

Nature Notes December 2011

Red Kites and Buzzards in Bugbrooke.

In September we went to Apethorpe near Oundle and we saw a wonderful display of six Red Kites flying over the trees near the church. On the way back we saw lots more in and above the fields. Red Kites are birds of prey that are a similar size to the more commonly seen Buzzards, but they are easily distinguished in flight by the V-shape in their tail feathers and their heads are distinctly grey. They are also much more reddish or russet in colour on their tails and thighs than Buzzards. Last year there were several sightings of Red Kites in the village by people living in Chipsey Avenue and in the fields towards the Mill. Until quite recently they were found in small numbers only in Wales, but they were reintroduced in the Chilterns where, in 2000 there were 112 breeding pairs and other schemes have been equally successful. In the middle ages they were birds of urban areas more than the countryside, as they are scavengers that fed on the rubbish that accumulated before the time of organised refuse collection. A German writer in 1465 claimed that to kill Red Kites was an offence punishable by death as they kept "the towns free from all filth". Now they feed mainly on carrion, although they can catch large birds such as crows, and they also eat insects and earthworms.

Many people who take part in the annual garden bird watch mention that they often see Buzzards circling in the sky. Buzzards are one of the most common and widespread of birds of prey. There are quite a few pairs that nest in Cornhill and on the A5. Often they are quite high and your attention is first attracted by their high pitched, rather weedy call. They can hang motionless against the wind while looking for prey such as small mammals, but they too will take dead meat including road-kill. Both the Red Kite and the Buzzard are residents so keep a look-out for them and let me know, especially if you see any Red Kites locally.

Look out for Redwings and Fieldfares. They are often seen together and are winter visitors that started to arrive in October. They like to feed on apples on the ground, so if you have any stored apples going a bit soft or starting to rot, put them out and see if you attract these winter migrants. If not the Blackbirds and Thrushes will appreciate them. We have seen male and female Blackcaps in our garden for a few winters eating berries, fruit on the ground and fat from fat balls, but they can easily be missed as they are often with similar sized birds such as Chaffinch. Waxwings came from the continent in abundance last year, but I didn't hear of any here. Some were seen in Bedfordshire though. Look out for small flocks in trees and bushes with berries, particularly hawthorn. There are large numbers of Goldfinches around at present, so don't forget to put out the niger seeds. Keep your eyes open and you might be surprised what you see, and don't forget to share it!

Recent sightings- a single Roe Deer was disturbed from the undergrowth in Smiths Lane.

The Big Garden Birdwatch will be on the last weekend of January. Each year we have had more people take part and if you haven't done it before, please join in. Tally forms will be available at Petstop after Christmas, and online at www.bugbrookelink.co.uk/naturenotes or from me at 1 Browns Yard.

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