

Thorndon Birdlife, July and August 2020

First of all, I should like to thank all those people in Thorndon and the surrounding area for letting me know about their sightings of birds, mammals, reptiles, insects, plants and even molluscs over the many years that I have been writing these pieces for 'Village Life'. Not only have readers supplied lots of useful and interesting information, but some have allowed me into their gardens to look at things they have seen and some have even brought me specimens, some of which have been very much alive! Thank you, also, for the very positive feedback about my jottings.

This will be my last piece for 'Village Life' as Louise and I are moving on to pastures new, which feels a bit strange after well over 20 years in what is a really lovely community.

In the very dry weather there have been lots of birds coming to drink and bathe in our pond, including blue tits, great tits, blackbirds, robins, woodpigeons, house sparrows (which we rarely see in our part of the village) and, on 28th May, three juvenile goldfinches with their parents. Juvenile goldfinches look rather odd because although they have the body and wing plumage like an adult, they don't have the black crown and red face, so they look a bit puzzling until you see the unmistakable black wings with the broad yellow stripe.

The following day I received a report of a spotted flycatcher from a garden on the High Street where they have been present in recent years, but this one may have been a migrant as it wasn't there the next day. I have received only one other report of this delightful bird, from Stoke Road.

Some of you will have heard about white-tailed eagles wandering around the country having been released on the Isle of Wight as part of a reintroduction programme. Two of these birds (which are satellite tagged) have been seen in Suffolk and one was seen over Thwaite Road on 2nd June. These birds are seriously impressive, with a wingspan of almost nine feet (nearly 2.7 metres). I've seen six in the UK, four of which have been in Suffolk, and the sheer scale of these birds was brought home with the first one I saw (near Leiston, in 1982), which was being mobbed by three birds that I assumed were crows, but when I got the bird in view through my telescope I could see that they were grey herons, which gives a shocking sense of scale! The Isle of Wight birds will continue to wander, so keep your eyes peeled for the proverbial 'flying barn door'.

I was really pleased to receive a report of two oystercatchers together at a site near Thorndon, where it is quite possible that they might be intending to nest. They do seem a bit incongruous on farmland, when you're used to seeing them on the coast and estuaries, but they are often to be found breeding well inland.

It seems that there have been at least two cuckoos around the Fen, in a year that has seen many more being seen and heard around the county than for many years. By the time you read this the first males will have left for their African wintering grounds, followed by the females and then, in August and September, the juveniles will head off on the same journey with no adults to show them the way. Staggering!

The blackbirds in my garden have been busy feeding their young, working tirelessly and no doubt being helped by me putting out mealworms for them. It has been interesting to see the male singing brief phrases whilst he is in flight and also uttering the high-pitched "seeeee" contact call that is such a

common sound from these birds when they are lurking invisibly in the undergrowth in high summer. Robins are nesting, too, although I haven't seen the juveniles yet, but I did have a lovely view of recently-fledged wrens.

As I always say in this edition, do take the time to enjoy our swifts during July because, by the end of the first week in August they'll be gone and they will not land until they are back here next May; surely one of the most astonishing of our more familiar birds.

Finally, I do love to see hummingbird hawk moths, which have been getting progressively more frequent in recent years, and I was delighted to see one feeding on Valerian in my garden on 16th June. It never ceases to amaze me that these little creatures fly here all the way from southern Europe and north Africa.

There are different species around now than there were when I started out in my interest in birds nearly 50 years ago, which is very exciting, but there are fewer of them and they need our help. I hope you will all continue to enjoy and look after the plants, insects, birds and other wildlife that surrounds us. It has certainly been a source of joy and fascination to me in the time I have lived here and it has been a privilege to share that enjoyment with you.

Stephen Dean