

Birds and other wildlife recorded in December 2021

Again, it has been a quiet month for records – was it the mud, or the virus, or Christmas planning, or a combination? Well, although this is just a short list, I think we can be sure that there was more wildlife around than the list suggests! Black-headed Gulls were seen occasionally, and of course the Woodpigeons were regular. Only three species of corvid were recorded this month: Magpie, Jackdaw and Crow – no activity at the rookery, though there will certainly be some activity and some rivalry with the jackdaws in a few weeks. Blue Tits and Great Tits were about – on a couple of fine days, the Great Tits were in singing mode. Blackbirds of course – do keep an eye out for their northern cousins, Redwings and Fieldfares – and now that it's January (as I write this) listen out for the Mistle Thrushes, very early breeders. Finally, to the finches: Bullfinches are still heard and seen regularly, as are Goldfinches, and this month a small flock (6) of Siskins was seen near the crossroads of the bridleway and the main ride. Listen out for them – high calls, rather bell-like sometimes. There are already signs of Bluebell shoots peeping through in the leaf litter in the old wood – spring is coming.

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Red Kites were very much in evidence over and near the woods; a Sparrowhawk was also spotted. There are regular calls from Tawny Owls reported from nearby – this is a good time of year to listen out for them. Black-headed Gulls were often seen making their way between nearby fields and waterways – a group of at least ten on the 24th. The corvids were also out in force: there were at least 50 Jackdaws and Rooks, and about 30 Carrion Crows on the adjacent fields on the 14th. Magpies and Jays were also recorded in the woods though in smaller numbers. Several flocks of Long-tailed Tits were observed, as well as Great Tits and Blue Tits. No Coal Tits were recorded – look out for them in the larches and other conifers. Nuthatches were heard, Wrens alarmed, and Blackbird, Robins and Dunnock were also noted. Song Thrushes are certainly around but not so noticeable at this time of year; but do look out for their wintering visitor cousins, Fieldfares and Redwings. There was a mixed finch flock of about 100 birds on the 14th – in the trees and hedges to the west, very noisy and very active! Goldfinches and Bullfinches were seen on other occasions.

The other mammal record received was of three Grey Squirrels.

Please keep those records coming in! there's a lot more out there than this paragraph suggests!

Birds and other wildlife recorded in October 2021

A Pheasant was heard calling (sounds like coughing) near a hedge. The only bird of prey recorded was Common Buzzard, but almost certainly Red Kites were around. Black-headed Gulls flew over, and of course there were plenty of sightings of Woodpigeon and Stock Dove. Green Woodpeckers were recorded but not Great-spotted, though again they were certainly around, just waiting for somebody with a notebook to record them! The common corvids were seen - Magpie, Jay, Jackdaw, Rook, and Carrion Crow; a very large number of the last three species were around on the 9th – this must have been as a result of the work on the adjacent field which presumably disturbed and revealed plenty of tasty insects and grubs in the soil. Blue Tit, Great Tit and Coal Tit were recorded as were Long-tailed Tits, now often seen in small flocks. A Chiffchaff was heard – maybe one of the last we shall hear this year – though, like Blackcaps, some will overwinter in the UK. Nuthatch was recorded as were the common species: Wren, Blackbird and Robin. Three finch species were also noted: Chaffinch, Goldfinch and Bullfinch.

Now is the time to look out for winter visitors: Redwings and Fieldfares are now arriving in their thousands – both are cousin to the Blackbird and the Song and Mistle Thrushes. Look out for any of these members of the thrush family on the berries.

It's the time of year when the bird boxes are checked. It is always rewarding when the boxes are used, and the check also gives an opportunity to clean out the contents and thus remove any mites etc. that might interfere with breeding success next season. There are 13 numbered boxes in total (one other was destroyed by vandals a couple of years ago), and – just to ensure that there is no bad luck for the occupants, there is no number 13! Two still need checking – with extra long ladders.

Many thanks to Dave M and John for checking, and to Dave for his report on the contents. All those looked at had been occupied and most contained moss, some with grass or lichen or pet hair. Blue fluff in one of them probably came from a decaying dog toy – one year there was a lot of bright yellow tennis ball fluff! One nest had an unhatched egg, and one was found on the ground with not only a mossy bird nest, but also a leafy mouse nest; this box has now been re-fixed to the tree.

Other wildlife: grey squirrel was the only mammal recorded (apart from humans and domestic dogs!). A few butterflies were still seen, including Speckled Wood, Red Admiral and a rather faded Meadow Brown. Some spectacular fungus has also been seen – if you see anything striking, please do photograph it and send it to the website.

Birds and other wildlife recorded in August & September 2021

August and September are always fairly quiet months – the breeding season is over for most species, and many are keeping quiet, re-growing their plumage and getting into condition for winter. Many of the summer migrant species have left, and the winter ones have not yet arrived. There is also a shortage of people recording what they see in the Woods, so this is a plea to everyone to jot down what you see on your walks – please send it to me or put it on the new friends of Linslade Woods Facebook page.

So, what was recorded? A Red Kite soaring high over the trees – always an uplifting sight. Stock Dove and Woodpigeons of course, and both our common woodpeckers: Green and Great-Spotted. All the common corvids were seen – and frequently heard, especially Jays and Jackdaws; Carrion Crows, the occasional Rook and Magpies joined the group. Blue Tit, Great Tit and Long-tailed Tits were all seen – do look out for the shyer Coal Tit, especially among the conifers. The only warbler recorded was the Chiffchaff, but they and Blackcaps will still be around now. Here were also the sounds of Nuthatch and Wren, and of course, Blackbird and Robin. Finally, House Sparrows were encountered in the trees near to housing. Not a single finch was recorded!

Other wildlife: A Grey squirrel – no surprise there! And a few butterflies, notably Speckled Woods, and Large White.

Let's hope for a bigger and better list for October!

Birds and other wildlife recorded in July 2021

Well, this has been a strange month for records – I think we have more butterfly sightings than bird sightings!

We'll start with the **birds**: Stock Dove and Woodpigeon of course, and both woodpeckers - Green (several of these, probably adult and juvenile) and Great-spotted. The corvids have all been recorded except the Rook, Magpie, Jay, Jackdaw and Carrion Crow. Blue Tits and Great Tits were about, as were several of our summer-visiting warblers: Chiffchaff, Willow Warbler, Blackcap and Garden Warbler. A few Nuthatches were about, and some Wrens. Also, Blackbird, Robin and Chaffinch. This is always a quiet time of year for many species - they have bred (though some - like Blackbirds - will continue to have later broods) - and many are exhausted and in poor condition after the demands of parenthood! They prefer to behave unobtrusively.

And the butterflies and other wildlife: Two **mammal** species have been recorded: Rabbit and Muntjac, and of course there were still a few tadpoles in the pond. Some of the **butterflies** spotted were: Speckled Wood, Meadow Brown, many Marbled Whites, Large Skipper, Ringlet, Small White, a Silver-washed Fritillary, Gatekeeper and Brimstone. The **orchids** have all gone over now, though there are still a few tattered stalks with seeds; we had plenty of Common Spotted-Orchids, a few Bee Orchids, and a Pyramidal Orchid.

Please keep an eye out for all wildlife in the woods – it may be common, but we still need to know about it.

Birds and other wildlife recorded in June 2021

Stock Doves and Woodpigeons – of course. Much more unusual was the record of Swifts over the wood; these perpetual flyers (they only stop flying to breed – everything else is done on the wing) were seen a couple of times. They spend just a few weeks in the UK and are usually observed more in towns than over woodland as they hawk for insects in screaming parties. Look out for them before they return to Africa! Great-spotted Woodpeckers were seen, as were all the common corvids – Magpies, Jay, Jackdaw, Carrion Crow and Rook. At the opposite end of the size scale was the sighting of a Goldcrest, our smallest bird – though its song is quite loud. Blue Tits and Great Tits were common as were some of the UK's summer warbler visitors: Chiffchaff, Black Cap, Garden Warbler and Common Whitethroat. Nuthatches whistled and made other schoolboy noises, and Wrens were also common (more often heard than seen!). A few Starlings were observed. Blackbirds and some Song Thrushes sang and alarmed, and finally there were sightings of Robin and House Sparrows.

Butterflies are around in numbers now – look out for Speckled Woods in the dappled shade of the wood, and Meadow Browns along the grassy edges – and lots more! And those Common Spotted orchids, to be seen by the hundred! Many are near the pond area, but they also abound along ride edges and grassy banks. Some are very tall. After a long hunt I managed to find six Bee Orchids not far from the pond area – they are going over now, but it is good to see them. Did anyone see a Pyramidal Orchid? Look out for the robust magenta pyramid-shaped blooms. And finally – water. We seem to get either much too much rain or not enough, and a couple of weeks ago (before the downpours) there was a danger of the water in the pond evaporating before the tadpoles were fully grown. So, John and Bob loaded a tank of water onto the GST vehicle, and after a little “water engineering”, they topped up the pond. They promise that no orchids were damaged! And the tadpoles can continue to enjoy the water. Thanks!

Birds and other wildlife recorded in May 2021

Red Kites were frequently seen over the woods and nearby houses and gardens (three on the 7th), and two Buzzards also on that day. Woodpigeons and Stock Doves were encountered on most visits. Great Spotted-woodpeckers were about, as were most of the common corvids: Magpie, Jay, Jackdaw, Carrion Crow and Rook – these were still around the nests on the 7th of the month but there was no activity round the nests three weeks later. Blue tits and Great Tits were commonly recorded but no Coal Tits. Skylarks were singing from nearby fields – always an uplifting sound! Some of the summer migrants were found – plenty of singing Blackcaps, and no shortage of Chiffchaffs. One Garden Warbler was recorded – a difficult one to separate by song from its cousin the Blackcap – especially as towards the end of the breeding season they mimic each other. Nuthatches whistled and called, and Wrens, Starlings and Blackbirds were frequently recorded.

On the 15th five singing Song Thrushes were heard – quite a record (unless it was one bird with a sense of humour following the human recorder around the wood). Robins and Dunnocks were regularly noted, and House Sparrows were in the areas near to human habitation. The only recorded finch species was Chaffinch.

The only “other wildlife” actually noted, was Grey Squirrel – six on the 15th.

Birds and other wildlife recorded in April 2021

A Pheasant was heard calling from time to time. Red Kites gliding majestically over the woods are a common sight; although they are generally carrion eaters, they can still generate a sense of distrust among other birds, and it was interesting to see a Crow chasing – and trying to attack a kite on the 14th. Stock Doves and Woodpigeons are common. Both common woodpeckers – Green and Great-spotted – were heard and occasionally seen. As well as the aforementioned Crow, the common corvids were also seen, Magpie, Jay, Jackdaw, Rook, the rookery consisting of about 15 active nests in the second week of April. Blue Tits and Great Tits were recorded (surely someone heard a Coal Tit from one of the conifers?). Only two warblers were recorded this month – Chiffchaff and Black Cap. Listen out for those melodic Willow Warblers and occasional Whitethroat scratchily singing from a hedge or scrub. Nuthatches are common, whistling, piping and making a variety of sounds. Wrens and Starling were regular. Blackbirds are best heard early in the morning when they perform a beautiful dawn chorus – and Song Thrushes were also heard occasionally. Many birds are going quiet as the breeding season progresses – they do not want to draw attention to their nest sites. Robins, Dunnocks and House Sparrows were regularly observed, the latter near the adjoining roads. Only one finch was recorded – Chaffinch. As the weather warms up there are more butterflies to be seen – this month's included Brimstones, Peacock, Small Tortoiseshell, Small White and Orange-tip. The last-mentioned lays its eggs on Garlic Mustard – green at first and easier to spot as they turn orange (though

small)! The floral triangle near Knaves Hill is doing well – look out for its seasonal plants, and let's hope the mowing brigade keep off!

Birds and other wildlife recorded in March 2021

A Common Pheasant was recorded in the area near the tunnel. Red Kites were seen on several occasions – but no other raptors; look out for Sparrowhawks and overhead Buzzards. Stock Doves and Woodpigeons are always present. This month only one of the common woodpeckers was noted – Green Woodpecker. Great-spotted Woodpeckers are certainly around but it is the shortage of recorders rather than the shortage of birds that means they are not included in the March list! All the common corvids were about – Magpie, Jay, Jackdaw, Carrion Crow and Rook. Blue Tits, Great Tits and Coal Tits were recorded. Chiffchaffs were heard regularly – has anyone heard Blackcap in the woods? They are certainly around commonly now – and Willow Warblers too. Keep your ears open! The stalwart Wrens and Blackbirds, Robins and Dunnocks sang and alarmed as people passed, and two people recorded the first Song Thrush singing for some time. House Sparrows chirped near the areas alongside houses, and two finches: Chaffinch and Greenfinch were also noted.

The above list is very roughly in taxonomic order – the official order of species which shows their relationship to each other. The last bird I'm going to put on the list presents a problem. It isn't native. It's never been recorded here before. It isn't exactly a wild bird – and this individual was quite happy around people....It has a rather unfortunate association with Xmas...and the answer is – a Turkey! Ranger John found it – not far from a gate (had someone dumped it there?) and after a little lateral thinking and co-operation with another Ranger and the RSPCA, it was encouraged into a box (the bird was pretty huge) and taken away. The RSPCA rep said it was a First for her!

No mammals were recorded, but if you are missing four-footed creatures – the sheep are back again! Brimstone and Peacock butterflies have been noted – there should be some other species around now, and there is frogspawn in the pond. Sweet Violets are about as are Wood Anemones, there is plenty of Dog's Mercury, and some Bluebells are in bloom.

The mud is on the wane, so do go out and enjoy the woods and make a note of what you see.

Birds and other wildlife recorded in January & February 2021

As there have been relatively few records sent in, here is a joint Jan/Feb listing. Spring is coming, so now is the time to get out into the woods (with suitable footwear of course!) and see what is going on; are the winter visitors still here? Have the spring/summer arrivals begun? As I write this in early March there have already been records of occasional House Martins and Swallows arriving on our shores. The raptors to start with – Red Kites of course, and Buzzard, and a female Sparrowhawk was spotted on the 12th February. A Tawny Owl was heard quite regularly; a new Tawny Owl box has been put up to replace the elderly ruinous one (which had been used from time to time by Stock Doves). Green Woodpeckers and Great-spotted Woodpeckers were observed, the latter heard drumming in mid-February. All the common corvids were about: Magpie, Jay, Jackdaw, Carrion Crow and Rook – how many will nest in the Rookery this year? The usual tits were around: Blue Tit, Great Tit (often singing very territorially), Coal Tit and Long-tailed Tit. Nuthatch and Treecreeper were recorded; the latter is more common than one might think – it is well camouflaged, and its high-pitched notes are almost out of the range of some people's hearing! Dunnocks are frequent. The finches: Chaffinch, Goldfinch and Bullfinch are certainly about – nobody has recorded a Siskin or a Brambling, though I can boast a few Siskins in my Linslade garden this week! Finally – just beyond the actual woods but seen in the adjoining temporary sheep field - Meadow Pipit and Skylark.

Start now to look out for **butterflies** – most spend the cold months as eggs, larvae or pupae, but a few species overwinter as full adult butterflies. It was a nice surprise to see a male Brimstone flying about in Bluebell Wood on the 24th of February.