

Autumn Watch - Turvey

It's always a moot point when autumn begins but I now realise that what was always for me the beginning of the summer holidays, in late July, was summer already past its peak in terms of the natural world. Many birds were already dispersing after breeding, and moths and butterflies already in decline. So we can justifiably begin with two Ravens 'kronking' their way northwards on 21st July with first a Kestrel and then a Hobby in hot pursuit – it's always worth looking twice. A Hedgehog in the laundry basket also occasioned a second look a few days later, but this was more likely to have been a post-prandial nap than the beginning of hibernation. We found several more later including two in a more suitable pile of leaves and two looking decidedly ill.

Summer birds seem to have departed early and in not such great numbers as usual apart from the House Martins which seem to have done very well. We saw good flocks of these above the garden, twice with a Hobby below. A few Yellow Wagtails and Meadow Pipits also passed over heading south. Birds of prey have put on a good show with some fascinating interactions, as above. The most surprising, perhaps, was watching a Wood Pigeon attacking a Sparrowhawk on the ground, attempting to beat it with feet and wings. Closer inspection revealed the corpse of a recently killed juvenile Wood Pigeon nearby and the reason, no doubt, for the parent's attack. Too late!

An early morning migration watch was enlivened by a Peregrine circling the end of the garden and showing great interest in our neighbour's flock of white doves. They got away this time. Young Buzzards have also been frequent garden visitors, up to three at a time, and distinguishable by their higher pitched begging calls and, perhaps, by shorter outer-tail feathers giving the tail a graded appearance.

Siskin have also been a feature from September onwards, but there's been no large scale passage of winter birds as in other years, though thrushes did arrive on cue in October. The first Redwing flew over on 12th October and two Song Thrush came down into the garden on the same day. The trees at the end of the garden then became the focus for a whole bevy of thrushes for a couple of weeks. Redwings, Blackbirds, Mistle and Song Thrushes were all present and were eventually joined by a flock of Fieldfare on 25th October, birds we normally only expect to see in the garden during hard spells.

But most surprising of all was an immature, or second winter, Gannet sailing through the garden on 14th October at 12.47 pm, after a long period of northerly winds. I've seen two immatures nearby on a previous occasion obviously lost in a mist but this one seemed to know where it was going, flying steadily north-westwards within a few feet of our rooftops. Unfortunately it showed no interest in the garden pond so I can't really claim it for the winter garden bird watch. Time perhaps for a bigger pond.

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