

Thorndon Birdlife, February 2018

February is the last month of the ornithological winter and it can be the harshest, but the first signs of spring will be in the early wildflowers. This year there has been a lot of talk of spring flowers emerging very early, despite the cold and snowy weather we have had at times, and on 13th January I saw a profusion of hazel catkins, which I don't normally expect to see before February. I look forward to seeing the snowdrops and sweet violets.

It was just as the snow started on 10th December that I had a lovely view of a fox, out in the open, in the middle of a field in broad daylight. It stopped to have a look at me and then trotted off.

You will have noticed a lot of blackbirds around and one villager contacted me to say that he'd seen about 60 in his garden, feeding on windfall apples. Perhaps surprisingly, a lot of these birds come here from a long way away, to escape the much colder conditions in eastern and northern Europe. A graphic illustration of this was a fine adult male blackbird that was picked up dead, not far away from here, in Bungay, which had been ringed in Finland.



It's remarkable that when you see such a familiar bird that it may have undergone a gruelling journey to spend the winter in your garden.

Another thrush that I've seen a couple of times recently at Stanwell Green is the mistle thrush and these are amongst the first birds to nest in the spring, and they start singing in February, so listen out for their wistful song on breezy days this month. Their habit of singing on windy days is what earned them the old name of 'storm cock'.

I was also pleased to see a flock of about 50 fieldfares at Thorndon Hill on 21st January and these birds will be with us throughout February and won't head back to their breeding grounds until March or April.



Also several times recently I've seen a common buzzard on the ground early in the morning in what must be its favoured spot. These birds don't roost on the ground and so I assume it's coming down early in the day to forage for earthworms and other invertebrates. Although buzzards are quite capable of catching a wide variety of prey - reptiles, amphibians, mammals and birds - they will also eat carrion and invertebrates. Perhaps it is being something of a generalist that has helped them to become so successful.



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

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