

NATURE SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Now including Bee & Mammal news

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NATURE SOCIETY
Making a real difference



GOODBYE TO THE BIRDS

Our Swallows will be off on their travels again, seems like only a couple of weeks since they arrived. While we stay at home tucked up in the warm they have to travel thousands of miles to the sun.



Swallows start to arrive here from Africa in April. Breeding soon starts and during the summer they will often raise three broods.

By early September, most swallows are preparing to migrate. They flutter about restlessly, and often gather on telegraph wires.

Most leave the UK during September, with early broods of youngsters being the first to go. But a few stragglers may hang around into October.



The return journey to Africa takes about six weeks. They travel down through western France and eastern Spain into Morocco, before crossing the Sahara Desert and the Congo rainforest – finally reaching South Africa and Namibia.

Swallows migrate during daylight, flying quite low and covering about 320 km (200 miles) each day. Travelling at speeds of 17-22 miles per hour. The maximum flight speed is an amazing 35 mph. At night they roost in huge flocks in reed-beds at traditional stopover spots. Since swallows feed entirely on flying insects, they don't need to fatten up before leaving, but can snap up their food along the way. Nonetheless, many die of starvation. In their wintering areas swallows feed in small flocks, which join together to form roosting flocks of thousands

of birds. If they survive, they can live for up to sixteen years. Repeating the journey many times during their lives. Amazing that such tiny birds weighing just 16 – 25gms can make this incredible journey at all.

HAVE YOU SEEN THE HERNshaw?

Another bird which has been increasingly seen around the Marina lately. Also known as the Harn or Harnser. The old English name was 'hragra' (sounds a bit like Klingon that one) so what am I talking about?

The Heron. That majestic bird of the water margins. The unmistakable Grey Heron is a tall bird with a long neck and legs, and a heavy dagger-like bill.



The most common call is a loud, harsh "frank", which is often given in flight. The call and the wingspan of around 6ft makes them easy to identify. The wing beats are slow and the legs extended. In many ways they can seem almost prehistoric.



If observed at close quarters they are a very attractive bird with a black crest and markings which continue down the throat and onto the belly.

In or near water, they are solitary feeders and very patient, and will standstill for long periods stalking their prey. Feeding mainly fish, amphibians and small mammals. It has also been observed catching and killing juvenile birds such as ducklings, and occasionally takes birds up to the size of a water rail. Small fish are swallowed head first, and larger prey and eels are carried to the shore where they are subdued by being beaten on the ground or stabbed by the bill. They are then swallowed, or have hunks of flesh torn off.

For avian prey such as small birds, the prey is held by the neck and either suffocated or killed by having its neck snapped with the heron's beak, before being swallowed whole. The bird regurgitates pellets of indigestible material such as fur, bones and the chitinous remains of insects. The main periods of hunting are around dawn and dusk, but it is also active at other times of day. At night it roosts in trees. Mainly living in heronries with the majority of nests at least 25m above the ground.

However, reed-bed heronries are not unusual, and they will also nest on cliffs, bushes, sometimes even on buildings or bridges. It's not unusual for a single tree to hold as many as 10 nests.



The record is 200 nests in a single heronry. However, as it's quite normal for herons, disturbed at their nest, to regurgitate their last half-digested meal, it pays to keep well clear. They lay 3-5 eggs. The young fledge at 6-8 weeks. Many juveniles do not survive their first winter, but if they do, they can expect to live for about five years. We have seen a young one at the marina lately. Surprisingly one of which was spotted, standing on a pontoon, within 6ft of an adult.

BERRIES

Some plants use berries as a clever way to entice birds and other animals to distribute their seeds. A plant that produces berries surrounds its seed in juicy, fleshy pith, rewarding the birds that eat them with vitamins and energy.



Ivy

The dry pith of ivy berries contains nearly as many calories as Mars bars!

In most cases, while the bird digests the pith and juice, the seeds travel undamaged through the bird's gut, and may be dropped many miles from the parent plant. It's no coincidence that lots of young trees grow near a fence or post that a bird might perch on! Some berry seeds, like those of juniper, will actually grow better after passing through a bird's gut, which removes natural chemicals that would otherwise prevent the seed from growing.



Juniper

Seeds, like mistletoe, are sticky, and must cause birds some frustration when they stick to their bills! The birds wipe their bills on other trees, unwittingly sowing more mistletoe plants. Most berries are either red or black. This makes the berries easier for birds to find them.

By September, the hedgerows are laden with berries, providing delicious pickings for people and birds alike. Berries are an important food source for many birds during the winter, especially when the ground is too frozen to hunt worms or snails, and there are few insects about. Some birds, like song and mistle thrushes, blackbirds, redwings and fieldfares, find most of their winter food from berries.

Birds feed in different ways. Redwings and starlings happily feed in flocks. Others, like the mistle thrush, may try to keep a valuable, berry-laden bush just for itself.

Thrushes and waxwings prefer berries with smaller seeds, like rowan, as they are really only interested in the flesh, whereas other birds, like hawfinches, can make use of the seed itself, and so are attracted to berries with large seeds, such as hawthorn and blackthorn. The overall size of the berry is important, too, with larger berries like rosehips generally proving too large for birds smaller than blackbirds or fieldfares.

The Blackbird is less fussy than others, typically taking a range of fruits including Haws, Rosehips, Sloes, Dogwood, Buckthorn, Elder, Yew and Holly



Haws

This preference is also shown by our winter visitors, namely Redwings & Fieldfares.

The Song Thrush shows a clear preference for Yew, Sloes, Elder and Guelder Rose but avoids Rosehips.



Sloes

The larger Mistle thrush prefers Sloes over Haws.

Late in the fruiting season, when the choice is limited to Holly and Ivy, preference seems to be strongly towards Ivy, suggesting another reason why Holly berries may remain untouched until very late in the season.

WARNING!



It is worth mentioning that many berries that attract birds are often poisonous to humans. Typically, Yew, which if the seed inside the flesh is chewed death can

occur within three hours. It was eaten, in the 1980s, by four prisoners as a means of suicide. Three of the four succeeded.

Certain species of Juniper can also be poisonous. Wild Hawthorn berries contain cyanide.

Discretion should be the rule the same as we would use in choosing fungi to eat. DON'T unless you know exactly what you are doing.

COTTAGE GARDEN INSECTS

Every time we go to do some work in the Cottage Garden we are totally distracted by the insects. Earlier in the month we were excited to find an Orange Shield Bug.



Not being able to identify it a local entomologist was asked for help. It appears that it has just emerged into an adult and will harden and achieve its normal colours in a day. As we have a number of Sloe & Forest shield bugs in the garden we can only assume it is one of those. We were going to cut back the old heads on the Stachys but

found it was full of tiny shield bugs, so we have left them on. After all the idea of the garden is for nature conservation and it is certainly living up to expectations.

On the same day we were very much taken with some bright metallic green beetles. These are Green Mint Beetles, which make perfect sense as they were in the Herb bed. Both they and their larvae feed on mint leaves.

They are absolutely stunning and seemed to change colour when you looked at them from different directions.



We also watched two Small Copper Butterflies busy among the plants.

The Small Copper is a fast flying butterfly that, once settled, is unmistakable with its bright copper-coloured forewings.

Usually on the wing May to June and August to September with 3rd brood flying in October and even as late as November.

Small Copper is usually found in small colonies often consisting of no more than a few dozen individuals. The numbers of Small Copper fluctuates depending upon the weather. Hot summers will usually boost numbers substantially so long as the larvae foodplant, Sorrel & Dock, is not affected by drought. What little beauties.

BIRD EVENT

Prior to having our bird stall, we had to have an evening of weighting up and labelling the seed. As you can see we had a good team and thoroughly enjoyed ourselves, as the Nature Society always do.



But then we would listen to the Met Office wouldn't we!! The forecast for Sunday 23rd was terrible with gales, heavy rain all day so we decided that rather than cancel altogether we brought it forward a day to Saturday. It was dull, chilly and damp. Sunday in contrast was sunny, warm and lovely. Grrrrrr!

However, we did manage to Raise £220 for our wildlife charities. Unexpectedly, as it did not seem that we had that many visitors so a great surprise.



We had lots of feeders, nesting material, nest boxes and information leaflets as well as a huge range of seed, fat balls, suet cakes etc.



Now we are planning to have a stall on the Christmas Market on Dec 2nd. We sold a couple of starter 'kits' to people new bird feeding so thought this a good idea for giving as gifts. Therefore, as well as all the items we had on the last day we would make up some proper gift packs.

The more people who become interested in looking after birds the better. So, we had quite a few different information handouts as well. How & what to feed, Garden Birds Identification, Importance of Hygiene, Making nest boxes, Siting nest boxes. One lady took some of the information away to use at her local primary school.

If anyone is interested in helping out on the day please let us know either via Facebook or in the office.

NEW CROSSWORD/QUIZ/WORD SEARCH



Hopefully there will be a new game in the office for you to have a go at some time during October. Not sure yet if it will be a crossword, word search or even a quiz. So, keep your eyes open and remember that all

proceeds go to wildlife charity, and please have a go. People have often said in the past that they would not be any good at it but lo and behold the last time someone who said that, they won a prize. Never say never!

LATEST NEWS

Female Common Shrew dead on footpath to Grebe 01.09.18

Adult & young Herons standing on Grebe pontoon 07.09.18

Chiff chaff heard on Finch island 07.09.18

Orange shield bug in cottage Garden.09.09.18

Large number of tiny Shield bugs in Cottage Garden 09.09.18

Small copper butterflies in cottage Garden 09.09.18

Large Yellow Underwing Moth beneath step on boat on Grebe 17.09.18

Green Mint beetles in Cottage Garden 17.09.18

Dead field vole on footpath to Grebe 24.09.18

Dead Wood mouse on footpath to Grebe 24.09.18

Speckled Bush Cricket FB 1 27.09.18

Two Hornets around bush at top of Heron steps 28.09.18

Green sandpiper on new lake 29.09.18

Redshank on new lake 29.09.18