



## **‘What’s About’**

## **No 52 Summer and early Autumn 2019**

It's pouring with rain and broadband is down, so for a moment I'll escape back to the days of summer when the temperature on the 25<sup>th</sup> July reached 32C. Was it really so hot?!



*Comma photo: Rolls Barclay*

It was an unusual year for breeding birds. A cool early May saw the late return of **Swifts, Swallows** and **House Martins** and when the latter did arrive there seemed to be fewer of them at several of their usual nest sites. Late broods weren't so evident either and although Swallows and House Martins did well in the Fishpond Road area where, particularly in humid weather, they liked to feed under the canopy of the sycamores, large pre-migration gatherings on the wires on Deben Lane and Mill Road didn't seem to happen. The quay and rigging of the yachts off the pontoon, however, provided the customary perches and launching points for 90+ Swallows and House Martins that hunted over the river, particularly in the early mornings of September.

I haven't heard of Swifts breeding in the village, but as the season progressed parties of Swifts flew over overhead, occasionally 'screaming', which indicates nearby nesting. Small parties have been seen over School Road, Sunnyhill, Fishpond Road and near the quay, and they may have been observed elsewhere.

Several people reported that by mid-summer good numbers of young garden birds were feeding on their lawns and borders, but fledgling **Blackbirds** were notable for their absence in the garden here, as was the absence of many other small birds. A pair of **Magpies**, joined later by their three hungry and noisy offspring, patrolled our garden for several weeks and provided another challenge for anything that to them, was edible. Since the breeding season the garden has held just a few skulking and quiet birds. Perhaps they have been hiding away whilst they moult, but it seems to have taken a particularly long time this year, and now, hopefully, they are in flocks on the arable land, enjoying the seeds that remain on unsprayed stubbles.



*Feeding time for a fledgling Blackbird Alexis Smith*



*Juvenile Great Spotted Woodpecker eyes up the feeder. Alexis Smith*

Back in June it was good to hear **Yellowhammers** calling from the hedge on the track to Manor Cottage, the hedgerow at the back of the reserve, Church Field and Mill Road, and **Skylarks** singing from above several of the open parts of the village. In June, **Green Woodpeckers** were calling from the cricket field area and in Waldringfield Heath, and young birds were seen there too as were young **Great Spotted Woodpeckers**. A **Bullfinch** pair were seen

on the Sandy Lane hedgerow on the 24<sup>th</sup> July.

**Mallards** did pretty well on the reserve, with several broods being raised. 3 or 4 pairs of **Little Grebe** enjoying the safety of the reedy edges to raise their young. **Moorhens** bred too, but a pair of **Tufted Duck** that were on the lagoon for several weeks showed no evidence of breeding success. A pair of **Mute Swans** began to build a nest but before completion left the reserve.

A **Curlew** was calling over the island on the 12<sup>th</sup> June. Was this a non-breeding bird that had remained on the river all spring or perhaps a failed breeder from further north that even in June had become an 'early autumn' migrant?

A pair of **Great Crested Grebe** was seen on the river off The Tips on the 27<sup>th</sup> July and a **Greenshank** was calling over the river on the same day. In our stretch of the river on the 30<sup>th</sup> July 2 **Greenshank**, 2 **Common Sandpiper**, 2 **Black-tailed Godwit** and 15 **Curlew** were recorded, but disappointingly no **Shelduck** were seen. Several years ago 2 or 3 crèches of up to 20 young Shelduck in each, escorted by two adult females would be on the river, but I've seen none between Methersgate and the lower end of the moorings, and

only one crèche of 6 young birds just below the Rocks. I hope others have seen young Shelduck on the river, I'd be interest to know.



*Canada Geese take to the air. Alexis Smith*

A **Marsh Harrier** was hunting over the beet field behind Sunnyhill House on the 27<sup>th</sup> July. When their young have to be fed Marsh Harriers will travel a little distance inland in their search for suitable food.

By the 9<sup>th</sup> Aug a **Whimbrel** was calling over the river. Also, 30 **Goldfinches** were on the edge of the small wood at the northern end of the reserve and 6 **Linnets** were on the gorse there. On the 18<sup>th</sup> Aug a feeding party of small birds included **Yellowhammers**, **Great Tits**, **Blue Tits**, **Dunnocks** and 5 **Blackcaps** were seen in the hedgerows around Manor Cottage.

On several occasions a **Barn Owl** has been seen sitting in the hole of its tree on the reserve. On the 29<sup>th</sup> Aug 2 were seen hunting on the reserve then sitting on adjacent fence posts by the river wall and, after that, when each ones perch proved to be a fruitless hunting position, they leapfrogged one another several times along the line of posts, presumably to find better hunting opportunities – deadly serious for them but an amusing game to human eyes. On the 17<sup>th</sup> Sept a photographer recorded 3 Barn Owls over the reserve, and from photographs observed that 2 of the birds had been ringed. Pity he couldn't read the ring numbers!



*An Oystercatcher took up station on the roof of Waterside. Rosalind Erskine*

By the 6<sup>th</sup> Sept 3 **Teal** were on the reserve lagoon, a couple of Greenshank and a **Whimbrel** were being heard regularly over the river. The first **Widgeon** (6) were on the lagoon on the 18<sup>th</sup> Sept and that number had doubled by the 20<sup>th</sup>. 3 **Avocet** were on the tideline below the reserve on the 20<sup>th</sup> Sept, but by the

end of the month few waders had reappeared as passage birds or to winter. 2 male and a female **Shoveller** were on the lagoon on the 27<sup>th</sup> Sept and remain there into early October.

**Buzzards** have often drifted overhead but one was watched low over Church Field and nearby fields on the 17<sup>th</sup> Sept.

The last two **House Martins** to be seen, which was on the 26<sup>th</sup> September, were darting in a southerly direction.

**Muntjacs** have been recorded everywhere from Sullivan Place and Sunnyhill gardens to the fishpond area, the wetland reserve, Church Field and beyond. Through the summer **Fallow Deer** have been less visible than in the leafless winter months, but in rainy weather their hoof print slots have been spotted in roadside muddy patches. A **Chinese Water Deer**, somewhat larger than a Muntjac, less hunchbacked too and with large rounded ears, was on the reserve on the 5<sup>th</sup> Oct.

Single **Stoats** put in brief appearances – crossing roads, actively exploring around greenhouses and outbuildings, and occasionally in a family group - three on Woodbridge Rd on the 29<sup>th</sup> June.

A bat detector used on Church Field and surrounding locations on the 12<sup>th</sup> July identified 5 **Pipistrelle** bats.

**Hedgehogs** have been seen in gardens of Sansarbres in Cliff Road and Japonica Cottage and the vicinity of Cliff Road and Deben Lane. 2 were photographed in a Mill Road garden. On the 25<sup>th</sup> Aug one hedgehog was by the beach huts.



*Cleaned the bowl out!  
Jan Kerry*

Sadly, a dead **Grass Snake** was on Woodbridge Road near Thatched Farm on the 26<sup>th</sup> July, a young grass snake was found dead on Woodbridge Rd about 200 metres from the village on the 19<sup>th</sup> Sept. And another was found tangled in garden netting on 3rd Sept. An **Adder** (zig-zag pattern along the back) was seen in Waldringfield Heath on the 7<sup>th</sup> Aug.



*Grass snake Olaf Kirchner*

**Hares** were seen in many fields whilst crops were still low to the ground and then immediately after harvest, but for the time being whilst there is no need for hares to chase and court, their presence is much less evident.

A **Hummingbird hawkmoth** was nectaring on busy-lizzie in Stan Baston's garden on 20<sup>th</sup> Aug and another was on buddleia in Christine Fisher Kays' garden on the 31<sup>st</sup> Aug.



*Painted Lady*

the summer months. **Red Admiral, Comma** and **Holly Blue** have done well but the **Small Tortoiseshell** has become a rare butterfly in the last few years.

Thank you for the various butterfly sightings that you have sent me. **Painted Lady** has had a special year, migrating from North Africa through Europe and appearing in good numbers for most of



*Mother Shipton moth*

- *her face on the upper wings!*

*Photo: Christine Fisher Kay*

For this edition I am grateful to the following contributors: Colin Archer, Chris Baldry, Rolls Barclay, Stan Baston, Joe and Kit Clark, Stephen Clover, Pam Crawley, Janet Elliott, Rosalind Erskine, Serena Gold, Christine Fisher Kay, Jan Kerry, Chris and Tony Lyon, Anne Maddison, Anthony and Celia Mason, John Ogden, Sally Redfern, Alexis and John Smith, Linda and Jon Wilkins, Neil Winship, Jill Winter,

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