

The Fieldfare

On a recent walk, on the 8th November, the bushes around Turvey were dripping with thrushes: Redwing, Fieldfare, Blackbird, a few Mistle Thrush and the odd Song Thrush; and as the walk progressed this scene was repeated several times over, with Fieldfares being particularly prominent. The total for these by the end of the day was well over 900, with flocks varying in size from 7 or 8 birds to one or two hundred. Most of these were to the West of the river with birds cascading from one wood or copse to the next in search of berries. These were almost certainly freshly arrived birds stocking up on haws after their journey of several hundred miles from the Continent. They are, for me, in Turvey, autumn's equivalent of the spring arrival of Swallows and Martins; heralds of harsher times to come, making merry while stocks last. One day the trees and bushes seem empty and the next overflowing with an exuberant hustle and bustle.

This scene can happen at any time from late October onwards and lasts until the haws are exhausted, usually by early December. Then the Fieldfare have to turn to other sources of food, such as slugs, insects and worms on pasture. There are usually a few attendant Starlings and Redwing with them, and these flocks may hold together until well into the spring, some perhaps being reinforced by other Fieldfare from further West, and odd individuals lingering until late April or early May. If cold weather strikes large movements of these thrushes can again be seen, with birds fleeing to the South or to the West Country, or even as far as Ireland, in search of frost or snow-free fields. On one memorable occasion Portsmouth was inundated with Fieldfares caught between two snow fronts. And on another, one honoured my garden in Sussex for ten days, zealously guarding a few lingering crab apples against all-comers until eventually overwhelmed by a flock of Starlings.

They are a wonderful bird to have on our doorstep and always associated for me with those first days in late autumn when a north or north-easterly wind has cleared the skies of cloud at last. Long may they continue to 'tchack' their way over Turvey.

Br. John

