

## ***AVIAN NOTES :      AUTUMN 2007***

*Autumn has arrived and brings with it a state of flux in the bird-watching calendar.*

Many of our summer migrants have left or are leaving. These migrations can cover vast distances. Swallows are one of our most well known migrants. They are especially gregarious prior to their long route via the Sahara to southern Africa when they are often seen in large numbers on telegraph wires along with House Martins prior to the onset of their migrations. More information regarding their migrations in Spring notes. Other more secretive species like the warblers leave in darkness using stars for navigation.

Meanwhile winter migrants are arriving from Northern Europe to benefit from our “milder” maritime climate. The arrival of Redwings & Fieldfares heralds the coming winter. They leave their breeding grounds of the “Taiga”, the hinterland of tundra & Birch forests of Northern Europe.

In Sweden Fieldfares are colloquially called “snow magpies” as they arrive from the north in front of cold air weather systems before the first snows.

Loosely formed mixed flocks can be heard in the cold autumn nights calling overhead with a thin “seeee” call. Many times I had wondered which species were calling as they are not visible against the dark backdrop of the clear winter sky!

Fieldfares resemble our native Mistle thrush in size. They have a grey head, reddish brown back and arrowhead markings underneath. Redwings are smaller, similar to a Song thrush. Though distinguishable by their red flanks and white eye-stripe.

They often arrive in gardens to plunder berry bearing shrubs, especially Hawthorn, and Rowan trees.

Flocks of Golden Plovers have been passing over in tightly packed flocks, preceded by their high-pitched calls. First “falls” (loose flocks) were seen mixed with Lapwings this month.

Other recent sightings included numerous Red Kites which have been re-introduced locally (Brigstock). Both Red Kites & Buzzards are often seen circling overhead. Several barn owls have been seen hunting along the field margins.

Jays are more visible than usual, leaving the cover of woodland they forage for acorns and nuts which they cache for winter food reserves. Forestry commission research has shown that cached acorns germinate the following year and help to regenerate woodland.

Autumn is a good time to listen out for Tawny Owls, which make themselves known by their calls and can be heard from adjacent woodland.

Several Stonechats have been resident on the track and hedgerow near Old Lodge Farm

It is good time to start building up a feeding programme for the winter via bird-tables etc, as the weather deteriorates birds will benefit from this. We will be selling RSPB products at the shop.

In future notes we will be able to record any unusual sightings and reports.

Wayne Davis  
Old Lodge Farm  
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