

## Dawn Chorus

Some twenty intrepid members of the Gardening Club accompanied me on a Mayday outing to hear the Turvey dawn chorus. We chose 1<sup>st</sup> May partly for convenience – it was a Saturday – and partly because by this date most of the summer songsters should have arrived. We chose the far side of Abbey Park (near the old railway line) in the hope of minimising traffic noise – which largely worked. And we chose 4.30 am as our start time in the hope of beating the birds to it, but it was a close run thing with one participant having already heard a Blackbird on the way.

We were soon rewarded at the entrance to the Park with songs or calls from Robin, Pheasant, Crow, Mallard, Song Thrush and another Blackbird. The surprise for me was the sound of three competing Song Thrush close to the Abbey, we see little sign of them during the day. By the time we reached the tunnel beyond Abbey Farm it was a Wren and a Mistle Thrush which had taken over, accompanied by the more subdued song of the Wood Pigeon. As dawn slowly emerged from the murk the first of our foreign visitors began to join in: Chiffchaff and Willow Warbler needing to be heard to be told apart while Blackcap and Garden Warbler really need to be seen to be sure, at least by me – both species occur here but Blackcaps seem to far outnumber Garden Warblers, and at least one was confirmed. These were soon followed by Chaffinch, Great Tit and a Green Woodpecker. We were then rewarded with the high-pitched song of a Goldcrest where the conifers began and a Common Whitethroat holding territory in a hedge. We finished the stint with a Blue Tit, at least one Marsh Tit and a Magpie. And so home to a splendid breakfast, which was really the whole point of the exercise, accompanied by a Lesser Whitethroat rattling away by Abbey Farm.

The most obvious reason for birds to sing together at this time is to ward off rivals and to attract mates, and the sooner this is done the better, not least because the air is often stiller at this time and sound carries further, and because as it becomes lighter it becomes more efficient to search for food rather than to sing. But there is a great deal more to be said on the subject which will have to wait for another time. This includes something on the sad absence of several past favourites especially Cuckoo here but also Turtle Dove and Nightingale elsewhere.