

## Thorndon Birdlife April 2021

Spring is in the air, and our gardens begin a transformation, the sun is rising earlier and it becomes warmer, birds suddenly become louder and livelier. Many of the birds seen in our rural gardens can be seen all year round, but their activity changes with the arrival of Spring.

Birds are heard throughout the year, but in spring and early summer mornings they seem to be louder and more persistent. The dawn chorus has arrived and it's generally produced by the males that are looking for a mate and once found they sing less, however the birds also use their voices to help them establish and maintain nesting territories and it is the strongest males that produce the best sounds. Females tend to choose the male that sings best to be their mate, and this suggests he will be able to defend his territory and help raise their chicks. Among the first birds to start and last to stop singing each day are robins (*Erithacus rubecula*). Although most birds mainly sing in summer, most robins in Britain use their voices to defend their territories all year round. Birds don't just communicate by singing, their calls which are not musical, can be used as warnings and to try and drive away danger. One bird you may not hear, but is probably singing or calling is the goldcrest (*Regulus regulus*) it is the smallest bird in the UK, just 9cm in length, and weighs approximately 5.5g, which is the equivalent of a twenty pence coin. If not for the bold orange stripe along its head, the Goldcrest would be a somewhat drab looking bird, with nothing more than a dull greyish-green plumage with which to advertise its appearance. However, a single stripe along the crown of a bird can add so much character. The difference between males and females is hardly noticeable, yet the most distinctive difference is the rich gold crown of the male Goldcrest, which has a tendency to become more prominent during mating displays. The male will bow its head and raise its coloured crest in a bid to attract a female mate



during the breeding season. The female crest is a rather pale yellow. The commonest call is a thin, high-pitched 'zree-zree-zree' and can be so high-pitched that some people have difficulty hearing it. The female goldcrest will often lay a second clutch of eggs before the first have fledged. The male will look out for the first brood whilst the female starts building a new nest. To find a Goldcrest nest, look for spruce or fir trees and a nest that is well balanced in a hammock position on the outer twigs. The nest is neat and cup-shaped and made from moss, lichens, spiders' webs and feathers. Look out for them in number over autumn and winter, as their population tends to increase significantly. This inflation occurs when flocks of Goldcrests from the

eastern coasts of Scandinavia and beyond join our native stock.

October 2019, I was bird ringing with the Waveney Bird Club on Dunwich Heath and we caught a ringed Goldcrest from Norway and three days later we caught a ringed female Goldcrest from Russia. The total recorded number of resident UK breeding pairs is 610,000 yet over winter this number can increase to as much as nearly five million birds. Despite this huge influx of Goldcrests, many will perish over harsh winter periods; in one Finnish study, only one tenth of the entire Goldcrest population survived due to cold conditions that affected the natural supply of spiders. Similar declines can happen in the UK, although

Goldcrests do have the ability to bounce back rapidly and reach normal population levels within a short period of time.

I walked the Thorndon loop a couple of weeks ago and heard a Raven (*Corvus corax*), I looked skyward and saw it being harassed by five crows. It is the largest member of the Corvid (crow) family and substantially bigger than the crow. The raven is also the world's largest perching bird. Their considerable size, black feathers and powerful beak lend ravens a somewhat sinister appearance and they frequently feature in folklore and literature. In some cultures, ravens are seen as a harbinger of death. In fact, ravens are highly intelligent birds with a playful and mischievous nature, and the ability to feel empathy with each other. They mate for life. Adaptable ravens can be found in a variety of habitats and they eat most things including carrion. Long before sanitation, ravens were found in large towns and cities, scavenging on dead animals, butchers' waste and the remains of human life found in the street. Once widespread, ravens were driven to the west and north of Britain, following many years of legal protection ravens are now spreading eastwards to inhabit their former haunts.

A total of 33 species were seen on the walk including a male Stonechat.

The first of the summer migrants have arrived in Suffolk, Chiffchaff, Sand Martins and two Swallows, I've seen two Red Kites and three buzzards over my back garden this morning and at Carlton Marsh there is a White-tailed Eagle.

Please contact me with sightings around the village.

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