



**RSPB East Surrey
Local Group**

**NEWSLETTER 63
Spring 2018**

LEADER'S BLOG

Well this winter threw its worst at us in March! The results of this year's Big Garden Birdwatch, carried out at the end of January when the weather was mild, show poorer sightings of blackbirds and robins which dropped to 4th and 9th places respectively in England compared to the relatively better showing of blue tits, great tits and long-tailed tits which rose to 3rd, 8th and 9th places. It was also encouraging to record greater numbers of greenfinches and siskins seen in gardens. Milder winters tend to discourage birds to come into gardens looking for food but don't stop feeding them as they soon flocked back in from the countryside when the snow and ice arrived.

Don't forget there is much you can do to "Give Nature a Home" in your garden and experience the joy of watching wildlife, if only from your windows. Locate bird feeders where they can be easily seen from indoors,

especially the kitchen sink, but make sure there is cover nearby to avoid predation of hungry birds by cats or sparrowhawks. Also keep those feeders clean to avoid the spread of disease and keep them topped up all year round. You never know what might drop in? If you see any interesting behaviour or unusual sightings, not just of birds, we'd love to hear from you.

At the end of this financial year we donated £1500 towards RSPB work on our grasslands and heathlands. Join us on one of our evening visits to Ashdown Forest in June to see nightjars and woodcock. We also attend local events with RSPB goods so look out for our stand and come and tell us about your encounters with wildlife.

Please check our web site for our monthly programme of meetings and outings, including local walks. There should be something for everyone. We've recently opened a

Facebook page and we'd love your feedback.

Whatever your interests I urge you to get out this summer and enjoy what's on offer.

John Lawrence (Group Leader)

HAWFINCH INVASION

I have experienced some amazing things in nature over the years, but this winter's influx of that stunning and magical bird the hawfinch, the UK's largest, rarest and most elusive finch has not only been spectacular, but also unprecedented. A couple of years ago we were treated to the mysterious arrival of over one hundred birds in the Box Hill area. This time round however there has been upwards of 700 birds alone in the same locality, and several thousands estimated across southern England. The influx is attributed to poor seed crop yields in other parts of Europe, notably Germany and Rumania, the species main winter feeding grounds. The plentiful steep banks of fruit bearing yew have been the bird's



main target along the North Downs here in Surrey. Indicative of their rarity; up until this year, I had only ever seen a single bird locally and that had been pointed out to me as it flew from a nest in Chelsham when I was a young child in the early 1950's. You can imagine my joy when I found 2 birds on Kenley Common this year, and later on another in early March atop a large ash tree near Warren Barn Farm Woldingham. Following periodic crossbill invasions to our shores, some birds stay with us to breed in subsequent years. It is to be hoped that a proportion of these very welcome and enigmatic immigrants do likewise, so bolstering our very small and dwindling breeding population.

Brian Thomas

RED KITE REFUSE

Brian Hobley was looking out of the window of his Warlingham home this week, when the Council's contractors in their lorry were proceeding down the road collecting household rubbish. To his utter amazement two magnificent and acrobatic red kites were seen following the vehicle and its workers, stooping low over the ground and skillfully picking up any spare food items that were on offer. It's amazing to think that we have now gone full circle since once this species graced the streets of London in medieval times similarly scavenging on any pickings. It was of course subsequently persecuted to oblivion with only a minute remnant population surviving in rural Wales. Then came the most successful of

reintroductions in the 1990's to the Chilterns, and the subsequent expansion of the species in huge numbers across the south of England and right into our back yard once more. Yes, it's taken a long, long time and much hard work but what a wonderful way to clean up our streets and make our day.

Brian Thomas

LOCAL BIRDS

Apart from the amazing influx of hawfinches, and despite the various periods of snowfall, it has not been a particularly vintage Winter locally for birds. That having been said it has been good to see bramblings again in the district, the largest flock was in excess of 50 individuals seen by Wendy Bainbridge at Dorin Court Warlingham on 1st April.



If you are lucky enough to encounter this species staying this late with us before their return migration to Scandinavia, the males can be in the most stunning plumage with their jet-black crowns and bright orange and grey hues. In connection with such 'late returners' it's also worth keeping your eyes, but more particularly your ears open to hear the beautiful song of the redwing. Usually it's only a modest sub song or mixed flock chattering that can be heard but very rarely I have heard full song, which is particularly attractive. As I write, the first returning passage wheatear was at Nore Hill Chelsham on the 31st March and blackcaps have been seen recently on several garden feeders; whether or not these are migrants from Africa or central European winterers can't be

proven. As I look at the flowering blackthorn, the emerging wood anemones, and hear the wonderful display flight of lapwings hopefully again to breed in Chelsham, I know Spring, though late, is now nearly upon us and look forward with eager anticipation to the newly arrived migrant birds, the carpets of bluebells, and the magical dawn chorus.

Brian Thomas

GOING EXTINCT

The last remaining male northern white rhino, Sudan, died in the Ol Pejeta Conservancy in Kenya on March 19, 2018.

In response to this news, the World Wildlife Fund issued the following statement from Bas Huijbregts, African species manager: "This is a wake-up call to humankind that our

actions have irreversible consequences for the species we cherish. It's more extinctions of iconic species from human caused pressures are inevitable but from each of these tragic losses are some hard-learned lessons. That which is true at the ecosystem level is true at the micro scale. We can all do more to assist wider conservation outcomes and there is no better place to start than in one's garden.

Next time you venture into your garden, ask yourself whether our fauna can move in and out freely? The garden can be an oasis for wildlife: sow a pollinator-friendly seed mix into your border; allow gaps in your fences for our threatened mammals such as the hedgehog and our declining amphibians to move through; make sure you leave things a little messy and at all costs avoid making your garden resemble something out of a housing brochure, nothing is worse for our wildlife than an enclosed patch of plain grass lawn!

Sam Thomas

One Fell Swoop... The Editor wishes to thank Elitta Fell once more for her technical skills and efforts to put this Newsletter together for publication.