

Summer Bird Walk

On a beautifully sunny morning back in June, ten villagers met at the bus stop for an early morning bird walk led by village bird expert Steve Holliday. Steve was, until recently, RSPB Midlands Regional Director, leading conservation work to halt and reverse declines in birds in the wider countryside, and managing and developing new nature reserves.

Before setting off we counted more than a dozen species: Swallow, Robin, Starling, Greater Spotted Woodpecker, Goldfinch, House Sparrow, Blackbird, House Martin, Swift, Jackdaw, Wood Pigeon, Collared Dove and Stock Dove. Steve explained that we have a population of Stock Doves in Shutford. Many of us had



Stock Dove

not appreciated that these birds are different from their close relative the more common Wood Pigeon, although they can be distinguished from them as they are smaller, have iridescent green markings on their necks and don't have white on their neck feathers or wing edges.

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From the bus stop we set off up Church Lane where we heard the beautiful songs of two



Wood Pigeon

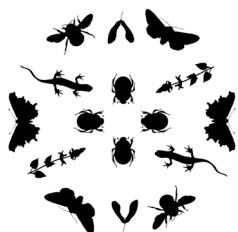
small birds that we identified as a Chaffinch and a Wren. Everyone was impressed by how loud the Wren's song was, particularly as the bird itself is so tiny. We learnt that the Wren's Latin name

is Troglodytes Troglodytes, which means cave dweller. Wrens do prefer dark places and need a loud voice to penetrate their deep woodland cover.



Wren

As we entered the field at the top of Church Lane we spotted a Mistle Thrush and heard its distinctive loud "tuk tuk" call. Mistle Thrushes have declined in gardens in recent years so we are lucky to have a breeding pair around Shutford. They have a rasping 'football rattle' call that can be heard when they fly over the village. Later on the walk we saw a Song Thrush which has become more common in gardens recently. It's smaller and less upright than the Mistle Thrush with arrow shaped spots and a warmer brown colour. We also spotted pheasants, a small flock of Greenfinches and a Common Buzzard circling overhead. We stopped and enjoyed watching Swallows, Swifts and House Martins flying and Steve explained how we can identify the birds on the wing. Swallows have a long deeply forked tail and long angled wings which they flap frequently during flight.



Shutford Nature Hub



Mistle Thrush



Song Thrush

House martins have a fluttery flight and a distinctive white rump and a short curved tail. Swifts also have a short tail but have large sickle shaped wings. They glide often at great speed and can be heard screaming as they fly.

Steve asked if any of us had seen Merlins flying over the fields among Swifts and Swallows which they will predate upon in mid-air.



Merlin

Merlins are often mistaken for Kestrels, a bird of similar colour and size. Kestrels are larger and have distinctive chestnut upper parts where Merlins tend to appear more grey.

We moved across the next field where we saw a Sparrow Hawk flying above a hedge which is where it likes to hunt for small birds. We then saw the third bird of prey of the morning, a Red Kite, and heard the beautiful song of a Sky Lark soaring high above the field.



Linnet (Male)



Kestrel

As we headed towards the copse on the way to Jester's Hill, Steve told us this is a great habitat for small song birds. We heard a Willow Warbler singing and learnt that this small migratory visitor is visually very similar to the Chiff Chaff, another migratory bird with a distinctive call. We saw Blue Tits and Linnets and Yellow Hammers around the copse and hedgerows, although the White Throat Steve had been hoping we would see, or at least hear, was not about on this particular morning.



Yellow Hammer

Bird Walk 2018

By the end of the walk we had seen twenty seven bird species in an hour and a half. We are lucky to have a diversity of habitats in our environs and although many species are in decline, such as Sky Larks, Linnets and Yellow Hammers on arable land, we also have a variety of woodland, mature trees, gardens and buildings, which attract a wide variety of bird species. We're planning another bird walk with Steve, earlier in the breeding season next year - we'll keep you posted.