



‘What’s About’

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Winter 2014**



Mute Swans down river

Alexis Smith

This morning’s late January frost and fog made me think that harsh winter weather was about to clamp down upon us. But by the afternoon the temperature had climbed several degrees and the regional weather forecast shows temperatures of 8°C and 9° at the weekend. Scandinavia too has been experiencing unusually mild weather and, as a consequence, it is reported that spring flowers are blooming, bears are coming out of hibernation and many duck and wading birds have not mustered the inclination to migrate south and winter on our rivers. So, the Deben has fewer duck and waders, at least in our stretch of the river.

The usual winter species can be seen in the creeks on the saltings and in the bay between The Tips and The Hams. The most plentiful are Widgeon and Teal, although Shelduck, which are easily identified, numbered 157 between Methersgate and Waldringfield island on the 5th Jan. 23 male Pintails were counted on the 18th Jan, a good score this year.

Brent Geese have not been flying in their customary flocks along the upper parts of the Deben but up to 200 roost at the southern end of the island and their early morning departures downstream are both noisy and evocative.

40 Black-tailed Godwit were upstream of the boatyard on 26th Nov and 23 on the 12th Dec. 3 male Goldeneye were at the upstream end of the moorings on the 12th Dec.

150+ Lapwing flew up from the island on the 15th Dec.

A particularly large egret, perhaps a Great Egret, which appeared to be at least the size of a Grey Heron, was seen by Christine on the 29th Dec in the Ramsholt area.

15 Avocet were upriver of the boatyard on the 26th Nov, 6 on the 12th Dec and 45 along the Sutton tideline on the 5th Jan.

6 Great-crested Grebe were on the river on the 12th Dec but just 1 on the 5th Jan.

4 Little Grebes were around the moorings on the 5th Jan.

A Snipe was seen by Sally at Kirton Creek on the 10th Oct. Other birds seen there were 50 Avocet, a Marsh Harrier and many Black-tailed Godwit.

55 Redshank and 11 Turnstones were high tide roosting on the metal hulk upstream of the river 15th Dec.

Curlew are seen feeding on the fields, often well inland from the river, such as the field by the Moon and Sixpence, and on the fields on the Heath where 23 were counted on the 10th Nov. 11 were counted on the field below Sandy Lane on the 16th Oct.

2 Marsh Harriers were seen at Kirton Creek during November and 2, together with a Buzzard, were seen on the 19th Dec.

A ring-tailed Hen Harrier was observed close in over the saltings just below Manor Cottage on the 17th Jan. This is an unusual sighting as they usually remain in the lower reaches of the estuary and it is the Marsh Harriers that are seen upriver.

A Buzzard was seen on the ground and before flying to perch in the hedgerow at Rudds Barn drive on the 25th Nov., at Howe's Farm on the 7th Dec, and near Rudds Barn on the 8th Dec.

A Sparrowhawk trapped a blackbird against wire netting in Sandy Lane on the 11th Jan. Evidently the Sparhawk was more disoriented than the Blackbird which flew off unscathed. Sparrowhawks have been particularly active around the village just recently with sightings in Sunnyhill, the golf course, Church Field and this morning, the 21st Jan, on the beach, where the bird flew out into the fog over the river, perhaps to ambush waders on the island, but thought better of its venture and almost immediately returned to perch in a tree on the cliff.

A Little Owl was in the trees along Fishpond Road on the 13th Dec and they have been seen near to the T-junction at Walk Farm wood.

Tawny Owls were calling along the cricket meadow valley in the early mornings and on several nights around the 15th of Dec.

A Barn Owl has been seen irregularly hunting along the field edges at Howe's Farm, Rudds Barn, the grazing marsh, the cricket meadow valley and over the rough land towards Newbourne.

About 40 Fieldfares were feeding in Howe's Farm valley before taking off in a westerly direction on the 16th Oct. 30 Fieldfares were feeding on the cricket field on the 21st Nov.

1 Redwing was on Woodbridge Road by the golf course on 5th Dec.

Rooks and Jackdaws have gathered on the field below Sandy Lane, 150+ were counted on the 24th Dec but there were at least 200 on the 7th Jan. Perhaps many of these birds had been displaced from their congregation on the Waldringfield Heath pig field, which now has been returned to arable production.

A Goldcrest put in an appearance in Pam's garden on the 3rd Nov.

A Kingfisher was seen flying upriver past the dinghy park on the 2nd Jan.

A Woodcock flew out of the bottom of the hedgerow near Rudds Barn on the 13th Nov and another flew from the edge of the stubble field near Chapel crossroads on the 12th Jan.

A Great Spotted Woodpecker was seen near Rudds Barn on the 3rd Dec and on several other days.

Joe Lubbock reported that on both the 20th and 21st Nov he watched a Green Woodpecker feeding in his garden, a welcome return after several years' absence from his garden.

Birds have been flocking to garden feeders: Sally has noted Blue, Great, Coal and Long-tailed Tits, Chaffinch, Greenfinch and Goldfinch, Robin, Blackbird, Dunnock, Pheasant and Magpie. Christine has had regular visits from a male and female Great Spotted Woodpecker and I can add Song Thrush, Jay and Pied Wagtail. As yet no Redpolls or Siskins.

The RSPB Garden Birdwatch takes place over the weekend of 25th/26th Jan. It is being advertised widely in the press and online at www.rspb.org.uk/Birdwatch

Stella reported Muntjac barking in the fields behind Cornfield Cottage on the 6th Oct and commented on the 'blood-curdling' quality of the call, particularly when heard at 11.00 o'clock at night. A Muntjac was in Sally's garden in the early morning of the 21st Nov.

Neil Winship saw an Otter in the grazing marsh dyke, which is adjacent to the river wall, in the early morning of the 30th Oct. Lucky, Neil, being in the right place at the right time! Otter spraints have been seen along the river bank both upstream and downstream of the village.

Margaret Lake reported a bat, probably a Pipistrelle, hanging on a wall at the Sailing Club on the 17th Nov.

Pam has seen our first Red Admiral of 2014. It was flying near ivy in her garden around midday on the 19th Jan. In the village the temperature was 8°C in the shade, so in the sun it must have been a degree or two higher. Hopefully the insect didn't use up too much of its energy reserve before finding its way back into the cover of the ivy.

Aconites, which had opened their golden flowers a week ago, have failed to open in this afternoon's sunshine. The nodding heads of Snowdrops still nod without opening fully. Spring edges closer but falters. We know well that searing winds from the east may yet blow. But there are only two months before the first Chiffchaffs call at the reservoir and a month after that the Nightingales will be heard!

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

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