

Birds and other wildlife recorded in December 2016

As usual we had regular visits from the Red Kites and Common Buzzards, and Black-headed Gulls flew over regularly on their way to and from feeding and roosting. Nobody recorded a Stock Dove this month, but Woodpigeons were certainly around, as were the two common woodpeckers – Green and Great-spotted. The corvids were regulars: magpie, Jay, Jackdaw, Carrion Crow and Rook. The Rook numbers are building up – they are early nesters - and by the third week of the month there was already some antagonism between them and the Jackdaws, though the latter are really hole-nesting species. In complete contrast the diminutive Goldcrests were encountered on several occasions, as were Blue Tit, Great Tit and small flocks of Long-tailed Tits. Coal Tit was also recorded – they are around all the time but not seen as often as their larger, noisier relatives. Someone once said that if a calling Great Tit sounds like a car tyre being inflated, a Coal Tit is more like a bicycle tyre! It's actually rather a good comparison! Nuthatches and Treecreepers were seen and heard as were noisy Wrens, Blackbird, Robin and Dunnock. Finally – the finches: Chaffinch, Goldfinch, Greenfinch (few) and Bullfinch (3 together on the 14th). Keep looking out for birds and send in your records. The year list for 2016 will follow soon. Several Squirrels were recorded, and there were some fresh Molehills but no other mammals were reported. Look out for the new shoots of Bluebells – spring will be coming – the shoots have already been spotted! We need more records – please don't leave it up to just one or two people!

Birds and other wildlife recorded in November 2016

The bird species this month were exactly the same as those recorded in October! Red Kites are now seen on virtually every visit – they also glide effortlessly over the nearby housing estate and cheer us up on a grey November day. Buzzards are also seen very frequently. Black-headed Gulls fly over, presumably on their way to and from Grovebury or other local waterbodies. Woodpigeons were recorded but not Stock Doves; both common woodpeckers were also seen. Our usual corvids were around: Magpie, Jay, Jackdaw, Rook and carrion Crow. Will the Rooks choose to come back again in spring to breed? Blue and Great Tits were seen on all visits, and there were several flocks of those unpredictable Long-tailed Tits, always calling and moving together at this time of year. Nuthatches were frequently heard whistling and hammering nuts into branches, while Wrens and Blackbirds uttered alarm calls. Robins and Dunnocks were around all the time, but there were few records of Chaffinch and Greenfinch. Finally Goldfinch and the melancholy-sounding Bullfinches were recorded. House Sparrows chirped near human dwellings.

Look out for those winter thrushes!

The only mammals recorded were Grey Squirrel and two Muntjacs in the biomass field.

Birds and other wildlife recorded in October 2016

A slim record this month! Several Red Kites and Buzzards were seen, Woodpigeons and Stock Doves were heard and seen, as were both the common woodpeckers – Green and Great-spotted. The usual corvids were around: Magpie, shrieking Jays, Jackdaws, a few Rooks and Carrion Crows. Blue and Great Tits abounded and there were a large number of smallish flocks of Long-tailed Tits that gather in parties now that the breeding season is over. A few Nuthatches whistled and called from trunks and branches and there was no shortage of Wrens, Blackbirds, Robins and Dunnocks. House Sparrows chirped from trees and thick hedges near human habitation, and four members of the finch family were recorded: Greenfinch, Goldfinch, Bullfinch and Chaffinch. Now is the season to look out for other finches – Siskins and redpolls, small birds that flock together and chatter as they seek for catkins and small seeds in Larches, Alders and Birch.

Look out also for the wintering thrushes – Redwing and Fieldfare.

The only mammal recorded this month was Grey Squirrel!

Birds and other wildlife recorded in September 2016

Birds: Red Kites, Sparrowhawks and Common Buzzard were all recorded this month. Woodpigeon was frequent – on every visit – but Stock Doves were not seen, though they were certainly there! Both common woodpeckers – Green and Great-spotted- were fairly regular, as were the common corvids: Magpie, Jay,

Jackdaw, Rook and Carrion Crow. Now that the breeding season is over, tits are beginning to form flocks, sometimes with finches – look out for Blue and Great Tits, and parties of Long-tailed Tits, all recorded this month. Chiffchaffs are still around – and may even stay over winter in small numbers – listen for the “wheet” calls. Nuthatches and Treecreepers were recorded as were the other common woodland birds: Wren, Blackbird, Robin and Dunnock. Some of the finches were recorded too: Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Goldfinch and Bullfinch. Now there are masses of winter thrushes beginning to migrate into England so listen out for the high pitched calls of Redwings and the chacking calls of Fieldfares.

Butterflies: Ten Speckled Woods were seen on the 9th, along with Comma, 2 Red Admirals, Small White and Ringlet. There should still be a few of the over-winterers around on warm sunny days in October.

The only **mammals** recorded were Rabbit and Grey Squirrel

Birds and other wildlife recorded in July and August 2016

These two months are usually quiet ones for birdwatchers; most birds have finished their breeding cycle, some migrants have already departed, and many are in the process of moult, and are therefore less confiding than usual. However, many of the usual suspects were seen in the woods. Red Kites are regularly seen circling overhead. Sparrowhawks were seen and their juveniles were heard; Buzzards also put in frequent appearances. A Herring Gull flew overhead, and Stock Dove and Woodpigeon were seen – the latter on every visit! Both Green and Great-spotted Woodpeckers called; most of the corvids were also seen – Magpie, Jay, Jackdaw and Crow (and where are the Rooks feeding and roosting?). Blue and Great Tits are common, and we still saw some Chiffchaffs and Blackcaps; these are known to overwinter in our changing climate so keep an eye out for them in the months to come. The calls of Nuthatches are quite regular, especially in the old woodland area, and there are frequent records of Wren, Robin, Dunnock and Blackbird, and – not quite so obvious now they are no longer singing – Song Thrush. Finally, three finches were recorded – Chaffinch, Greenfinch and Bullfinch. Look out for flocks of Goldfinches and mixed finch and tit flocks now the autumn is coming. One of the regular volunteers, David, has kindly made nine sturdy bird boxes which have now been put up in the newer areas of the wood, many of them within easy sight of the various benches. They are all numbered and we may get a map produced to indicate roughly where they are. Thank you!

Very few **mammal** sightings these two months: just Grey squirrel and Rabbit!

Also very few **butterfly** records sent in – just three of the “browns” - Ringlet, Meadow brown and Marbled White (yes, this one is a brown). Butterflies will be on the wing for some time yet, so do make a record of what you see.

Birds and Plants seen in the woods in May 2016

A Pheasant was seen – a lucky escapee from the shooting fraternity. Unexpectedly a Grey Heron was seen flying over the wood. A pair of Common Buzzards with a juvenile were seen circling overhead on the 27th – how rare this would have been only 20 years ago! Rather less exciting were the usual Stock Doves, Woodpigeons and Collared Doves. Swifts are occasionally seen – these birds are not nearly as common as they once were, and the sight and sound of their “screaming parties”, once really quite regular in Leighton Buzzard, has diminished. Both common woodpeckers were seen and heard as were all the common corvids: Magpie, Jay, Jackdaw, Carrion Crow and Rook. After an almost complete loss of nests in the rookery last year, it is good to see young Rooks again! Blue and Great Tits and Long-tailed Tits are frequently seen as are some of our summer migrant warblers: Blackcap, Chiffchaff and Whitethroat. Skylarks sing territorially from the nearby field, while Nuthatches and Wrens sing and call loudly. Blackbirds, Song Thrushes, Robins and Dunnocks were also encountered frequently. House Sparrows, those most urban of birds, chirped from the edge of the wood near human dwellings, while three of the common finches were also regulars: Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Bullfinch.

Butterflies: At least eight species of butterfly have been recorded this month: Holly Blue, Peacock, Comma, Small Tortoiseshell, Brimstone, Large and Small Whites, Speckled Wood and Orange-tip. Look out also for Green-veined Whites, Red Admiral and – as summer approaches – Marbled Whites, Common Blue and if you're really lucky(!) perhaps a Painted Lady.

Birds and Plants seen in the woods in April 2016

Birds: We've lost the winter visitors now, but some of the summer visitors are much in evidence! There have been plentiful sightings of Red Kites in and around the woods – often several at a time. On more than one occasion they have been seen annoying the occupants of the rookery. Sparrowhawk and Buzzard are also present. Stock Doves and Woodpigeons have been recorded, though not Collared Dove this month. Both the common woodpeckers are regularly spotted (no pun intended), and also all the usual corvids: Magpie, Jay, Jackdaw, Carrion Crow and Rook; the Rooks are nesting successfully this year – their numbers have returned to double figures. Tiny Goldcrests have been heard, and Blue, Great and Long-tailed Tits are seen and heard regularly. Of the summer visitors so far we have records of Chiffchaff, Blackcap and Common Whitethroat – more next month! Nuthatches are noisily whistling and Wrens and Starlings are also calling loudly when disturbed. Listen for the lyrical songs of Blackbird and Song Thrush, and the treble songs of Robin and Dunnock. House Sparrows chattered away in the usual places near housing; and there were regular sightings of four finches: Chaffinch, greenfinch, Goldfinch and Bullfinch.

Other wildlife: Peacock and Brimstone butterflies have been recorded – plenty more species to follow. Several species of bumblebee have also been noted. Mammals seen were Muntjac, Squirrel and the cubs of Fox.

Birds and Plants seen in the woods in March 2016

There have been regular sightings of those wonderful Red Kites this month, as well as the Buzzards. Stock Doves, Woodpigeons and Collared Doves are seen and heard regularly. Listen out for the yaffling of Green Woodpeckers (their old country name is “yaffle”), and both the territorial drumming and chipping alarm calls of the Great-spotted Woodpeckers. All the corvids are frequently seen (well, not Ravens and Choughs!) – Jay, Jackdaw, Magpie, Rook and Carrion Crow; after a very poor Rook year in 2015 it's good to be able to report that the rookery is rapidly expanding this spring. On the 30th of the month we had 15 nests, and the April counts are considerably higher. Tiny Goldcrests sing loudly for their size, and there are many records of Blue and Great Tits, and of their very distant relatives, the Long-tailed Tits. The first migrant summer warbler – Chiffchaff- was recorded on the 30th; in-fact there were four of them. Nuthatches have begun to nest in the same tree as last year. Treecreeper was spotted, as were Wren, Blackbird and Song Thrush – and the winter migrant thrush, the Redwing, was recorded, probably for the last time till the autumn. Robins and Dunnocks were common, and house Sparrows were observed in the usual places near human habitation, and finally to the finches: Chaffinch, greenfinch, Goldfinch, Bullfinch – and the two rarer species: Siskin and Lesser Redpoll.

The only **mammal** recorded this month was a Fox.

Bird and Plants seen in the woods in February 2016

On the 6th a Red Kite was being harassed by a party of Carrion Crows; and there were sightings of two Buzzards on two days towards the end of the month. A group of 14 Black-headed Gulls flew over in the Grovebury direction. Generally, this month was pretty similar to last February. We had Stock Dove and Woodpigeon (but no Collared Dove reported), and occasional sightings (and sounds) of both commoner woodpeckers – Great-spot and green. Magpies chattered, Jays shrieked, Jackdaws chacked (20 of them on the 18th), and Carrion crows called, but there were only one or two single Rooks seen throughout the whole month. Our Rookery really does seem to have gone – how sad. There were plenty of records of Blue Tits, Great Tits and Long-tailed Tits, and many calls from the noisy Nuthatches. Treecreeper was seen – they are far from rare but they are very tricky to see as they blend in well with the tree bark – try listening for their high-pitched call instead. In the thrush family we had Blackbird and Song Thrush, and a couple of Redwings on the 12th. Listen out for the lonely song of the Mistle Thrush – they are early breeders and may be sitting already. Finally, some of the other common species: Robin, Dunnock, and four finches: Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Goldfinch and Bullfinch. Look and listen out for Siskins – bright small green and yellow finches, often very athletic, and usually near conifers; they are in nearby gardens so they are almost certainly in the woods.

Plants

The colder snap of weather has slowed down the growth of Bluebell leaves, but already the first partially open flowering spikes of a few have been seen on the 25th. According to Dave and Sue

Booth, this is the earliest, in their many years of checking, that they have been seen. The previous early records were on the 2nd and 3rd of March. The latest were in 2013, on the 17th of April. There's always something interesting to see and record!

Birds seen in the woods in January 2016

An almost identical list to last January's, with the exception of a couple of Cormorants observed flying over on the 15th. The only bird of prey recorded was a Red Kite. Woodpigeon and Stock Dove were seen regularly, and the two common woodpeckers – Great Spotted and Green- were also seen and heard. Magpie, Jay, Carrion Crow and Jackdaws were commonly encountered – but no Rooks. It's not many years since we had over 50 active nests in the Wood. Blue, Great and Coal Tit were seen as well as Long-tailed Tits, which are now separating into pairs instead of their winter flocks. Whistling Nuthatches and noisy Wrens called. Blackbirds and Song Thrushes are already beginning to sing on milder days, and Robins have not stopped singing all winter! Dunnocks and House Sparrows are regular as are the finches: Chaffinch, Goldfinch and Bullfinch.

Please send in your sightings – sometimes the most obvious species don't appear on our list just because nobody's sent in a record!