

Birds and other wildlife recorded in May 2017

Hérons, probably on their way to the canal. Only two different birds of prey recorded this month: Red Kite and Buzzard. One Red Kite was seen being chased by an angry and very noisy Rook. Woodpigeon and Stock Dove were seen but no Collared Doves. Both common woodpeckers – Green and Great-spotted were around. Swifts have been seen on a couple of occasions flying over the wood – they will nest in urban areas so do listen out for “screaming parties” around town and the housing estates. There is a Swift project being carried out in Bedfordshire, so please note any that you see going into buildings. The following common birds were seen (or heard) on most visits: Robin, Song Thrush, Blackbird, Wren, Great Tit, Blue Tit and Long-tailed Tits. Swallows were also observed flying over the woodland and in a nearby road. There are plenty of those summer visitors to be seen, like the Warbler, Chiffchaff, Blackcap, Willow Warbler (surely the most delicate and enchanting singer of all!), and Common Whitethroat.

Nuthatches are nesting in tree holes. The common corvids are also noisily about: Magpie, Jay, Jackdaw, Rook and Carrion Crow; most of the young Rooks have now fledged but will be hanging around the nests and the adults for a while yet. House Sparrows chattered near human habitation, and finally three finches were also commonly recorded: Chaffinch, Goldfinch and Bullfinch. The sun has brought out butterflies (though as I write this it is pouring and they will all be hiding!). A Common Pipistrelle was heard at the very end of our evening walk on the 12th. No other mammal records! The show of Bluebells this year has been excellent – the best ever, according to one observer, and they are spreading!

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The two main raptors, Red Kite and Buzzard circled regularly over the wood – the former is often seen wheeling over the nearby housing estate. Woodpigeon and its subtler relative, Stock Dove, were frequent but nobody recorded Collared Dove. Green and Great-spotted Woodpeckers called and drummed. Dunnocks, Robins and Wrens were encountered on most visits, and it was pleasant to hear several Song Thrushes uttering their varied songs in different parts of the wood. Blackbirds too gave out their flute-y melodies. (Which is your favourite song?) Great and Blue Tits sang and called and there were still a few small groups of Long-tailed Tits. All the summer warblers have now arrived in Britain, and many were found in the woods: on the 1st five separate Chiffchaffs and a Blackcap were heard; a couple of days later the first Willow Warbler sang its enchanting song. Quite a contrast to the more assertive sounds we heard from Nuthatches, magpies, Jays, jackdaw, and crows. The Rooks nest are difficult to count now that the leaves are fully out – probably 11 to 13. House Sparrows chirped from areas near human territories and three finch species were recorded: Chaffinch, Goldfinch and Bullfinch. No Greenfinches were heard this month – as a species they have been hit by disease, but they are still around in the woods. The Bluebells have been magnificent, and are definitely spreading from the old woodland area into the new wood. They, like Dog's Mercury and Wood Anemones are known as Ancient Woodland Indicators (AWIs to the botanists). There has also been a very good display of Lesser Celandine. The mammal list is short – Grey Squirrel, Fox, and Muntjac. Two of these little deer were seen crossing the picnic area on the 3rd – perhaps they were hoping for a change of diet from the Bluebell shoots...Keep those records coming in

Birds and other wildlife recorded in March 2017

Red Kites were seen frequently, sometimes two or three at a time, and probably more often than the Buzzards. An occasional Black-headed Gull flew over the wood. Both Woodpigeon and Stock Dove were seen, and Green and Great-spotted Woodpeckers were definitely heard, the latter beginning to drum their territorial notes. Dunnock and Robin called from within bushes, while Song Thrush and Blackbird sang their uplifting songs – or, in the case of the latter, uttered frequent alarm calls as they flew off. Wrens made loud calls and songs despite their diminutive size, and both Great and Blue Tits set about their territorial business. Long-tailed Tits are not seen in such sizeable flocks now – they are pairing up and will be gathering moss and feathers to construct their intricate springy nests. Chiffchaffs called their name many times over, while Nuthatches whistled and “chitted” from the branches or trunks. All the common corvids (Jay, Carrion Crow, Jay, Magpie) were – well, common! It looks as though the Rook' nests total about 13, but things are still happening up in the canopy and the number may change. House Sparrows are found near human habitation, and three finch species were recorded: Goldfinch, Chaffinch and the piping Bullfinch.

Wood Anemones in bloom and the first Bluebells were just beginning. As I write this in mid-April, they are a glorious sight and have an equally magnificent scent!

Birds and other wildlife recorded in February 2017

We certainly see Red Kites very frequently over the woods – on most visits. Three were seen together on the 13th. Buzzards are also common visitors, and a third raptor, Kestrel, was also spotted. Woodpigeons are seen on every visit, and frequently both Green and Great-spotted Woodpeckers are seen and heard; listen out for the latter drumming – the Great-spot equivalent of a territorial song. Dunnock, Robin and Wren are never far away, and now the Blackbirds and Song Thrushes are singing beautifully and loudly. Great Tits and Blue Tits are beginning to investigate nest sites – check out their visits to nest boxes. Long-tailed Tits are not seen so much in flocks now – they are beginning to pair up. Nuthatches are seen/ heard regularly. The usual corvids are noisily around – Magpie, Jay, Jackdaw, Rook and Carrion Crow. The Rooks seem to have had about 10 nests before “Storm Doris” came through and reduced the nests to a handful; at last count, they were back up to about 13. It’s a perilous business having a home made of sticks at the top of a tree! House Sparrows were seen in the usual places near urban life, and four finch species were observed: Chaffinch, Goldfinch, Greenfinch and Bullfinch.

Grey Squirrels and Rabbits were seen this month but nobody reported deer. Frogspawn was reported, however!

Birds and other wildlife recorded in January 2017

Three species of birds of prey this month: Red Kites frequently, a Common Buzzard which was seen perching in the old wood (surely, they will breed in our wood soon?), and Sparrowhawk. Woodpigeons were regularly seen and heard but nobody reported Stock Dove. Black-headed Gulls were spotted flying overhead, and both common woodpecker species were reported- Green and Great-spotted. Dunnock, Robin and Blackbird commonly encountered. Song Thrushes and Great Tits were heard singing early in the month, and Blue Tits and Long-tailed Tits were also often met with. Nuthatch was observed but not the shy Treecreeper. The usual corvids were about: Magpie, Jay, Rook, Jackdaw and Carrion Crow; there has been quite a lot of quarrelling between the Rooks and jackdaws, although they have different nest requirements – Rooks have bundles of twigs and sticks, while Jackdaws seek out holes. Already the Rooks are perching on trees beside old nests – we should be able to get a better idea of actual nest numbers soon. Starlings were seen in and near the woods, as were House Sparrows. The usual finches were also seen: Chaffinch, Goldfinch, greenfinch and Bullfinch, the latter often observed as a pair.

The only mammal recorded in January was Grey Squirrel.

The Bluebell shoots are now peeping through the leaf litter in many places – they are quite a lot behind compared to last year.