

Thorndon Birdlife, March 2019

As I write we are in the midst of a spell of dry, mild weather, which has been a February record breaker in other parts of the country (the highest February daytime temperature in parts of Scotland since 1897). With warm weather being funneled across the country from a long way to the south-west, it has felt like spring, quite different from the cold, snowy weather this time last year. Astonishingly, a swallow was seen at Sudbourne, near Aldeburgh, on 17th February.

I have already seen long-tailed tits in twos, presumably pairs, suggesting that the winter flocks are breaking up and pairs of birds are looking to nest. The Long-tailed tit is one of our early breeding species and they will no doubt be busy constructing their expandable, ball-shaped nests from moss, lichen, spiders' webs and hair.

Blue tits have also been very vocal and appear paired up and on the lookout for nesting sites. I wonder if they will again nest under the tiles of my house, as they did last year.

On 22nd February I had a lovely view of a barn owl along the Clint Road as it followed the roadside verge, where the grass is long, no doubt harboring voles and mice.

Also on 22nd February I saw six fallow deer, which I was really surprised by because I'd never seen this species in Thorndon before. I have seen plenty of muntjac and quite a few red and roe deer over the years, but never fallow deer. They were in the open and quite skittish, which is perhaps not surprising as I tend to associate them with open woodland. Perhaps they were making their way from one wooded area to another, across open fields.

I've also seen brown hares recently, all looking well, which is a relief because this species has been suffering from an illness like myxomatosis. Perhaps during March I'll see them 'boxing', which is females fending-off over amorous males.

There has been a good display of snowdrops recently in the usual places, such as the churchyard. Seeing these flowers is always a reassuring sign that we are reaching the end of the winter. I learnt recently that the snowdrop is almost certainly not a native British flower, with the earliest records of them in the wild dating from the 1770s.

Whether the mild weather conditions continue into March remains to be seen, but March is the first month of the meteorological and ornithological spring, so we should expect bird song and nesting activity to increase and, I hope, that by the end of the month we'll see and hear our first returning summer visitors: the chiffchaff, with its simple onomatopoeic song and the blackcap, with its rich, explosive, fruity warble.

I welcome reports of birds and other wildlife of interest in Thorndon, Rishangles, Hestley Green and Braiseworth.

