

Thorndon Birdlife, June 2019

The thing about the spring is that you never know what's going to turn up and on 30th April I received a report of a curlew in a field along the Wetheringsett Road. I'd never seen a curlew in this part of Suffolk (I did see one flying high, heading up the Gipping valley near Sproughton, many years ago) and I was really intrigued, as this would be an unusual record in our area. I went to look for it that evening and scoured the fields in the area where it had been seen very thoroughly, but I didn't see it. I assumed it had moved on, as is so often the way with birds in the spring that need to get to their breeding grounds. The person who found the bird did manage to get a couple of photos of it on his 'phone and, although they weren't pin sharp, I couldn't detect the dark stripe through the eye and the dark stripe at the side of the crown that separate the curlew from the rather smaller whimbrel, so I was happy that it was a curlew. I thought that was that, but then, on 3rd May, I received a report of a whimbrel at the same location. Now, whimbrels do pass through Suffolk in the spring, on their way to the northernmost parts of Britain and Scandinavia where they breed, and I did one spring see a small party of these birds flying over Redgrave and Lopham Fen when I was leading a dawn chorus walk there. I went and searched the area again that day and the next day, but didn't see the bird. Oh well, you can't win them all.

At the beginning of May I was keeping a lookout for the return of 'our' swifts and I received a report of three over the village on 8th. I kept looking and finally saw my first one of the year in Thorndon over The Street, on 12th. This bird careered straight into its nest site in a roof they have nested in for many years. It is truly astonishing to think that this bird had been on the wing since last August, had flown all the way to Africa, where it had spent the winter, before flying back to Thorndon and straight into its nest. I've seen three together over my part of the village since, so I hope that its mate has survived as well and that they will breed successfully. For me, swifts are the very essence of summer.

Other birds are busy raising their young and I have seen blue tits feeding their fledged young on caterpillars in the oak tree that overhangs my garden.

I've had two different male blackbirds coming down to gather meal worms that I've been putting out and flying off with them to feed their young in nests nearby.

Once young birds fledge they follow the adults and wait to be fed, opening their bill and shivering their wings to stimulate the adult to feed them. Many smaller birds do this and I had wondered at what point the urge to be fed gets taken over by the young bird having learnt to fend for itself. Watching the adult male blackbird and the juvenile I saw behaviour that suggested that the youngster had realized what to do, but was still quite happy to be fed, because when the male's back was turned and he was gathering meal worms to feed to the youngster, the young bird would pick up items for itself. Then, when the male turned to feed the juvenile it immediately opened its bill and shivered its wings. Eventually, of course, the adults stop feeding the juveniles and they have to find their own food and it won't be long

before this juvenile blackbird realizes that no matter how much it begs for food the adults will ignore it - and probably drive it away from their territory - as they get on with raising their next family.

On 4th May, although I didn't see the elusive wader, I did have a wonderful view of a male bullfinch in a thick hedge along the Wetheringsett Road and then another flew along in front of the car as I drove up Thwaite Road. Seen well, a male bullfinch is an unmistakeable and stylish riot of pink, black, grey and white, but even when you can't see the colour of the underparts (males are pink and females are grey) the black tail and square white rump of a bullfinch flying away from you is very distinctive.

I still haven't seen or heard a turtle dove in the village, so if you have one purring near you I'll be very interested to hear about it. It is very sad that a bird that was common not that long ago is now so scarce. The other bird that should be back with us in June is the epitome of understated charm, the spotted flycatcher, and I'll be pleased to hear of them if they're in your part of the village.

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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