



# Thorndon Birdlife

March 2022



I have recently acquired a thermal imager that incorporates hand held thermal imaging technology, with a high resolution 640x480 thermal core, providing crisp clear thermal images, with enhanced recognition ranges and a detection range up to 1800ms away in complete darkness. The same night I took it around my garden and spotted five Muntjac, two hedgehogs, several Pigeons and Pheasants roosting in trees and of course, a few rabbits. A couple of weeks ago in the dead of night I took it to a farm very close to Thetford and with the aid of a colleague caught and ringed fourteen Skylarks and a Woodcock.

The Eurasian Skylarks (*Alauda arvensis*) are characteristic of semi-natural grassland systems from heathland, sand dunes to marginal upland, but are most common in open arable farmland. It is known for the song of the male, which is delivered whilst hovering from great heights of 50 to 100 metres when the singing bird may appear as just a dot in the sky from the ground. It can sing more than 300 different syllables and each individual bird's song can be slightly different, they also have shown the ability to mimic. The song generally lasts two or three minutes, but tends to last longer later in the mating season when the song can last for twenty minutes or more.

The males are very territorial and take advantage of their long song flights to broadcast to rivals and potential mates because the open landscapes they prefer are devoid of high perches. This also allows the males to show themselves without bright plumage, so they have kept the cryptic greyish-brown and streaked coloration above and buff-white belly that affords them protection from predators on the ground. Like most Larks, the Eurasian skylark is a rather dull looking species. Sexes are alike but the male has broader wings than the female.

British breeding skylarks are believed not to move far between seasons, although upland birds move to lower latitudes. They often start breeding in March and continue into July, making up to three or four breeding attempts. The nest is probably built by the female alone and is a shallow depression in the ground lined with grasses and hair. They lay 3 to 5 eggs which are grey-white with heavy brown and olive spots. They are incubated only by the female beginning after the last egg is laid and hatch synchronously after 11 days. The young are cared for by both parents and for the first week are fed almost exclusively on insects.



In the UK, Eurasian skylark numbers have declined over the last 30 years as determined by the Common Bird Census started in the early 1960's by the British Trust for Ornithology. There are now only 10% of their numbers remaining.

Woodcock, known as the ‘Snipe of the woods’ is an elusive wading bird found mainly in woodlands. It is a short-legged, thick-bodied bird with a long bill. Its beautiful plumage provides almost perfect camouflage when it is on the ground, motionless in leaf litter. They’re mostly brown, with an intricate pattern of black and grey barring, and broad dark bars across the crown. It is mainly nocturnal, spending most of the day in dense cover. Unlike most birds, the tip of the upperpart of the bill is flexible. It is during its breeding display flight, known as roding, that the woodcock is most frequently seen. Males undertake roding flights between April and June, and will patrol a large area, flying with rapid wingbeats over the tree line, overlapping with other males as they compete to attract the attention of the females.



Most of the birds in the UK are residents, in the autumn birds move to the UK from northern Europe and Russia to spend winter here. The current breeding range is less than half its 1960s extent, supporting other evidence of long-term population decline. The reasons for the decline are unclear but may include recreational disturbance, drying out of woodlands, increased browsing by deer, declining woodland management and maturing of new plantations.

In the May 2021 issue, I mentioned the red kites that were nesting at Sibton Hall and that the team had installed a live camera above the nest, I am now in possession of a short film that was taken showing the chicks being fed by one of the adults, if you would like a copy of that film I would be happy to send using WhatsApp but I would need your mobile phone number. Contact details are below.



Picture of 20 Red kites roosting at Stoke by Nayland recently and the one extreme right is one of the Sibton Hall birds (pic right) that I ringed with the wing tag DS

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