

Thorndon Birdlife, February 2019

We finally seem to be experiencing some cold and frosty winter weather, albeit intermittently, and the clear skies on the night of 20th/21st January promised a good view of the total lunar eclipse. Totality was predicted for 5.12am and I set the alarm early in the hope that the sky would still be clear. Fortunately, it was, and I enjoyed a good view through binoculars before some high cloud rolled in and obscured it.

I had a nice view of a small group of fieldfares on Christmas Day near the junction of Clint Road and the B1077 and I was quite surprised that the grey rump of one of the birds really caught the low sun momentarily and looked almost white. I've never seen this on a fieldfare before but it's not unusual for shiny plumage, even the black plumage of crows, to look very pale when the sun catches it.

A week later, on New Year's Day, I had a lovely view of a barn owl hunting near the Fen. It's great that the numbers of these beautiful birds have been helped by the provision of hundreds of nesting boxes around the county. Fortunately, they take to these quite readily as there are fewer old trees with holes in and many old buildings have been renovated, so many of their traditional nesting sites have been lost.

Also on New Year's day I had prolonged views of a goldcrest, its presence betrayed by its distinctive, high-pitched call. Small birds - and the goldcrest is Europe's smallest - keep in touch with one another with repeated 'contact' calls and one goldcrest in a small bush soon became three. Watching them moving around quite rapidly, in a constant search for food, they were completely oblivious to me watching them. From time to time one would be facing me and I could see the yellow crown from which the bird gets its name.

I've seen mallards perched on rooftops in Thorndon in the past but the sight of a grey heron perched on a rooftop of a house on The Street on 4th January seemed rather incongruous. I suspect it was keeping an eye open for any potential food without having to expend any energy. Eventually, it flew from one rooftop to another, but I've not seen it since. Like a lot of birds that forage in fresh water, herons do suffer in prolonged periods of freezing weather and will often head to the coast, where they are quite at home in creeks and estuaries.

As we look towards the spring by the end of February, we'll have to hope that we don't get a repeat of last year's big freeze at the end of February and the beginning of March. The first spring flowers will emerge and I have noticed in the last week or so that the hazel trees are festooned with catkins.

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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