

Familiarity Breeds Content

Last autumn's article detailing the birds seen on a weekly local walk is the inspiration for this one at the risk of going over the same territory twice. Some people might find this confinement to one place potentially boring and one often sets out on the same old route wondering whether it will be worth it this time. But familiarity does indeed breed content for not only do the birds change but one becomes finely attuned to the differences, no matter how small. This year's autumn has followed the same general pattern as last year's but the detail has been fascinatingly different.

It began well with a fine passage of hirundines in late August and throughout September, possibly because there were so many late broods as a result of the awful summer weather. Groups of House Martin, with the odd Sand Martin among them, were still passing over on October 1st. Hobbies have been very scarce this year, perhaps for the same reason, but two were chasing Swallows on 31st August, on the same day that four Yellow Wagtail were still present by Hill Spinney. These remain scarce breeders with us often associated with crops of Field Bean.

And then the autumn really began with a good passage of Meadow Pipit and, for the first time for me, possibly Tree Pipit too, told by their different call. And what was to become a feature of the autumn: Siskins and Jays. The BTO website reports a huge influx of the latter from the continent with birds seen coming in off the sea in Kent and following the coast eastwards in North Norfolk. 668 passed over Hunstanton cliffs on 6th October. This is usually a sign that the Acorn crop has failed elsewhere.

Pied Wagtails too have made a welcome return after being unusually absent throughout the summer. Several small flocks have been watched bouncing their way south or southwestwards. But things really began to get going with the arrival of the winter thrushes. Huge numbers of these were again reported on the coast and we received our first Redwings on 10th October at about the same time and also several Song Thrushes, including one with a cream-coloured head.

Fieldfare were unusually late but suddenly arrived en masse on 25th and 26th October. This period produced several days on which certain field corners were throbbing with a variety of resident and autumn arrivals.

One such flock include Yellowhammers, Chaffinches, Linnets, Starlings, Blackbirds, Song Thrush and many Redwing and Fieldfare, all frantically feeding in short bursts interspersed with sudden dashes into the nearby trees or hedges. Another such flock included Wood Pigeon and Lapwing too. We seem to have had our Wood Pigeon influx early this year with hundreds present in early October but now dispersed or moved on. Goldfinch have also been a feature of the autumn often in the company of Siskin and Redwing. One wonders if this is their normal association on the Continent too. And lastly, the season was nicely rounded off with a small party of Redpoll heading westwards on 17th November. And now we wait for what the winter will bring.

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