

## Thorndon Birdlife, September 2019

As I write this we are in the midst of a hot August Bank Holiday weekend and it seems pretty quiet on the bird front. There are, however, plenty of house martins busily feeding their young in nests along The Street and rather fewer swallows. Throughout the summer I have seen fewer swallows than I normally expect to see and I think that the extreme weather in southern Africa during their northward migration has reduced the numbers getting here this year.

Our swifts usually take their leave of us by the end of the first week of August and certainly those that I had been watching since May were gone by 8th August. However, I saw three separate individuals, all heading east over The Street on 24th August.

On 29th July the Buddleia in my garden was alive with peacock and red admiral butterflies and over the summer I have also seen holly blues, large whites, small whites and a few gatekeepers.

The late summer and early autumn is a good time for dragonflies and in the last few days I have seen the always impressive southern hawker. I have also seen a male of one of the darters, either common or ruddy, but it didn't perch to allow me to see the colour of its legs (the common darter has yellow on the legs whereas the ruddy darter has all black legs). Males of both of these species have reddish bodies and when seen perched, as well as the leg colour, it is possible to see that the ruddy darter has a narrowing of its abdomen about half way along its length.

On 29th July I was delighted to see a chiffchaff in my front garden. I don't see them that often in my part of the village because we don't have a lot of mature trees, but they do start to wander a bit after the breeding season so they can turn up in places where they are not normally seen.

After the glut of sightings earlier in the summer, the last hummingbird hawk moth I've seen so far was on 26th July, when it was frequenting petunias and verbenas. The predicted invasion of painted lady butterflies doesn't seem to have materialised.

On the mammal front I've seen three hedgehogs in the garden (at least two different individuals) and have been putting out hedgehog food for them. We've also had our second-ever brown hare actually in the garden.

By the end of the breeding season many adult birds are looking somewhat the worse for wear and I noticed an adult female blackbird on 24th August with rather pale looking secondary flight feathers (you can see these on the closed wing when you get a view of the bird in profile). She was feeding on the ground and bathing in the pond and the pale patch was quite obvious in her left wing. It is not that unusual to see blackbirds with white feathers, but these feathers were not white; they were simply a much paler (almost greyish) brown. This is caused by bleaching of the feathers by ultra-violet light and can happen, for example, when part of a bird's plumage is exposed to direct sunlight when incubating the eggs or brooding the chicks for a prolonged period.

September is the first month of the birding autumn and I have already seen small flocks of starlings and gulls are frequenting the harvested fields. Look out for lapwings in the fields and for the normally insectivorous warblers feasting on berries in your garden as they fatten themselves up for their long migration to Africa for the winter. This month also lookout for house martins and swallows gathering on

overhead wires before they head off for the winter.

I am always pleased to receive reports about birds and other wildlife of interest in Thorndon, Rishangles, Hestley Green and Braiseworth.

Stephen Dean

678093