

Thorndon Birdlife, June 2018

The early May Bank Holiday was spectacularly cloudless and on 5th I was pleased to see orange-tip, large white and holly blue butterflies on the wing, and it became clear that a pair of blue tits had set up home in a cavity behind the soffit boards in my house. As I write, 24th May, they are still bringing food in for their chicks, at a rate of 84 visits an hour. I can hear the chicks calling when the adults arrive with food and it has been astonishing to see just how tireless they are in providing for their young. They must be close to fledging and I am hoping to witness their first flight as I don't know how many there are in the nest.

The great tits that were trying to fill one resident's mail box with moss have moved to a nearby insect box and have young in the nest, so I hope they'll be successful.

Also nesting in the garden are chaffinches, blackbirds and dunnocks and I've no doubt that the largely good weather we have had will be helping them.

I was very pleased to receive a report of a male blackcap at the set-aside and I heard one singing at the Fen on 5th May, where I also heard green woodpecker and two wrens, and had lovely views of a male whitethroat that was singing and song-flighting.

On 7th May I saw my first swift of the spring, hawking for insects high above a group of house martins over The Street. Later in the day I saw another two swifts and received a report from elsewhere in the village and so I expect that there will have been a wider arrival in the clear sunny weather that day.

Interestingly, the swifts that nest in my part of the village didn't arrive until 19th; it's great to see them back, going to their nests underneath the roof tiles of a nearby house, knowing that they have been on the wing, continuously, since leaving us last August. They are truly remarkable birds.

Also on 7th May I saw white-tailed bumblebee and a female red-tailed bumblebee and heard a male blackbird repeating some notes in his song in a way that suggested a song thrush. Normally, the common thrushes' songs can be told apart by remembering that the mistle thrush repeats entire phrases, song thrushes repeat individual notes and blackbirds don't repeat anything, so hearing a blackbird doing this was quite surprising.

I was delighted to receive a report of a cuckoo singing at the Fen and I went to have a listen the same evening, but didn't hear or see it, so it may have been passing through. I did, however, hear two green woodpeckers, had a great view of a barn owl and saw the male whitethroat again.

On 19th May I saw my first damselfly of the spring, a male common blue, and had a prolonged view of a red kite as it drifted slowly north over The Street (only the third one I've seen in and around Thorndon).

Having seen few little owls in the last couple of years I was thrilled to see one at The Wash on 20th May, when I also had a lovely view of a barn owl at Rishangles. The same day I watched two common buzzards soaring over The Street and two pairs of red-legged partridges, which look absolutely splendid at this time of year.

I had a graphic illustration of just how acute birds' vision is on 20th May when a female blackbird I was watching tilted her head to one side, as if looking either up or down. She was perched on the top of a fence and I guessed that she was looking up, so I looked in the direction that she was and very high up in the air was a sparrowhawk. With the unaided eye it was just a speck, but I could identify it through my binoculars. I've seen other birds do this before and it's often the first clue you have that a bird of prey is in the area.

As well as the house martins and swifts, it has been great to see swallows and, again on 20th May, I watched a pair perched on an overhead wire on The Street. Seeing the two birds side by side, the longer outer tail feathers of the

male were obvious. He also had a subtle pinkish wash to his underparts and his undertail coverts (the feathers at the very rear of the underparts, under the tail) were bright red. He looked very smart.

I hope that in June we'll see spotted flycatchers and turtle doves back in the village (I've not seen either yet) and there will still be plenty of bird song to enjoy as the breeding season reaches its climax.

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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