

## Birdlife September 2022

Avian bird flu; some visitors to Minsmere over the last few weeks have noticed dead birds on the Scrape, the RSPB have confirmed that the dead birds tested by Defra for avian influenza have tested positive for the disease. Black-headed gulls, common terns and sandwich terns are the main species affected but I'm led to believe that things are improving. All site ringing activities by Waveney Ringing Group have therefore been suspended until further notice, our site at Dunwich Heath has also suspended ringing. I'm restricted to garden ringing at this present time and I managed to catch and process (age, wing length, weight, etc) five Moorhens in the last week including three juveniles.

The common Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*), also known as the waterhen or swamp chicken, is a bird species in the rail family (*Rallidae*). The scientific name *Gallinula chloropus* come from the Latin *Gallinula* (a small hen or chicken) and the Greek *chloropus* (green or yellow foot) It is distributed across many parts of the world, it lives around well vegetated marshes, ponds, canals and other wetlands, it is not found in polar regions or many tropical rainforests. The widespread, familiar moorhen of Eurasia and Africa is a large, plump, aquatic rail that often swims like a duck. Predominantly black or blackish overall with a bold red bill, white undertail coverts, and white streaks on the flanks. The bill and frontal shield are strikingly vivid red with a yellow tip. The eye is dark-red, usually requires direct illumination to detect. The back and wings are usually brownish, but the extent and tone vary from warm-brown to black. The legs are mostly greenish, but partly red above the knees. The young are browner and lack the red frontal shield. This species will consume a wide variety of vegetable material and small aquatic creatures. They forage beside or in the water, sometimes walking on lily-pads or upending in the water to feed. They are often secretive, but can become tame in some areas. Moorhens breed between the middle of March and the middle of May, sometimes in small colonies and produce 3 or 4 broods a season. They are monogamous and form pair bonds. They build their nests in shallow water anchored with vegetation, or on the ground in a low shrub, or on floating vegetation. Both male and female build the nest which is a wide shallow cup made from dead plant matter, twigs, coarse stems, and is lined with softer grass and leaves. Moorhens lay up to 6-10 smooth, glossy, greyish-white eggs with reddish-brown or olive markings. Incubation is by both parents for 18-21 days. Chicks are precocial and covered in black down. They leave the nest at about 2-3 days when they can feed themselves and fledge about 45 days after hatching and reach sexual maturity at one year. Young moorhens from the early broods will help their parents raise subsequent broods. Despite loss of habitat in parts of its range, the common moorhen remains plentiful and widespread.



Moorhen



One of 4 Hedgehogs in garden

The garden is inundated with tits at the moment and they're keeping me busy keeping the feeders full. Most are Great tits (*Parus major*) which is large for a tit at 12.5 to 14.0 cm (4.9–5.5 in) in length, and has a distinctive appearance that makes it easy to recognise, it is green and yellow with a striking glossy black head and neck with white cheeks and a broad mid-line stripe running from the bib to the vent. It is a woodland bird which has readily adapted to man-made habitats to become a familiar garden visitor. It can be very aggressive at feeders and bird-tables fighting off smaller birds. In winter it joins with blue tits and others to form roaming flocks which scour gardens and countryside for food. Its scientific name is derived from the Latin *Parus* "tit" and *major* "larger"

Sightings in my garden; 5 Buzzards, Kestrel, Chiffchaff, Song thrush, Green & Great-spotted woodpeckers, Swallows, House martins, Goldcrests, Treecreeper, Tawny owls at night. 4 x Hedgehogs. Red Kite at Wyken market Saturday.

Butterflies: Red Admiral, Comma, small white, lots of Gatekeepers and Hummingbird hawk moth (4th this year)

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