

Just every so often an ordinary walk suddenly becomes very special. In early October an otherwise dull plod up to Hill Spinney was turned into a red-letter day by the passage of two obviously lost juvenile Gannets - about as far from the sea as they could be. This was at about 4 pm after a morning of thick mist. They were flying at tree-top height and heading south-west but in a very tentative manner, even bumping into one another at one point. My guess is that they'd come in over the East Anglian coast and were unaware that they were over land until the mist cleared later and by then were too far inland to sense the sea and so carried on hoping for the best - only another 150 miles to go on that heading!

Thick mist has produced other surprises in the past, including Sandwich Terns calling plaintively as they flew over the Abbey garden and, once, a Nightingale foraging about in the flowerbeds, looking like an overlarge Robin. We waited for song but none came. A few years ago there was an invasion of Honey Buzzards passing south to Africa well to the west of their usual route and one of these possibly passed over Turvey but was gone before there was time to get the binoculars out. More certain was a Woodlark heading west in very cold weather in February of this year and a female Marsh Harrier also heading west in June of the previous year, perhaps a failed breeder. 2006 also produced a Hawfinch which hung around the garden for much of the winter. This was one of a number that arrived in eastern England from the Continent in October of that year. Hawfinch were once regular breeders in Bedfordshire but not any more and so this was a welcome sight, but I've not heard of any staying on to breed from this influx.

We've had nothing yet to beat the experience of an old friend of mine at a marsh in southern England many years ago. He thought he would just pop down to the marsh to see what a very misty night and morning might have produced and, when the mist cleared, was astounded to find some fifteen or so Cranes dotted about the fields. This could yet happen to us especially as their breeding now not so far away from us in Norfolk. I'll settle for one.

Br. John

