

## Let's Twitch Again

A recent visit to the North Norfolk Coast brought out that perennial tension in me of whether to follow the crowd and add a new bird to the list or to wander off on one's own and find a place to sit down and wait for the wildlife (of all varieties) to reveal itself. As a monk my preference is for the latter, both in North Norfolk and here in Turvey. So I sit and wait or walk but at an easier pace and, not knowing what's around the corner, or just about to approach me, I'm constantly surprised: everywhere and everything then becomes a revelation. In North Norfolk it was the staggering colour of the plants on the shingle at Blakeney Point, sheets of white Sea Campion, mixed with rich yellow patches of vetch and the occasional purple of Sea Pea. And looking closer the place was alive with insects: Common Blue butterflies, Small Coppers and a Painted Lady; several species of bees, and menacing-looking Sand Wasps with thin waists and elongated red and black bodies searching for caterpillars to bury and lay their eggs on – to be eaten alive later! A visit to sand-dunes at Titchwell was equally enthralling. Sitting at the furthest point possible from the busy reserve produced a constant toing and froing of Little Terns on the hunt for fish, my very own Whimbrel, Common Sandpiper and a late Golden Plover, (perhaps from further north than its departed confreres); and at my back, a dune system full of life: Houndstongue and Sea Spurge attracting wasps, bees and migrant moths – a Silver Y and a minute Diamond-back, nesting Wheatear and a bevy of wary Shelduck. Perhaps best of all, out to sea the last of the wintering Brent Geese heading home across the North Sea, 900 passing in a couple of hours.

This is 'listing' with a purpose, the naming of names to understand more, to follow up all the connections which any eco-system produces, the fields and gardens of Turvey included. The Abbey garden alone produces an endless stream of delights: a newly emerging dragonfly, the Broad-bodied Libellula, still clinging to its exuvia (the cast skin); a large Noctule Bat a few feet overhead in all its chestnut glory; Ravens shuttling backwards and forwards from feeding grounds to a possible nest site to the north-west; Hairy-footed Flower Bees humming loudly from the Comfrey – male and female quite distinct; a Curlew circling slowly south-eastwards, calling and looking down – what is it looking for?; a Wood Pigeon one wing extended vertically as it showers in a heavy downpour. And Abbey Park is no less rewarding, yielding secrets on every visit: a Hawfinch perched on top of a White Poplar, the last perhaps of many from the preceding autumn influx; the first Lesser Whitethroat, perhaps beating the Common Whitethroats to it as easterly winds have aided its passage to us via Italy or even Israel; and two Jays wings spread-eagled (!) on oak trunks, the constant movement of head from tree to body suggesting they are 'anting' - picking ants off the trees to apply them and the formic acid they exude onto their feathers in an effort to be rid of lice, a behaviour I've never seen before off the ground in forty years of watching.

Putting a name to all these creatures widens the search: I can find out more. So listing has its uses but always as a first step, or in the words of the palaeontologist Richard Fortey:

*There may be those whom getting the name right is more important than enjoying the thing itself, but there must be many more for whom the discrimination of species opens the way to appreciating the marvellous richness of the world.* (p.16 The Hidden Landscape)

By the way, I've now recorded 153 species of bird locally with 96 in or over the garden alone, each one with a story to tell and part of a wider story still. Contemplation in action.

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