

The RSPB Macclesfield Local Group



giving
nature
a home

The Heron



Newsletter - February 2021

**We look forward to our ZOOM speaker Michael Leach
on Tuesday 9th February starting promptly at 19:45**

Michael has spoken to the Local Group on several previous occasions. This presentation is based on his best-selling book of the same name covering resident British owls in both folklore and fact and in particular looking at their specialised techniques that help them to hunt. It dispels misleading myths revealing the realities of an owl's life and is illustrated with dramatic high-speed photographs of owls in flight.

Diary Dates

February 2021

Tuesday
9

Zoom Meeting: The Complete Owl by Michael Leach

Contact: Lydia Taylor by eMail - members@macclesfieldrspb.org.uk if you haven't already shown interest in receiving our Zoom presentations and would like to be added to the list.

Introduced by David Tolliday

March 2021

Tuesday
9

Zoom Meeting: Ethiopia: fascinating landscapes, birds, animals and ancient history by Paul Bingham

Contact: Lydia Taylor by eMail - members@macclesfieldrspb.org.uk if you haven't already shown interest in receiving our Zoom presentations and would like to be added to the list.

Garden Wildlife Survey 2020 Part 1- Birds

Thankyou to the twenty one people who completed the spring and summer garden bird and wildlife surveys during March to October 2020. I must apologise for the time it has taken me to collate the data and report back but as some of you may know I've been a little indisposed with some open heart surgery. Everything went well and now fourteen weeks later I'm now in a position to look at the data.

During the survey period 30th March to 26th October, 62 different species were observed in respondents gardens. Table 1 (page 3) shows the species distribution. Six species; blackbird, blue tit, dunnoek, great tit, magpie and robin were present in all twenty one gardens at some time during the survey period. Interestingly four species; blackbird, blue tit, great tit and robin are present in our gardens all through the year because they were present in all gardens during the winter bird survey, reported in the Autumn Heron 2020.

Other frequent visitors to our gardens who showed less than a 5% difference in garden presence between the two survey periods, e.g. goldfinch (95% in both), coal tit (95 to 93%), wren (90 to

93%) collared dove (86 to 82%), nuthatch (76 to 77%), greenfinch (71 to 67%) and blackcap (33 to 32%). While other species showed a big difference for their presence between spring/summer and autumn /winter. Those present in our gardens more in the spring/summer include dunnoek (93 to 100%), magpie (100 to 91%), house sparrow (90 to 84%), jackdaw (86 to 80%), sparrowhawk (71 to 48%) and chiffchaff (67 to 27%). By comparison those bird species featuring less in our gardens during the spring/summer compared to autumn/winter include, bullfinch (64 from 81%), starling (71 from 89%), chaffinch (27 from 67%), common buzzard (43 from 67%) and great spotted woodpecker (54 from 62%). Possible reasons for this difference in numbers according to the season may be breeding opportunities e.g. nest boxes, hedges and foliage to hide a nest or nest predation especially by corvids in the spring/summer months or food supply from feeding in the winter months.

The species where we don't see a change doesn't mean they are the same birds staying in our gardens all year round. We know that blackbirds for example migrate locally and we see winter migration from Scandinavia and the continent if weather conditions are bad. The similar blackcap presence (33 to 32%) between the seasons in our gardens is particularly interesting because blackcaps migrate south in the winter to return north in the spring. Blackcaps were observed in seven gardens, two for one week in March, three reported over a two week period in April and one garden for the last week of March and first week of April. Two other gardens reported blackcaps regularly between April and June. These sightings suggest that five members had blackcaps passing through and feeding up in their gardens while two lucky observers possibly had blackcaps breeding in their gardens.

In contrast, chiffchaff the other warbler that we see overwintering, was seen in 67% of the gardens in spring/summer compared to 27% of the gardens in autumn/winter. In five of the fourteen gardens chiffchaff was only seen during one week in June, July or September and in two gardens during October. This suggests these birds were moving through, particularly the September and October sightings when migration south was happening. In the other gardens, sightings were more frequent between March and July for seven observers and August/September and October for the other reporters. Chiffchaff was possibly breeding in the gardens with these regular sightings over the summer.

Other warblers that were reported from gardens were single reports for common whitethroat and garden warbler with two reports of willow warbler. In addition one lucky person in the SK11 area of Macclesfield heard a cuckoo in May, a Sandbach member had a pied flycatcher flyover his garden while another reported a spotted flycatcher on two separate occasions in August and September in Congleton. It is difficult to say whether this is the same bird as the sightings were five weeks apart, so no conclusion can be drawn about breeding.

Swallows and house martins were reported flying over 33 and 29% of the observers gardens. This represents 7 and 6 of the 21 gardens respectively and I'm a little disappointed the numbers were not higher. Swifts however were seen flying over 52% or 11 of the gardens participating in the survey. While it would be great if all the gardens in the survey saw swifts one has to be realistic and realise that swift numbers are declining as nesting points are lost to building renovation and demolition. It is a shame that more new builds don't have provision for swift nest sites to help increase their breeding capacity options.

We must remember that the sample size for this spring/summer survey is very small and is a third the size of our established winter garden bird survey. The suggestions made above are just the speculations to explain the data and are not statistically proven. That said, I hope the survey gave everyone something to think about during the first COVID lockdown as we are now experiencing the third. Next month I will share my thoughts on the mammals, butterflies, moths, amphibians and odonata.

Finally, I would like to thank those again who sent in their sightings, it's just our contribution to citizen science which has helped me during my recovery period. I look forward to getting back to birdwatching beyond my garden. I look forward to receiving your winter garden bird survey in May.

Table 1**The RSPB Macclesfield Local Group Spring to Autumn 2020 Bird Survey Results**

Bird Species	No. Gardens	%	Bird Species	No. Gardens	%
Blackbird	21	100	Blackcap	7	33
Blue tit	21	100	Black-headed gull	7	33
Duncock	21	100	Mallard	7	33
Great tit	21	100	Pied wagtail	7	33
Magpie	21	100	Swallow	7	33
Robin	21	100	Tawny owl	7	33
Coal tit	20	95	House martin	6	29
Goldfinch	20	95	Stock dove	6	29
Woodpigeon	20	95	Grey wagtail	5	24
House sparrow	19	90	Kestrel	5	24
Long-tailed tit	19	90	Mistle thrush	5	24
Wren	19	90	Herring gull	4	19
Collared dove	18	86	Lesser black-backed gull	4	19
Jackdaw	18	86	Raven	4	19
Bullfinch	17	81	Rook	4	19
Carrion crow	17	81	Common pheasant	3	14
Nuthatch	16	76	Moorhen	3	14
Greenfinch	15	71	Treecreeper	3	14
Song thrush	15	71	Cormorant	2	10
Sparrowhawk	15	71	Curlew	2	10
Starling	15	71	Red kite	2	10
Chiffchaff	14	67	Willow warbler	2	10
Common buzzard	14	67	Common whitethroat	1	5
Jay	14	67	Cuckoo	1	5
Great spotted woodpecker	13	62	Garden warbler	1	5
Chaffinch	12	57	Green woodpecker	1	5
Grey heron	12	57	Lesser redpoll	1	5
Swift	11	52	Pied flycatcher	1	5
Feral pigeon	9	43	Siskin	1	5
Canada goose	8	38	Spotted flycatcher	1	5
Goldcrest	8	38	Yellow hammer	1	5

Ian Taylor
Garden Bird Survey Analyst