

Birds and other wildlife recorded in May 2024

Birds: Red Kites and a Common Buzzard have been seen over the Wood. Woodpigeons were common, and there were occasional records of Stock Dove; no Collared Doves this month – look for them near the edges of the wood, near human habitation. Both the common woodpeckers were heard and occasionally seen: Green and Great-spotted. All the common corvids were around – Magpie, Jay, Jackdaw, Rook (very few nests this year), and carrion Crow; a Raven called in passing – they are breeding in Rushmere CP. The common tits were also about: Blue Tit, Great Tit, Coal Tit, and a small flock of the distantly related Long-tailed Tits, in the “pony field”.

Three warbler species were recorded: Chiffchaff, Blackcap and Garden Warbler – these last two are quite hard to separate on their songs now. Someone said that Garden Warblers sound rather like Blackcaps on a high! There were plenty of records of Wren, Blackbird, Song Thrush and Robin, and (rare at this time of year), a Mistle Thrush as early breeders they are usually heard much earlier in the year and then keep pretty quiet. Dunnocks and House Sparrows were recorded, and Skylarks sang from adjoining fields. Pied Wagtails do visit nearby gardens with ponds, and one was recorded in the wood. Of the finch family – Greenfinch (which does seem to be doing better now after a long period of disease) – and Chaffinch. No Goldfinches? The bird app, Merlin, recorded a Nightingale; it's not out of the question, but I am a little cynical!

Mammals: Roe Deer; Muntjac; Grey Squirrel; Rabbit; Red Fox.

Butterflies: It hasn't been a great year for butterfly records so far – they probably need some more sun and warmth (like us mere humans!) But the following have been recorded in May, though there will have been other species too: Brimstone,, Small White, Orange-Tip, Holly Blue, Peacock, Speckled Wood

Plants: Common Vetch is now quite common Good to see Ragged Robin, a plant normally associated with damp habitats (!)

Do send in your records of any wildlife that you find interesting!

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Red Kites were seen soaring overhead – how magnificent they are! – but nobody recorded the other common raptors: Sparrowhawk, Buzzard, or Kestrel. A Mallard was seen overhead – and so was a moorhen (curious). There were Stock Doves and plentiful Wood pigeon, but no woodpeckers were noted; surely there must be some drumming going on! One species new to the list – and not entirely welcome – was Rose-ringed Parakeet, a species that is taking over many urban areas throughout the whole of Europe! Despite many ideas and research about escapees and deliberate releases the jury is out on exactly how they started to proliferate so quickly and readily. Back to more normal species: Magpie, Jay, Jackdaw, Rook (not in large numbers) and Carrion Crow were recorded. So were the tiny (but vocal) Goldcrest, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Coal Tit and Long-tailed Tit. A Marsh Tit was identified by an ornithological app., but since this is pretty rare - I have my doubts! Several of the warblers were recorded: Chiffchaff, Willow Warbler, Black Cap and the slightly frantic-sounding Garden warbler. Nuthatches were seen and heard as were Wren, singing and alarming, Blackbird and Song Thrush. Robin and Dunnock and House Sparrow (the latter fairly near to housing). Skylarks sang in the adjoining fields. A Pied Wagtail was identified, possibly on its way to someone's garden pond; and finally, two members of the finch family: Chaffinch, and Greenfinch (good to see these returning in larger numbers after a severe decline).

Mammals: Muntjac and Roe Deer - the latter very obligingly appearing on a work party day. Also, Grey Squirrel, Fox and rabbit.

Butterflies: Brimstone, Peacock, Red Admiral, Orange-tip, Holly Blue and Small White – there will be more; look out for them!

Other insects: Only Buff-tail Bumblebee and White-tailed Bumblebee were noted but there is plenty more to look out for!

Birds and other wildlife recorded in March 2024

There have been many sightings of Red Kites over the wood. (Do you remember when we had to go towards the West country to see one?!). Buzzards are also seen and heard calling regularly. Other “flyovers” were Mallard and Lesser Black-backed Gull. Stock Dove and Woodpigeon were regularly spotted, and both the common woodpeckers, Green and Great-spotted were recorded, the latter heard both drumming and calling. The usual corvids were noted: Magpie, Jay, Jackdaw, Carrion Crow and Rook, the latter now with apparently about 8 nests between the old and new Woods. A Raven was also heard – they do breed at Rushmere so listen out for their “cronking” calls; maybe we’ll get a pair in Linslade too!

To the somewhat smaller birds: Goldcrest, Blue Tit, Coal Tit, Great Tit all recorded as were Long-tailed Tits. The warblers – Chiffchaff and Blackcap were recorded; in the past they have always been regarded as migrants to the UK, but more are now lingering here over winter too! Nuthatch and Treecreepers were about – what better place for them than a quiet wood? Wrens were regularly heard – both making their alarm calls, and their long loud songs. Starlings were recorded – nearer to human habitation, and three of the thrush species: Blackbird, Song Thrush, and Redwings, the last of which will soon be departing to more northerly breeding areas. Robins, Dunnocks, and House Sparrows were all observed – the Robins often in large (musical!) numbers. Skylarks called in the adjoining fields. A Pied Wagtail was recorded near gardens, but – oddly – the only finch recorded was Greenfinch!

Mammals: Only Grey squirrels were actually noted.

Amphibians: Frogspawn in the pond.

Plants and trees: The Bluebells have started to show – always a wonderful spectacle. And they do seem to be spreading. Look out for the blooms and buds on many other species such as Hawthorn and Blackthorn, and Cherry – and Cowslips, Dog’s mercury and other species that favour woodland.

Butterflies: Brimstone, Peacock and Comma all recorded in March. Look out for Orange-tip, Red Admiral and Holly Blue!

Birds and other wildlife recorded in February 2024

Red Kites were frequently recorded gliding over head, but no Buzzard this month. Green Woodpeckers were also noted on several occasions, sometimes two calling against or to one another. No Great-spotted Woodpeckers noted, however; listen out for early spring drumming! The common corvids were all noted: Magpie, Jay, Jackdaw, Rook and Carrion Crow. The Rooks are just beginning to start on new nests – virtually none were left from last year – there have been some very strong winds. Do keep an eye out for activity in the old wood. Goldcrests have been recorded – a tiny bird but quite vocal with a high register. Blue Tits, Great Tits and Long-tailed Tits have all been seen – but nobody recorded a Coal Tit. They are there somewhere! Nuthatches are very vocal now and have been recorded on several occasions. Wrens are also regularly heard – both singing and uttering alarm calls.

In the thrush family: Blackbirds, Song Thrushes, and Redwings – but no records of Fieldfares. Dunnocks and – nearer to human habitation – House Sparrows are about. Among the finches we’ve had records of Chaffinch, Greenfinch, and Goldfinch and the delightful Siskin, a bird of the forests, mainly recorded near here in the winter – and venturing onto garden feeders too.

The mammal list is brief – Grey Squirrel and Rabbit (including one deceased specimen). Signs of Badger activity and the aroma of Fox. There is also Frog spawn in the pond. The Dog’s Mercury is in bloom and orchid rosettes are appearing widely. Look out for the fungi too.

Birds and other wildlife recorded in January 2024

A Pheasant was heard calling. Several times Red Kites were seen circling overhead – what an uplifting sight! Also flying over were various gulls: Lesser Black-backs and Black-headed. Woodpigeons and Stock Doves were recorded but not Collared Doves, usually encountered near the housing. Both common woodpeckers were about, Green, and Great-Spotted. The usual corvids were recorded: Magpie, Jay, Jackdaw, Rook and Carrion Crow. Only two Rook nests so far – rookeries are mobile habitations, but it would be sad to lose ours – it doesn’t seem many years ago that the nests were numbered in their 40s and even more! Goldcrest has been recorded more than once – not a rarity but often hard to hear (especially as one ages). Also, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Coal Tit and a small flock of Long-tailed Tits. Nuthatch and Wren were around – both often heard

before seen! Four of the thrush family were recorded: Blackbird, Song Thrush, and their wintering cousins – Fieldfare and Redwing, but no Mistle Thrush; these are early breeders so it's really worth listening out for their long carrying and slightly melancholy calls now. Robin, Dunnock and House Sparrow were also recorded, as was the unexpected Grey Wagtail, probably on its way to local garden ponds. Finally, the finches: Chaffinch, Greenfinch (whose population may be recovering somewhat from a finch disease), Bullfinch and quite a lot of Goldfinches.

Other wildlife: Muntjac were seen, and so – more unusually - were Roe Deer; on one occasion five of the latter were recorded, including 3 bucks. Good news! Grey Squirrels were seen a-plenty, and there were occasional Fox sightings. Bee Orchid rosettes were seen in the area not far from the pond, and Hazel female flowers, really tiny and scarlet, were plentiful. Look out for other early woodland specialists!

Thanks to all those who send in their records; it really helps to build up a picture of the wealth of wildlife in the Woods and will help when we have to fight those development battles!