

Nature Notes April 2011

Thank you to everyone who took part in this year's Bugbrooke Birdwatch at the end of January, and to Allen at Petstop who distributed tally forms. We had 41 sets of results which was a big increase from last year, and most parts of the village were represented in the survey. 32 species were seen which is one more than last year, and 42 species are seen regularly, but weren't seen during the birdwatch. Some different species were recorded. These were Fieldfare, Kestrel, Nuthatch, Green Woodpecker, Reed Warbler, Little Egret and Mallard. Those that were seen last year and weren't recorded in 2011 were Mistle Thrush, Tree Sparrow, Grey wagtail, Carrion Crow, Moorhen, Blackcap and Goldcrest.

The 4 most numerous birds were the same as last year, but not in the same order. At the top for both years was the House Sparrow. Blackbirds were second last year and third this year, their place being taken by Starlings, while Blue Tits were still in fourth place. The really noticeable increase in ranking was for Long-tailed Tits. Last year they were 15th (17% of gardens) and this year 6th (30%). For the second year, the only species that was seen in every garden was the Blackbird.

Many people were concerned about finches. Commonly, lots were seen during the snow in December, but there were far fewer since. The survey confirms that Greenfinches were present in fewer numbers, and in fewer gardens. In 2010 the Greenfinch was the 13th most numerous species whereas in 2011 it had dropped to 19th. There was the same drop in rankings in the number of gardens where they occurred. The Goldfinch and Chaffinch rankings were the same as last year. We can speculate on reasons for this, but it is only guesswork. It seems unlikely that it was a result of the cold as the smaller, more susceptible-to-cold Wren has been recorded in a greater proportion of gardens than last year. Another possibility is the presence of a parasitic disease, Trichomonosis which affects Greenfinches. However, infected birds tend to die close to feeders and more often in autumn. If you have not found bodies, it is unlikely that Trichomonosis is responsible.

Another explanation is that they were just somewhere else rather than in our gardens. I have noticed that many finches have been in the hedgerows. Perhaps their natural food was covered with snow in December, and so was still available after the thaw. Perhaps we had an influx from further north where conditions were worse than here in December and they returned or moved further south. However, since the Birdwatch, the numbers of all finches in our garden has recovered, and the feeders are emptying faster than in January. I would be interested in knowing what you think, and if your experience has been similar.

The full results are displayed in Petstop and online at www.bugbrookelink.co.uk/naturenotes. If you do not have access to a computer and would like a copy of the results, they are available from me.

Look out for: Orange tip butterflies. If you are not sure what they look like, there are photographs on the website. Their flight is timed to take advantage of their caterpillars' foodplants. They particularly like Lady's-smock flowers, so Charity Meadow is a good place to see them, although they are normally seen in gardens. House Martins, Swifts and Swallows will be returning during April and May, and listen for the Cuckoo too. Now is the time for a trip out to Everdon Stubbs to see the bluebells.