

## Nature Notes — Bugbrooke Birdwatch 2013

This year's Birdwatch was on 26th – 27th January, the weekend when the snow began to disappear. Many people had seen lots of birds during the week preceding the Birdwatch, but with the thaw they started to leave the gardens. Fieldfares and redwings had been seen in abundance, but only a few were recorded during the weekend. There were 38 sets of results, which are fewer than last year, and all but one came from Bugbrooke. The top ten of the most likely to be seen in gardens remains the same although they are in a slightly different order. The top four are in the same order, and are blackbird, wood pigeon, house sparrow, and robin, followed by starling, collared dove, blue tit, chaffinch, great tit and dunnock.

In terms of numbers the top ten does see some changes. The top five remains the same and in the same positions. They are house sparrow, starling, blackbird, wood pigeon and blue tit. Jackdaws have lost their 7th place and have fallen to 12th position, but they have been replaced by goldfinches. Collared doves have come back into the top 10. The others in the top ten are chaffinch, great tit and robin.

The number of species seen in each garden ranged from 4 to 19 and the average was 9. There was the first report of redpolls being seen on feeders this year where they were eating niger seeds and where the goldfinches "couldn't get a look in"!

Crows seem to cause some confusion in identification. The crow family covers quite a few birds. There are those that are quite distinctive and are difficult to confuse with anything else such as the jay and magpie, both of which are relatively common around Bugbrooke, although they can be cautious as they have been persecuted. The jay is a colourful bird with pink, black, white and blue plumage and can often be seen in the ash trees by the canal. The magpie, which has many superstitions associated with it, is a striking long-tailed black and white bird that is often seen cleaning up road kill. The confusion comes when distinguishing between the black crows – the carrion crow, the rook and the jackdaw. As its name suggests, the carrion crow feeds mainly on carrion and is most likely seen eating road kill rather than being in the garden. It is of about the same size as a rook, but its beak is smaller and less vicious looking. The rook and jackdaw are more likely to be seen in the garden. The rook is much bigger than a jackdaw (which looks big enough until you see it alongside a rook). The rook has a large, pointed beak with a white area around its base. The top of its head has a "peak" and its plumage is all black. The smaller jackdaw is grey-black with a definite lighter grey area around its head and shoulders, with a small black cap. Both the rook and jackdaw roost and nest in the churchyard. The "rule of thumb" that rooks are only seen in colonies and crows are solitary, is misleading. Sometimes crows will be seen in a group and sometimes rooks can be seen alone.



The rook with its distinctive white face area and pointed beak



The smaller jackdaw in its breeding plumage