

Dawn Chorus 2 on 7th May 2011

The promise of a cooked breakfast proved once again too much for Br. John and some twenty members of the Gardening Club despite an even earlier rising because of the later date. The suite of birds was much the same as last year with three few species heard and five new ones, partly due to venturing out into an area of intensive farming. Rain threatened but fortunately held off and the lack of wind helped greatly.

Despite the extra early start there was already a Robin singing at 4am in the monastery courtyard, no doubt stimulated by the security lighting. This raises the question of how much sleep birds actually need, or can do without. One local birdwatcher, with help, once listened to a grasshopper warbler which kept going for almost 24 hours. A comparison with others later led him to believe that this was probably because this bird was an unmated individual desperate for company. Similarly, one often hears a sudden re-starting of song by a bird which has lost its mate or its young due to predation. But the birds we heard followed much the same pattern as last year. The first true participant was a Tawny Owl heard as we waited at the entrance to Abbey Park, followed shortly afterwards by a Blackbird and another Robin, as last year. As we approached the tunnel under the old railway line Wood Pigeon and Song Thrush began to join in and by the time we reached the field on the other side a much richer chorus had begun with the addition of several Blackbirds and a Wren. Pheasants and Crows added to the cacophony. A quick dash towards hill Spinney produced a Common Whitethroat, a Yellowhammer and a Reed Bunting, if the latter's song can be deemed worthy of the title – it was all of two notes delivered in a mournful repetition from the middle of a field of rape. A return to the woodland added Chiffchaff, Chaffinch, Great Tit and a Lesser Whitethroat. The last songster of the morning was a Goldfinch heard on the way home tinkling away by Abbey Farm. Mallard, Moorhen and Stock Dove were seen but not heard.

A humdrum set of birds but good to hear nonetheless, and the breakfast was delicious.

Br. John