



‘What’s About’

No 30
mid-February – April 2012



Thank you to the members of the Group who planted 2000 crocuses around the Playing Field.

.....*Enjoy!*

We have a telephone bird in our garden. It's a Song Thrush that perches high in a pear tree and mimics a pretty convincing ringtone. The bird is proclaiming his territory and, hopefully, calling in a future partner (do other birds use 'Twitter'?) The early morning chorus of bird song is hotting up. Through the clamour of robin, wren, blackbird and finch newly arrived birds are making their presence felt. There seemed to be an influx of Chiffchaffs on the 19th/20th March and now they can be heard in many parts of the village. Blackcaps give their fluting song from thickets and bushy patches - yes, this is a plea for a few wilder areas that are not 'tidied up', which provide much needed nesting cover and feeding areas for these migrant birds as well as our residents.

A Cetti's Warbler can be heard at the reservoir. It has a 'different', loud and unmistakable call that surprises you when it's heard from the brambles near the path. A Willow Warbler, which has a musical call of descending notes, was heard at the reservoir on the 9th April, but not since then, so it might have been passing through and by now is calling in a Scottish glen.

Nightingales are special and surely must indicate, when first heard, that sunny, spring weather is on the way! The first two Nightingales, heard in the Manor Cottage

thicket on the 14th April, were heard again during the afternoon of the 17th April and then on the 19th. It seems likely that they will stay on for the nesting season. A Nightingale was singing at Newbourne Springs on the 17th April. The males arrive first and sing to attract the females that arrive later in the month. When pairing is assured the males will halt their singing for another year.

A Swallow was seen over Church Field on Easter Day, the 8th April, two were wheeling over the field opposite the thatched cottage in Woodbridge Road on the 14th April and one was over the Maybush on the 19th April.

5 House Martins were over the village on the 21st April.

Before the end of February and the start of the warm spell many of the birds of the river began their spring migration, but it was good to see that on the 14th Feb 30+ Avocets, 20+ Black-tailed Godwits, 3 Great-crested Grebes and 10 Little Grebes were on the mud and river just off the grazing marsh. Brent Geese roosted around the island and towards the end of Feb about 300 could still be counted there, but this number soon reduced so that by mid-March only a handful remained in the vicinity of the island roost. 20+ Black-tailed Godwits continued to feed boldly on the mud by the boatyard where good close views were possible and by mid-March several of them were in their fine, chestnut summer plumage.

Curlews that are always to be seen feeding along the lower tideline often come well inland to roost and feed at high tide and small flocks of 2-6 birds or large flocks of 30-40 birds have frequented the fields around Howe's Farm.

Shelduck have been mustering on the to-be-ploughed fields of the cricket field valley. On the 30th March 18 were standing about in their pairs or small groups, then flying short circuits before rejoining the group. By now they will have searched out holes in trees and banks in which they can make their nests.

The heronry at the Tips is busy and from our river wall on the 19th April a minimum of 10 Herons could be counted in the trees there. A Heron was watched fishing successfully at the reservoir on the 19th April.

Marsh Harriers have been seen on several occasions hunting along the saltings but they have also been seen inland over the village as have Buzzards. The latter are often seen over Stonner Point and Ramsholt Rocks and it is in the Kirton Creek area that a ringtail Hen Harrier has been seen through the winter, and a male on the 24th Feb on the Hemley saltings. Hunting Peregrines and a Merlin have both been watched too. Sparrowhawks swoop through the area. A Sparrowhawk was photographed by Rolls as it attacked one of her white pigeons, but the pigeon survived! A Collared Dove was found on Christine's lawn recently, predated upon possibly by a Sparrowhawk and she noted that by evening House Sparrows had removed all the feathers for nest building.



Pigeon and Sparrowhawk
Photo Rolls Barclay

Single Barn Owls have occasionally been seen hunting, but 2 were on the grazing marsh on the 17th Feb and on the 21st March one was seen to enter an owl nest box.

A Barn Owl found a way through the roof space into Hemley church and chose a roof beam for roosting. It might have been convenient for the bird, but it resulted in a messy church. Happily, the roof space was blocked from within the church leaving the outside entrance open and a large, protected space for the bird to roost.

The damaged Barn Owl Pole Box on Church Field was replaced on the 15th March and two Stock Doves were seen to enter (to examine it for nesting potential?) on the 16th March!

A Little Owl was spotted in the oak trees along the track from Newbourne Road through to Holly Corner on the 16th March and more recently, on the 18th and the 20th April, one has been seen perched and hunting at the Waldringfield-Newbourne-Hemley junction.

A Short-eared Owl was seen on Hemley marshes on the 23rd March.

A Woodcock was watched in the ditch at Howe's Farm on the 19th March.



*Great Spotted
Woodpecker female*

Birds that came to feeders during the colder spell included a ringed Redpoll and a ringed Chaffinch, and a Brambling which came to Christine's feeder. Great Spotted Woodpeckers came to peanut feeders very late in the winter or not until the early spring.

Goldfinches, Chaffinches, Greenfinches, Siskin, Robins, House Sparrows, Tree Sparrows, Blue, Great, Long-tailed and Coal Tits, Starlings (on fatballs), Collared Doves, Wood Pigeons, Blackbirds and Song Thrushes and a Jay have been recorded coming to feeders. Perhaps all the birds that come to garden feeders were overshadowed by a Blackbird in February about which Rolls wrote: 'We've got a blackbird with exotic taste which comes into our courtyard and jumps 2' to take black olives off the trees!'

Rooks were making much noise in the rookery in Fishpond Road in early March when the stealing of twigs for nest building was well underway, but by April, when 14 nests were completed, the rookery became more orderly.

Green Woodpeckers have been absent for much of the winter but one was heard at Novocastria on the 26th Feb, at Cross Farm drive on the 28th Feb and at Manor Cottage on the 16th March, but they've not been heard since.

Yellowhammers seem to have wintered well and a few pairs can be seen around the golf course and in the field hedges south of the reservoir and along Mill Road. Males have been calling along Woodbridge Rd. by the golf course and by Rudd's Barn drive.

Linnets were seen in a mixed flock of finches on the golf course in late March, and in April, 25+ could still be watched in the early morning leaving their roost site in the gorse near the grazing marsh.

7 Pied Wagtails was the maximum number seen enjoying the insect life on the muck heap at the Chapel crossroads on the 17th Feb.

5 Skylarks were seen on Church Field on the 17th Feb, 3 of which ascended to sing. They are heard regularly in many fields.

Badgers have made their presence felt by excavating in the bank along Woodbridge Road as well as scraping and scratching, probably for worms, along the verges and in gardens where spring bulbs have been uprooted. One or two people have watched them trundling through their gardens.

A weasel was seen on Woodbridge Road on the 17th Feb. and another on Ipswich Road by the golf course on the 14th March. A dead weasel was on the road past the Moon and Sixpence on the 30th March.

Particularly large deer prints were seen in the mud at the reservoir on the 15th March. They were large enough to be those of a Fallow Deer and quite possibly those of a Red Deer. There is a herd of Fallow Deer at Nacton and it's not unheard of for a wandering Red Deer to cross to the Deben / Orwell peninsula.

2 Muntjacs were sighted in the undergrowth opposite Christine's house on the 17th Feb. One was in Fishpond Road on the 27th Feb and a young Muntjac crossed the road near the Moon and Sixpence on the 19th March. Recent muddy weather has made their prints visible throughout the village.



Muntjac

Photo Ian Kay

Hares have been reported by several people and, whilst the crops are still short, they can be seen in many of the fields around the village.

Christine found a dead hedgehog on Church Field on the 18th April. It weighed 1lb 8ozs. Christine noted that perhaps the recent warm weather had caused it to emerge from hibernation too early and the previous freezing night had been too much for it.

3 Common Seals are often to be seen hauled out on the mud banks in Early Creek and during Feb a seal pup was recorded there by Celia Mason. Seals are inquisitive animals that will raise their heads above the water to get a better look at passing boats. A rowing boat or one with a quiet engine will bring a seal in close, much to the delight of the occupants, as Michaela Doherty recorded.

A temperature of 16°C in the shade was recorded on the garden thermometer on the 23rd Feb, warm enough for frogs to be on the move in several gardens and Christine recorded frogspawn in her garden pond in the last week in Feb. which she then noted as taking a particularly long time to hatch out. Angela recorded frogspawn in her pond on the 13th March.

From mid-March an unusual plant, Butterbur, has been flowering, before its leaves appear, on the riverside verge of Woodbridge Road just before Howe's Farm reservoir. Along the roadside verges the flowers of Spring Beauty and Stitchwort are beginning to open, as are those of Garlic Mustard or Jack-in-the-Hedge (the egg-laying plant of the Orange-tip butterfly). Bluebells are flowering in the woodland strip past the school.

The first butterfly of the year to be seen flying outdoors, a Red Admiral, was seen by John Smith at Waldringfield Heath on the 19th Feb. 2 Brimstones were in Kit's garden on the 17th March and 2 in Pam's garden on the 25th March. In the warm spell bumblebees appeared as did ladybirds and the 7-spot was recorded in large numbers by Alexis.



7-spot Ladybirds Photo Alexis Smith

An email from Sally:

'Lovely afternoon yesterday, 15/4, 2.30-4.30, cold northerly wind, watching Marsh Harriers displaying in the Ramsholt to Shottisham Creek area. A pair was displaying over the reedbed just north of Shottisham Creek with the male zooming up vertically, stall-turning at the top and tumbling down in a vertical spiral dive, then up again, repeating the downward spiral and clashing talons with the female. I sat and watched entranced, then wandered back towards Ramsholt pub only to see 4 more individuals (2 male, 2 female) over the reedbeds closer to Ramsholt Church. These were hunting and chasing each other but not displaying so well. Also in the area, 3 Kestrel seen individually, so possibly the same individual, and a Barnacle Goose with Greylags.'

For this edition I am grateful to the following contributors: Jill and Michael Atkins, James and Rolls Barclay, Joe and Kit Clark, Pam Crawley, Michaela Doherty, Serena Gold, Agnes Gross, Stella James, Christine Fisher Kay, Liz Kennedy, Joe Lubbock, David and Angela Mace, Janette Mace, Anne Maddison, Celia Mason, Sally Redfern, Betsy and Colin Reid, Alexis and John Smith, Judith Stinson,

Please send your sightings to:

Peter Maddison, Barnmead, Fishpond Rd

prmaddison@yahoo.co.uk

