much in evidence; you know, the one that doesn't bother to go around you but just blows right through you, chilling you to the bone.

By the Spring Equinox, however, things had improved and I received a report of a willow warbler in bushes along the River Dove. The willow warbler is very similar to the chiffchaff but is brighter green, yellower on the face and has pale legs and doesn't dip its tail habitually. It's not that long ago that the willow warbler was a common breeding bird in Suffolk, but like a number of species - including spotted flycatcher and cuckoo - it seems to be shifting its breeding range further north and west. It is still an abundant bird in northern Europe and we still get them passing through on passage when they return from their Winter quarters in sub-Saharan Africa. Unlike the chiffchaff's onomatopoeic refrain, the willow warbler's song is a beautiful descending series of short whistles with a terminal flourish.

I was very pleased to receive several reports of barn owls, around the 'set-aside' and between Thorndon and Stoke Ash. It is not unusual to see barn owls on the wing during the day, especially if they're struggling to find enough food or when they have young to feed.

April sees a great change in our birdlife as our winter visitors, such as redwings and fieldfares, gear themselves up to depart for their breeding grounds in the North and the East and our summer visitors arrive from warmer climes. By the end of the month we should see our swallows and house martins and, I hope, hear the purring of turtle dove.

There is a wonderful display of daffodils and primroses at the moment, trees and shrubs are coming into bud, common gulls are passing through on passage and the amount of bird song is increasing. I've heard chaffinch and blue tit in the last few days and as the summer visitors' songs add to those of the resident species, the dawn chorus will be heading towards its peak in early May.

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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