



It's a debatable point when summer ends and autumn begins. I tend to take the departure of the Swifts as the first arbitrary sign that autumn is beginning to make itself felt, and most of August seemed to bear this out until we got to the end and those fabulous last three days. It was on the last of these that I managed a lengthy trek from Harrold to Park Wood to Santa Pod to Odell and back to Harrold and then on to Turvey. The choice of the route was quite deliberate: a clockwise circuit to the north so that the sun was directly behind me, at least at first. This gives a much better chance of taking the wildlife by surprise and gaining a close approach. This strategy was amply rewarded this time with a superb view of a Hobby hurtling straight towards me, taking a dragonfly, and then settling in a dead tree within eighty paces of where I sat. This made finishing the coffee somewhat difficult but the view was perhaps the best I've ever had. This is a beautiful bird with a black mask and white cheeks, a heavily streaked breast and pale red leggings - all set off by slatey-blue back and wings. Seven more Hobbies presented themselves during the day, mostly hunting dragonflies at some height, but they can take Swallows and Martins too. We have a pair not far from the village and a sure sign that they are about is a sudden mad dash in one direction by the Swallows and Martins. Nine Buzzard, five Sparrowhawk and eight Kestrel also presented themselves. This is a good time for raptor watching as the young of all these species are now flying and often give themselves away by their higher pitched and more insistent calls. It's also a good time for coming across small groups of birds working their way through the hedgerows feeding on the abundance of fruit and insects. These can often comprise of an interesting mix of migrants and resident birds. One flock included Blackcap, Reed Warbler and Reed Bunting, while another had Whitethroat and Spotted Flycatcher. The migrants are preparing for their long journeys south and one can also hear snatches of song from Willow Warblers and Chiffchaffs as they pass through. Perhaps the most unexpected find was a flock of 45 Yellow Wagtail among cattle at Carlton. These are now scarce birds nationally but we still have breeding birds around Turvey, and especially around Santa Pod. The British race of Yellow Wagtail has a wonderful lemon yellow head and breast.

We live in an exciting countryside, full of movement and sudden surprises - it just needs that slightly mad English ability to wander around in the midday sun for things to happen.