

Thorndon Birdlife, July and August 2018

The weather during June has been dry, sunny and at times hot and there's been plenty going on around the village in terms of birds and other wildlife.

The blue tits that were nesting in my roof fledged when I wasn't around to see them go, so I don't know how many young they had, which is a pity. It was, nonetheless, quite inspiring to see how devoted and industrious the adults were, and very reassuring to see that they were able to gather plenty of food without having to go too far.

I haven't seen that many butterflies yet, but with the Buddleia in my garden just starting to come into flower, I hope for more. I've seen a few small tortoiseshell, one peacock and, on 3rd June, a painted lady, which is a remarkable migrant from North Africa. I also watched a female orange-tip at rest and the green marbling on the underwings and the white-tipped antennae were very striking.

Although I'm no botanist, I was very pleased to receive a report of bee orchids growing in the village. The person who had found the plants sent me some images, from which I was able to confirm the identification. The centre of the flower resembles a bumblebee (albeit a purple and yellow one) and, although it is one of the more common and widespread orchid species, it's a beautiful flower.

With the influence of very warm air from the Continent, I'm surprised that I've not yet seen a hummingbird hawk moth, but there's plenty of time yet. I was delighted to receive a report (with photos) of two privet hawk moths together in a garden along The Street on 22nd June and, from the same location, a fine looking grass snake that was causing consternation amongst the young frogs in a garden pond.

The most surprising thing on the bird front in June has been red kites. As I reported last month the one I saw on 19th May was only the third one I'd seen in the village, so I was astonished to see four together, soaring and drifting slowly east, over The Street on 1st June. I saw another on 15th June and received a report of single birds seen over Thwaite Road on 7th and 9th June. Quite how many individuals have been around is hard to say, and quite what they are doing here at this time of the year is something of a mystery. Nonetheless, red kite is, without doubt, one of the most handsome of all British birds of prey.

I received a report of a juvenile great spotted woodpecker in a garden along the Stoke Ash Road, so they've obviously bred successfully there, and another of an adult that was found dead. That bird had been ringed and was ten years old, which is a good age for a great spotted woodpecker.

I was very pleased to receive reports of spotted flycatchers at three locations in Thorndon. At one site they were on their second clutch on 17th June and I watched the male bringing food to the nest. I presume he was feeding the incubating female as his visits were very quick and I didn't see him leave with faecal sacs.

Having mentioned my little owl sighting last month, I have received reports of them being seen at three other locations around the village, which is very heartening. I was surprised by the ones

featured on the Springwatch television programme catching prey as large as fledged blackbirds, as they typically catch much smaller prey such as earthworms, small mammals and insects.

I was relieved to see a very healthy looking hedgehog in my garden on 10th June, but that's the only one I've seen so far this summer.

During June I found a beetle that I wasn't familiar with. It was the same shape as the red soldier beetle (the one we used to call bloodsuckers when I was a child (they are in fact completely harmless)), but was bigger and its wing cases (the elytra) were black. A quick reference to my field guides quickly enabled me to identify it as a common sailor beetle.

During July and August we should continue to see young birds as the bird breeding season comes to an end and we'll start to see birds occurring as part of the post breeding season dispersal. Look out for young goldfinches, which look just like the adults but without the black crown and nape and the red face. Look out, too, for gulls beginning to gather on stubble fields.

Enjoy the 'screaming parties' of swifts as they career around the village rooftops in the evenings because they'll be off to Africa by the middle of August, and the spotted flycatchers won't be far behind.

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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