

## A Weekly Constitutional

Once a week I try to get out for a circular walk from the monastery before the dog-walkers and joggers begin and, hopefully, whilst the migrant birds are still moving. We seem to be just so situated in Turvey that for an hour or two after dawn we can hear and see migrant birds passing over.

On a circular walk which takes in some of the higher ground with wider horizons one has a better chance of sorting out which birds are probably long distance migrants from those which remain with us all the year round. A few birds moving on a narrow front could well be only local birds departing a roost or changing from one field to another, but several flocks on a broad front mostly flying in the same direction usually means that these birds are long-haul migrants either arriving with us to spend the winter or departing for sunnier shores.

And a regular walk to Hill Spinney and back this autumn has made this coming and going very apparent – each week differing in both content and number of birds. In early September there was an obvious passage southwards of the hirundines, that is the Swallows and both House and Sand Martins, with a few Meadow Pipit and Yellow Wagtail. A week later and it was the turn of the Skylarks and the Linnets and a few Pied Wagtails, some heading South and some newly arrived on their traditional winter fields.

Early October produced the first Redwings suddenly appearing from the east after a night of rain and followed an hour later by a wisp of Snipe hurtling south westwards. A week later and the first Fieldfare heralds its arrival from the north with its characteristic chakking accompanied by a few silent Blackbird and a Redwing or two. By late October the tempo increases as both Fieldfare and Starling begin to arrive in large numbers accompanied by a few small flocks of Wood Pigeon.

At the very end of the month, on a brilliant clear day, Lapwing head south and the sky is full of raptors. Most of these will be resident birds but not the Merlin paying close attention to the now well-established flocks of Linnet and Skylark on the higher ground. As the Hobbies go south with the Swallows to Africa so the Merlins come south from Fenno-Scandinavia with the Skylarks, their favourite prey. I wonder how long a flock of sixty Skylark can sustain one Merlin but suspect it will soon move on.

A week later and flock after flock of Wood Pigeon move south with a few Stock Dove, and, almost to order, as the westerly wind suddenly gives way

to a bitter north-easterly and a bank of North Sea 'haa' rolls in, two wild swans emerge from the gloom and make their way south-westwards immediately overhead, given away by their silent wings and a dash of yellow on their bills. This is a fitting climax to a fascinating run of birds, all within the parish of Turvey.

Elsewhere, but within a few miles radius, large flocks of wintering finches bring life to an otherwise seemingly empty landscape; a close look reveals a solitary Brambling among the hoards of Chaffinch and Greenfinch, and a step back for another view startles a Woodcock from the nearby ditch. Home produces Siskin and Crossbill, and so it goes on.

Br. John