

Thorndon Birdlife July and August 2021

The Turtle dove (*Streptopelia turtur*) have suffered a drastic decline in the UK with an estimated 97% decline since the late 1970's. Reasons behind this include changes in agricultural practices which affects the food chain resulting in a lack of seed and grain during the breeding season, this means a much shorter breeding season with fewer nesting opportunities. Turtle doves are also shot in great numbers on migration in countries that border the Mediterranean. Unfortunately for the dove, it is the only migratory dove in Europe, wintering in west Africa in roosts of up to one million birds, they are remarkably tolerant of heat, having been seen feeding in temperatures of 45°C. The British Trust for Ornithology has also highlighted Trichomoniasis parasite as a threat to the turtle dove. There are serious concerns that the species could soon disappear from this country entirely. The species is now included on the Red List of conservation concern. UK Turtle doves are now mainly a bird of southern and eastern England although their range does extend further north and west.

It's not that long ago that the Turtle Dove was such a common feature of the British summer that almost everyone would have recognised the purring call that gave the bird it's English name, this beautiful migratory bird was to many of us emblematic of the sun on our backs, fields full of flowers and long days spent outside. The turtle dove is smaller than a pigeon and just a little bit smaller than collared dove. It breeds in woodlands, orchards and well-wooded parks, mainly in the warmer, drier south and east of the UK. It is pinkish grey in colour with black and white barring on the neck. The bird's wedged tail has white tips that are most noticeable when fanned in flight. Adults feed on cereal and wildflower seeds and mating pairs are monogamous and often mate for life.

Despite the identical spelling, the "turtle" of the name derived from Middle English *turtle* (*tortle*, *turtle*, *turtul*), derived from Old English *turtla* (male turtle dove), *turtle* (female turtle dove), ultimately derived from Latin *turtur*, has no connection with the reptile "turtle" in this case, came originally from Latin *turtur*, onomatopoeic for the song. The genus name *Streptopelia* is from Ancient Greek *streptos* meaning "collar" and *peleia* meaning "dove"

And don't forget that the European Turtles dove has become an emblem of devoted love!

The Cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*) is also currently Red Listed as a Bird of Conservation Concern in the UK, because of its population decline. Since 2011 the British Trust for Ornithology have been satellite-tracking Cuckoos to find out why they are declining and to learn more vital information which could help us to understand them. There are currently twelve UK Cuckoos you can track on the web using this link www.bto.org/cuckoos and some are heading back to Africa, in fact AJ is already in France. The Cuckoo is a brood parasite which means it lays eggs in the nests of other avian species, just one egg in each nest and about twenty eggs in a summer, the nests of Dunnocks, Meadow pipits, Reed warblers and Pied wagtails are particular favourites. Just after the Cuckoo chick hatches, one by one it tips the host eggs out of the nest, any host chicks get thrown out too and once the Cuckoo chick has claimed the nest to itself the host parents will then raise a young Cuckoo instead of a brood of their own. Cuckoos can produce eggs that are very similar in colour to the host and if the hen cuckoo is out-of-phase with say a clutch of Reed Warblers eggs, she will eat them all so the hosts are forced to start another brood. If she fails to find a nest of her favourite host, as a last resort she might lay in the nest of another host species, but this egg is more likely to be rejected as it will not be such a good match to the host egg. The Cuckoo family gets its name and the genus name from the call of the male, the female has a loud bubbling call. One day a Cuckoo may appear on the TV series Long Lost Families as it never gets to meet its real parents.

I wrote in the May edition of the magazine an article on the Red Kite and last week I participated in ringing a brood of three Red Kite chicks not far from Thorndon, they are also wing-tagged so sightings would be of excellent value. Letters to look out for are DS, DT, DV.

A brood of four Kestrels were also ringed in Rishangles.

Sightings; Nightingales x 2 (Thorndon) Turtle dove (Occold) Spotted flycatcher x 2 (Kerrison) Cuckoo, Lesser whitethroat, Willow warbler. Keep an eye open for fledged tits

Your local sightings would be appreciated and if you need help to navigate the Cuckoo web page, please ring me.

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