



‘What’s About’

No 29
Winter 2011-12

The unseasonably mild weather of December resulted in fewer special ‘winter’ records and my notes are fairly sparse for the month. However, the fact that there were fewer duck and geese than last year in this part of the river is worth recording. Of the sightings that were sent to me there seemed to be somewhat less activity at garden feeders too.

As the year turned, more duck became evident along the tide’s edge, both on this side of the river and between the Tips and Hams. **Widgeon, Teal, Pintail** and **Shelduck** could be seen easily, whilst out on the open water the number of **Goldeneye** built up so that by the 15th Jan. 14 were counted. **Little Grebes**, 11 on the 28th Jan, bob about between the moorings, whilst **Great-crested Grebe**, 10 on the same day, tend to stay at either end of the buoys and in the more open water. To date other species of Grebe have not wintered on the river here. A **Tufted Duck** together with 3 **Mallards** were on the un-frozen upper pond of the reservoir on the 12th Feb. 10 **Bewick Swans** flew upriver during the afternoon of the 11th Feb.

Avocets have been good to see, small numbers being here in December, then 40+ along the shore of the upriver moorings in late January and as the cold weather set in 116 were counted at the Tips with another 25 on the village side of the river. **Golden Plover** roost occasionally on the island, 40 were there on the 15th Jan. 20 **Turnstone** with 15 **Redshank** settled on the rusty hulk that remained above the high tide on the saltings on the 12th Jan.

30+ **Lapwings** were on the stubble near Whitehall on the 14th Jan, and Kit has seen other large flocks around there on occasions this winter. At high tide **Curlews** come inland to feed on the fields and Kit noted 20-30 near Thatched Farm in mid-Jan. A **Woodcock** flew out of the green lane next to the golf course on the 6th Feb and another from the track to Whitehall on the 10th Feb.

A number of birds of prey have been reported. A ring-tailed **Hen Harrier** was seen at Kirton and Hemley and then later over the Waldringfield island and on towards Methersgate on the 9th Dec, and similar sightings have been made occasionally through Jan and Feb. A Hen Harrier has been in winter residence in the Falkenham stretch of the river. A walk at Kirton Creek or on the Waldringfield saltings will almost always result in the sighting of a **Marsh Harrier**. It’s likely that local birds

are joined by roaming migrants particularly in adverse weather conditions, and on the 7th Feb an especially dark Marsh Harrier flew over the island and upriver. They will come inland to feed too and one was reported over Waldringfield Heath on the 1st Feb. and there was another sighting over the fields to the north of Fishpond Road during late Jan. **Buzzards** appear almost anywhere too. They are seen frequently from Kirton and Hemley, and upriver towards Methersgate. One was seen overhead at Whitehall on the 9th Dec and another was gliding over the village and then inland on the 28th Jan, and no doubt there would be many more sightings if only we made time to 'stand and stare'! A **Merlin** is an infrequent visitor but I had a report of one that disturbed birds on the island on the 7th Feb. It's worth looking out for **Peregrines**, at least 2 have been regular visitors, probably they hunt along the length of the Deben and into the Orwell and Ore. Peregrines put up clouds of waders and duck, as do Marsh Harriers, but whereas the latter are obvious large predators, it takes an observant eye to spot the culprit when a Peregrine is hunting - the action's over before you know it. Sally wrote 'emerging from the path to the river below Manor Cottage, I couldn't understand why the sky suddenly filled with hundreds of Brent Geese, Curlew, Widgeon and Teal. Did I disturb them or were they enjoying the sun and wind? And then I saw it in the middle of the mass - a Peregrine hot on the tail of a Widgeon, which it didn't catch. What a sight!' **Sparrowhawks** hunt over the saltings, and they've made their usual appearances in gardens too.

Early morning and afternoon walkers report sightings of **Barn Owls**. They are seen hunting over the grazing marsh, the fields behind the sailing club and towards Rudd's Barn and Howe's Farm. **Tawny Owls** have called throughout the winter. Several people have mentioned that the oaks along the cricket field valley and those around Novocastria have been favourite haunts. A dead Tawny Owl was found by the path to the river at Manor House on 2nd Jan. A **Little Owl** was heard calling from the hedgerow on Cross Farm drive on the 20th Dec and they can sometimes be seen in the oaks along the side of the golf course.

Green Woodpeckers have become less common but one was in Sandy lane on the 14th Dec. A **Kingfisher** was seen flying downriver and into the reservoir area on the 18th Dec. and at about that time a Kingfisher was seen on a couple of occasions by the sluice upriver of Swan's nest.

A count of the corvid roost in the trees at Kirton Creek on 20th Dec resulted in 200+ birds.

Birds coming to garden feeders have caused interest. I found that rather few birds came in December but as the weather turned colder, and then with the snow, feeders have been inundated. The thaw set in yesterday and this morning only a handful of birds are here. The open fields have become more of an attraction.

We get no **House Sparrows** and **Starlings** are a rarity in our part of the village, but this winter **Tree Sparrows** have made up for that. Judith watched up to 3 Tree Sparrows on



Tree Sparrow

several occasions over the new year and into Jan. and they were seen in early Feb too. **Redpolls** have also put in an appearance, favouring nyger seed, 4 or 5 birds will crowd onto a feeder. Sally and Stan have seen Redpolls in their parts of the village too. A **Great-spotted Woodpecker** has come to peanuts in Christine's garden, where it saw off the more resident Starlings, and G-s W's have been sighted more often in the gardens in Sunnyhill, Sullivan Place, Cliff Road and Waldringfield Heath.

At the end of Jan. Christine noted that **Coal, Long-tailed, Great and Blue Tits** had been coming to feeders as had **Chaffinches** and a **Brambling**, but very few **Greenfinches** had been seen this winter and Sally and Pam in Sunnyhill echoed that. Perhaps here in Fishpond Road with more fields around us Greenfinches have been fairly regular feeders and in the cold snap we had up to a dozen Greenfinches, together with many Chaffinches, feeding on black sunflower seeds. **Goldfinches** enjoy nyger seeds in garden feeders, but they have also been seen in the fields in flocks together with **Linnets** and about 30 were on the field behind the sailing club on the 25th Dec and in Jan. Linnets have continued to feed on the grazing marsh and roost in the gorse at the northern end. **Robins** are regular visitors to bird tables and where normally a Robin will not tolerate in the vicinity one from another territory, we had 3 Robins feeding close together when the snow was on the ground. A **Jay** and a **Magpie** have also come to garden feeders, with fat balls being the attraction. By mid-Jan **Fieldfares** and **Redwings** had begun to visit gardens and on the 13th Jan a flock of 12+ devoured cotoneaster berries in Mary's garden and on the 29th Jan both Liz Lord, and Max and Margaret reported 30+ Fieldfares and Redwings on cotoneaster in Sullivan Place. A large cotoneaster was stripped in Mill Road too, and then came the turn of the crab apple Red Sentinel in Mary Tucker's garden and another in Cliff Road which was descended upon by these birds and **Blackbirds** and **Mistle Thrush** too.



Fieldfares and Redwings

Stan Baston

By mid-Jan. **Gt-s Woodpeckers** were drumming and they could be heard clearly in the oaks in the valley. By the 28th Jan Christine had watched **House Sparrows** collecting feathers for nest material and males were fighting fiercely, and they continued to prepare for nest building throughout the period of snow. 5 **Bullfinches** (inc 3 males) were in the Manor House thicket on the 31st Jan and 2 were seen near the reservoir on the 12th Feb. Here 2 **Yellowhammers** were seen on the 6th Feb.

On the 25th Dec Christine found a small **Hedgehog** roaming in her garden. Nettie Trigg was called and she will be looking after this 9oz youngster until the spring.

3 **Common Seals** were noted in Early Creek on the 12th Jan and 2 were within the Waldringfield moorings on the 1st Feb.

A **Fox** was seen in Sullivan Place at 09.30 on 8th Jan. It walked along the road and on up School Road! Max and Margaret had not seen one there before in broad daylight! An occasional fox has been seen towards Howe's Farm, but tracks in the snow indicate that they are widely spread. **Badgers** have remained active, perhaps a little less so in the cold period, but Pam was pleased to find tracks in the snow on her lawn and Agnes knows them to be regular visitors in her garden. **Otter** prints were seen near the reservoir on the 6th Feb and there were plenty of deer prints in the area too.

A dead adult **Frog** was found on Fishpond Road on 3rd Jan.

Liz reported that a **Peacock** butterfly came out of hibernation in Jan, flew around in the warmth of a room in the Deck House and promptly went back into hibernation! (The first butterfly to be seen flying outside in Suffolk this year was a Brimstone in Landseer Park in Ipswich on the 7th Jan - a record for that species.)

Violets were flowering in Alexis' garden on 1st Jan. and **Primrose, Crocus, Aconites** and **Honesty** elsewhere, then with the snow all closed down. Now, rising temperatures and increasing daylight ought to bring a flush of blooms and Spring!

For this edition I am grateful to the following contributors: Jill and Michael Atkins, James and Rolls Barclay, Joe and Kit Clark, Pam Crawley, Janet Elliot, Serena Gold, Stella James, Christine Fisher Kay, Liz Kennedy, Liz Lord, David and Angela Mace, Janette Mace, Anne Maddison, Michael Parkinson, Max and Margaret Pemberton, Sally Redfern, Betsy and Colin Reid, Alexis and John Smith, Judith Stinson, Mary Tucker, Neil Winship

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