



‘What’s About’

**No 33
Winter 2012-13**



The particularly low temperatures in early December, mid Jan and through much of February have made this into a long winter, but recent warm sunshine, brief as it may have been, heralds Spring. A *Prunus* species at the top of the beach steps is in bloom, a hawthorn on Sandy Lane is breaking into leaf and frogs and toads have become active. One of the first Suffolk arrivals was a Sand Martin recorded at Lackford Lakes near Bury St Edmunds on the 2nd March.

On the Deben there are good numbers of wintering wildfowl which have hardly begun to think about migration. 200-300 Widgeon have been visible in the bay between the Tips and the Hams, and in the channels in the saltings on our side of the river too. Teal and Mallard are there in good numbers and on the 17th Jan. 29 male **Pintail** were counted. **Brent Geese** were late to arrive in the early winter and their numbers built up slowly around the southern end of the island where they have gathered, mostly to roost. Large flocks of several hundred Brent Geese have been feeding downstream at Kirton and Falkenham. For patient birders there is still an opportunity to spot a 1st

winter **Black Brant** and a **Pale-bellied Brent Goose** amongst approximately 1200 **Dark-bellied Brent** on Ferry Marsh, Felixstowe, so I'm told!

Large numbers of **Mute Swans** winter on the low-lying fields towards Felixstowe. There were 2 **Bewick Swans** on Hemley marsh on the 3rd Jan. **Avocets** have been noticeable along the tideline. 4 were seen just upriver from Swan's Nest on the 13th Dec. but 50 were on the water's edge on 4th Jan.

In late November about 100 **Lapwings** roosted on the island and were often seen feeding on various fields around the village. By mid December the number around the island had risen to 300+. In late January and February **Golden Plovers**, gathering on the island, increased to 175+ birds.

On the 20th Dec. 2 **Ringed Plover**, 3 **Turnstone**, 4 **Goldeneye**, 5 **Little Grebe**, 6 **Great-crested Grebe**, and 18+ **Avocet** were on the mud or immediately off the shore at the southern end of the island. On 17th Jan. 7 **Goldeneye**, 12 **Little Grebe** and 5 **Great-Crested Grebe** were counted.

2 **Green Sandpipers** were on the pig field at the Heath on 30th Dec. 40 **Turnstones** and a few **Oystercatchers** and **Redshanks** were high tide roosting on the rusty wreck near the river wall meadow on the 30th Jan. A **Woodcock** flew out of the thicket vegetation at the edge of the river wall toward Manor Cottage on 11th Feb. A **Snipe** took flight from the salt marsh near the river wall on the morning of 7th March. 60 or more **Curlews** are always on the mud or the saltings, and quite often are seen high tide roosting and feeding on inland fields. **Black-tailed Godwits** have been present in good numbers, with 70+ often visible feeding along the tideline. They are relatively fearless and remain undisturbed near the boatyard as walkers pass by.

In early January Neil Winship found a dead **Black-headed Gull** on the foreshore near the sailing club. The bird was Swedish ringed and email contact with the authorities in Sweden resulted in the information that the bird had been ringed as an adult near Malmö in Sweden on the 8th June 2002. During the birds life it had been caught twice by bird ringers in Denmark, who read the ring number in March 2009 and in March 2010. Its ringed life had been 10 years and 211 days. This Black-headed Gull was one of the many gulls that migrate to Britain from Scandinavia and eastern Europe during the winter period.

A male **Hen Harrier** was sighted on the Waldringfield to Hemley marshes on the 27th Dec. On the same day a **Marsh Harrier** was hunting on the marsh and a **Peregrine** was identified as it perched on a one of the dead trees on the edge of the saltmarsh. A Marsh Harrier flew upriver to hunt over the saltings towards Metersgate on the 13th Dec. and another Marsh Harrier was noted over the Kirton Creek reedbeds on the 30th Jan. A **Buzzard** was over the river wall meadow and the arable fields around Novocastria on the 28th Jan. 3 were over the Tips on the 14th Feb., with 2 of them performing tumbling displays. There has been a number of **Kestrels** about, perhaps an increased number. Church Field has often had one hovering overhead and whilst walking from the school to Kirton Creek 2, 3 or perhaps even 4 different individuals have been counted. A **Sparrowhawk** was seen sitting on the roof of a bird table in Anthony and Celia Mason's garden in early Dec. Needless to say no small birds were feeding there, but an unsuspecting House Sparrow flew out of a nearby hedge, which

forced a chase the Spadge escaped. A pigeon in Fishpond Lane didn't make such a lucky escape on the 10th Jan. Sparrowhawks have visited several gardens around the village including Mill Road and the Quay.

Barn Owls were active during daylight in late November and early December, but during the coldest weather they were recorded hardly at all, so it was with relief that after the snow thawed Barn Owls were seen again by several observers over the important river wall meadow hunting ground, the reservoir valley, the golf course, Rudd's Barn and Howe's Farm valleys. A Barn Owl was seen hunting over the fields below Hemley Cottages on the 21st Jan.

A **Little Owl** was seen perched on top of the Barn Owl pole box on Church Field on 6th Jan. Then on 30th Jan a Stock Dove was sitting on the shelf of the box. Who will be the tenant this year? **Tawny Owls** have been heard towards manor Cottage and in Waldringfield Heath as well as along the lines of oaks in the cricket meadow valley.

On 21st Jan. 4 **Rooks** were seen to mob a fake harrier, used as a bird-scarer at Hemley. Clearly the harrier was very convincing. Rooks were visiting their traditional rookeries in Fishpond Road and by the Moon and Sixpence during February.

2000+ corvids were on the pig field during the harsh weather in January.

3 **Waxwings** were spotted feeding on hawthorn berries in the golf course hedge along Woodbridge Road on 30th Nov. They were part of a large invasion of Waxwings that came into eastern England from Scandinavia and were reported in a flock of up to 70 birds in Ipswich. They have remained in the county throughout the winter and within the last week Sally watched a flock feeding on berries in a supermarket car park in Saxmundham.

Fieldfares have been evident throughout the winter period. A flock of 8 was in Joe Lubbock's garden on the 24th Dec. 12 were on the field above Manor Cottage track on the 17th Jan. and 30+ were between Whitehall corner and Holly Corner. 3 came to feed on apples at a garden feeder on the 18th Jan. About 25 fed on crab apples in Sullivan Place on the 19th Jan. 40-50 were on the parsley field at Chapel crossroads on the 6th Feb. 12 were on the stubble field below Whitehall on the 27th Feb., where they were feeding in close proximity to a flock of about 30 **Starlings**. In early March a flock of 200+ Starlings has been flying regularly, in the early morning, eastwards over the village. It is likely that they were dispersing from a roost that would not have been so very far away. 500+ passed over on the 2nd March.

2 **Mistle Thrushes** were on a stubble field at Hemley on the 3rd Jan. and others, usually in pairs have been seen at Novocastria and in the cricket meadow valley.

A **Great-spotted Woodpecker** was seen feeding in a garden on the 21st Nov. This species has not been seen very often during the winter, but recently one has been drumming in the oaks near Rosemary Cottage. A Great-spotted Woodpecker, which has become a regular visitor to a peanut feeder in Christine's garden, has been unperturbed by the closeness of exotic reptile. (see photo)



Great-spotted Woodpecker and Chameleon! ©CFK

In late Nov. a flock of 6-8 **Yellowhammers** were seen feeding in the hedgerow near Cross Farm Cottages. 8 were on the track to Manor Cottage on the 4th Jan. and 5 on the 17th Jan. A similar size flock has been seen on the river wall meadow too.

70+ **Chaffinches** and **Greenfinches** took advantage of the seeding sunflowers at Holly Corner in mid Nov. A male **Bullfinch** was seen at Whitehall on 27th Nov. A **Goldcrest** was seen in the hedge next to the school on the 30th Nov.



Goldfinch on teasels

The cold weather brought many species of birds to feeders in gardens. **Greenfinches, Chaffinches, Goldfinches, House Sparrows, Starlings, Blue Tits, Great Tits, Coal Tits, Long-tailed Tits, Blackbirds, Starlings, a Song Thrush, Collared Doves, Woodpigeons, Pheasants and even a Pied Wagtail** have all been present and in the harsh conditions they emptied feeders rapidly. A **House Sparrow** on a seed feeder was a rarity in Fishpond Road. 12 noisy House Sparrows were noted in a bush at Hemley on 3rd Jan. 8 Long-tailed Tits that were on a feeder in Christine's garden on the 26th Jan. seems to have been a record number for this winter.

Wrens have not been mentioned in relation to feeding stations, but one was seen feeding quite regularly in the litter along the base of a protected wall in Max Pemberton's garden.

A **Jay** was seen feeding on fat balls in Stella's garden on the 7th Dec., and a **Magpie** chased birds from the same garden feeders on the 4th Jan. 2 **Redpolls** appeared on the bird feeder in Christine's garden on the 15th Dec. and 4 on the 23rd Jan. Christine noted how aggressive they were towards the Goldfinches even though the Redpolls were distinctly smaller in size. 2 Redpolls were on a feeder in Fishpond Road on the 18th Dec. A ringed male and a female **Blackbird** were feeding in Pam's garden on the 18th Dec. and a ringed male Blackbird was in Sally's garden on the 9th March. A **Brambling** came to Fishpond Road feeders around the 10th Feb. 3 **Siskins** visited the peanut feeder in Pam Crawley's garden on the 26th Feb. Siskins have visited

Christine's feeder in Waldringfield Heath and on the 1st of March a Siskin was feeding in Sally's garden. On 4th March a male and female were noticed on niger and sunflower seed feeders in Fishpond Road. Siskins can be confused with Greenfinches, but their smaller size, blackish cap in the male, streaked under parts, and wing bar are diagnostic.

2 **Weasels** were in Stella's garden on the 24th Dec. A road casualty Weasel was found by Cross Farm drive on the 19th Feb.

A **Stoat** was seen to run across Woodbridge Road by Cross Farm on the 20th Feb.

Otter prints and a body slide were seen in the snow along the river wall on the 22nd Jan.

1 or 2 **Common Seals** have been seen fairly regularly on the mud or in the stretch of river from Early Creek through the moorings to beyond the boatyard.

Hares have been seen on the fields around Howe's Farm, Plum Tree Cottage and on Waldringfield Heath. A dead Hare was found near Hemley Hall on the 30th Jan.

The warmth of the first few days of March encouraged **Frogs** and **Toads** into activity and spawn has been recorded in Christine's pond in Waldringfield Heath.

The 5th March was a gloriously sunny day, which encouraged a **Brimstone** into flight in Fishpond Road.

For this edition I am grateful to the following contributors: Janette Brown, Joe and Kit Clark, Pam Crawley, Stella James, Christine Fisher Kay, Joe Lubbock, Tony Lyons, Angela Mace, Anne Maddison, Anthony and Celia Mason, Max and Margaret Pemberton, Sally Redfern, Alexis and John Smith, Judith Stinson, Alyson Videlo, Linda Wilkins, Neil Winship.

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