

Taken from Nature Notes October 2011

From time to time people send me wildlife photographs and the most common subject is the Sparrowhawk. Gwyneth and Jim White sent the one alongside this article and it was taken in their garden in Homestead Drive. There are regular reports of Sparrowhawks elsewhere in the village including Butts Hill Crescent, Oaklands, Lime Grove, Ash Grove, Camp Hill, High Street, Church Lane and West End. Their reason for visiting gardens is betrayed by their name. Where people are feeding small birds with seeds and nuts, then it is a good hunting ground for their predators. Speed is the Sparrowhawk's greatest asset, and it seems to come from nowhere to take its prey. Small birds are very aware of the danger and often the alarm call scatters them as the Sparrowhawk arrives. Sometimes it will make a kill, but often it will leave for another good spot it knows of! To give the small birds a fighting chance, it is best to put your feeders close to evergreen shrubs so that they have some cover in which to hide.