



‘What’s About’

No 42
Winter 2015/16

A robin calls softly from the ornamental cherry, a tree that is flowering out of season. Alkanet, bramble and even stitchwort are in flower in the hedgerows and there are numerous garden plants that are blooming. What effect the extraordinarily mild weather has had on animal life is difficult to gauge, but a frog was encouraged to cross Mill Road on the 4th Jan and on the 10th Jan, Alyson Videlo sent photos of a caterpillar of a Large ‘Cabbage’ White butterfly that had been devouring her broccoli. It ought to be a chrysalis, tucked away in a shed or under a windowsill.



Large White caterpillar on broccoli 10th Jan 2016 photo Alyson Videlo

The autumn movement of wetland birds into the river was slower than usual and good numbers of Widgeon and Teal were not observed until mid November. Although some large flocks had been seen flying down the coast in September, it was not until the 1st Oct that 4 Brent Geese were seen flying behind the island off the sailing club. 80+ **Widgeon** were counted on the day of the Jahan trip (5th Oct), but Golden Plover didn't put in an appearance this year. Perhaps the highlight of that day was the 83 **Avocet** feeding along the tideline, studiously counted by Antony Mason.

Back in early October 2 **Barn Owls** were seen on the 8th over the field inland of Dairy Farm Marsh (DFM) and another was seen on the 9th near Rudds Barn. Very occasionally Barn Owls were seen over or around DFM during Oct to Dec; e.g on Oct 27th a Barn Owl was seen hunting over the marsh in the late afternoon and on the 2nd Nov two Barn Owls were seen there. In January there were more reports of

Barn Owls in the DFM vicinity. 2 were seen sitting in a tree on the edge of the marsh on the 7th Jan, then singles on the 9th Jan and 17th Jan.

Bunny King watched 4 **Buzzards** circling over Cliff Road on the 9th Oct and later that day 3 were seen over Waldringfield Heath.



*A Sparrowhawk has been active in Stan Baston's garden just lately.
Photo Stan Baston*

A **Snipe** was seen close in to the seaward side of the river wall by DFM on the 11th Oct. 2 migrant **Fieldfares** were recorded flying along Howe's Farm valley on the 11th - autumn migrants were arriving, but then, on the 14th Oct, 2 **Swallows** were seen flying over Church field.

However, there did seem to be a movement of birds at that time: many noisy **Blackbirds** were in gardens and hedgerows and being slightly larger, more wary and noisier than our resident form, they had probably arrived from the continent. By the 19th Oct there were several small flocks of 3 – 5 Fieldfares about, with a flock of 15+ near Church Farm.

9 **Redwings** were in trees along Sandy Lane on the 19th Nov, and on the 25th Nov, between Newbourne and Hemley, a flock of 20 Redwings was seen. 10 Fieldfares were noted between Hemley and Kirton Creek, where a Buzzard, a **Kestrel**, about 100 **Brent Geese** and 20 **Avocets** were counted. **Curlews** were feeding on arable fields there.

Several people have noted that they have seen 30 – 50 Curlew feeding on fields between Waldringfield and Martlesham. 28 **Lapwings** passed over Mill Road beyond Plum Tree Cottage where they landed on an arable field to feed on the 20th Nov.

Yellowhammer numbers have, perhaps, picked up a little in the last couple of years. 6 were counted in a large party of mixed finches on the track to Manor Cottage on the 18th Oct and again in Nov. A party of 12 were in the Chapel cross-roads area on the 17th Jan. A female **Bullfinch** was in Fishpond Road on the 20th Oct.

A juvenile **Marsh Harrier** was found dead on the field downstream of the reservoir on the 23rd Oct. The bird was sent off to the Predatory Bird Monitoring Scheme for tissue analysis. We await the results.

A **Green Sandpiper** was feeding on DFM on 27th Oct. 3 **Mute Swans** were on the canal of DFM on the 2nd Nov. A **Short-eared Owl** was reported on the downstream village marshes on the 9th Nov, but so far there's been no sign of our Short-eared Owl that spent so much time on DFM last winter. As we moved into November it was noticeable that there were very few wading birds feeding on DFM, but for that matter the shoreline of the river was relatively quiet too.

A **Kingfisher** has been seen several times on DFM, where it likes to perch on posts that stick up above the water line. It's also been seen in front of the quay and along the foreshore to the reservoir.

On the 14th Dec 200+ Brent Geese were counted around the island in the early morning. There still haven't been many in this part of the river this winter.



Goldfinch on Teasel PRM

Rosalind Erskine emailed to say that she had not cut her *Verbena bonariensis* to the ground this autumn and now was delighted by the **Goldfinches** that came to feed on their seed heads. It will be necessary to cut them down in late winter, but whilst they last it's enjoyable to watch goldfinches feeding away from the niger seed feeder.

Garden feeders have been attracting the usual range of birds but it's always nice when a **Coal Tit** or two, a party of **Long-tailed Tits** or a **Redpoll** comes to the seed feeders. Christine has been fortunate to have a single Redpoll, occasionally two, coming to a feeder in her garden. Pam has had a female **Blackcap** visit her garden – mostly the bird-bath – in the days leading up to the 16th Dec.

Great-spotted Woodpeckers have been arriving at some feeders. They've been seen in the more wooded parts of the village too, such as in the trees around the Sailing Club and the reservoir area. A **Green Woodpecker** was seen and heard there on the 7th Jan and 2 days later one was heard 'yaffling' along the line of oaks by the cricket meadow.



Great-spotted Woodpecker PRM

By the end of December there were several hundred Widgeon and Teal visible in Methersgate bay on the opposite shore to DFM.

81 **Shelduck**, 37 Male **Pintails**, 3 **Goldeneye**, 6 **Great-crested Grebes**, 5 **Little Grebe** and 18 **Golden Plover** could be seen on the 23rd Dec.

40 **Avocet** were feeding along the tideline on this side of the river above the quay on the 30th Dec and into mid January similar numbers could be seen as a loose flock from below the dinghy park to the Hams. I was interested to observe that just after high tide, when mud began to reappear at Melton, opposite the boatyards where there was quite a lot of human activity, 40+ Avocets were feeding. During the winter months Avocets can be seen in all sections of the river.

Christine watched two particularly large swans flying along the river in the Kirton Creek area on the 12th Dec, these she thought were possible **Whooper Swans**. Interestingly, 2 Whooper Swans were recorded at Minsmere on the 13th Dec. Otherwise they've been very scarce visitors along the coast this winter. (BBC News has just shown film of hundreds of Whooper Swans at Welney.)

An **Otter** was seen on DFM on the 8th and again on the 10th Oct
There's been plenty of **Badger** activity and one was watched crossing the Ipswich Rd in the direction of the golf course on the 10th Oct. A Badger dug out a wasp's nest in Kit's garden on the 21st Oct.

3 **Muntjacs** were in the garden at Oak Garage on the 29th Oct, 1 of which darted across the road in front of traffic and entered High Elms.

Bats were still flying on Fishpond Rd on the 6th Dec and again on the 25th Dec. They've been noticed in Sally's garden too, hunting along the hedgerow.

7 **Fallow Deer** were spotted near Whitehall on the 8th Dec. 4 **Seals** were counted at Early Creek on the 29th Dec.

Possibly the two last butterflies to be seen in the village in 2015 were two Red Admirals in Fishpond Road on the 10th Nov, but Christine beat that with a sighting of a **Red Admiral** flying at Ipswich Station on the 21st Dec, yes December.

For this edition I am grateful to the following contributors: Sue and Stan Baston, Joe and Kit Clark, Charlie and Stephen Clover, Pam and Bob Crawley, Rosalind Erskine and Jonathan Webb, Christine Fisher Kay, Joe Lubbock, Chris and Tony Lyon, Janette Mace, Anne Maddison, Steve and Geraldine Merritt, Donna Morgan, Sally Redfern, Alexis and John Smith, Judith Stinson, Linda and Jon Wilkins, Neil Winship, Jackie Brinsley and Lorna Venmore-Rowland.

Please send your sightings to: Peter Maddison, Barnmead, Fishpond Rd
prmaddison@yahoo.co.uk