



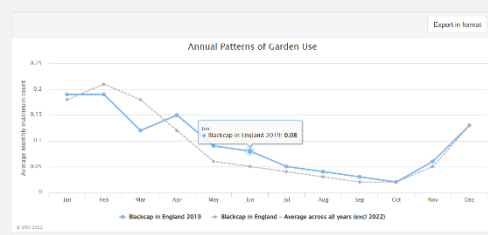
Edgmond Wildlife Roundup Winter update 2 (Nov and Dec) 2022



The 13th December was a special day. We recorded the first arrival of our over wintering Blackcaps in our garden and on the following day, two came to the feeders. It always amuses me that our own summer migrant Blackcaps disappear in the autumn to warmer places. Our new visitors have come all the way from eastern Europe and are quite happy to winter here! These birds will feed on Sunflower hearts (chipped) but are very fond of bird fat, the softer square slabs are best. So, keep your eyes open they are coming to a place near you soon!

Annual patterns of garden use

How different species use Garden BirdWatch gardens over a year



The graph on the right from the BTO garden birdwatch scheme shows the fall off in the early autumn as our breeding birds leave. Then we have a gradual climb in November and December as Eastern migrants come to visit. In our garden most Blackcaps return at the end of November. Our earliest return was on the 9th November 2020.

When we think of winter migrant visitors, we normally think of winter thrushes like Fieldfare and Redwing. Both have been seen in our gardens and in the surrounding countryside for many weeks now. However, many of our birds are on the move. I recently recorded two Woodcock on my walk from the village. Somewhere around a million Woodcock migrate to the UK in the winter months to escape the freezing temperatures of northern Europe. They migrate at night and often end up in strange places when they lose their way, including back gardens! When we start to see Woodcock in places where they have definitely not bred, then we can assume that they are birds that have made the incredible migratory winter journey to us.

Every year the Strine and Weald Moors are home to overwintering Stonechat, birds that have come away from northern hills and coasts to spend time with us. They are almost always in pairs so on your walk around the village look out for a bird that flies up onto posts and down into rough vegetation alongside fences and streams. They have been recorded locally in the last few weeks.

Many birds we are now seeing have come from elsewhere. Even Blackbirds (those with darker bills) and Woodpigeons are often European visitors and Robins have been known to move quite large distances in the winter. In 2019 a Robin flew from Germany to the UK crossing the North Sea in an amazing 4 hours (average speed 35mph). Not bad for a bird weighing 19 grams!



As the short days and long nights arrive many birds start to flock and roost in the surrounding countryside. Some birds like Pied Wagtails are very fond of warmer town roost sites. Waitrose supermarket in Newport is one of those places. It is not just Newport supermarkets that attract these roosting visitors but many supermarkets across the country become the overnight hotel for these delightful birds. This is also a good time of year to find large groups of wagtails on our local sewage farms. I recently recorded 15 Pied Wagtails on the Harper

Sewage Farm. Even in cold weather there are still clouds of midges and other insects over the settling tanks and this brings in not only Pied Wagtail but also Grey Wagtail and good numbers of Meadow Pipits.



Huge flocks of Rooks and Jackdaws now assemble to roost at dusk and I disturbed a gathering in the trees on my way down to Newport recently. As I approached, the black noisy crowd launched into the air and a thousand wings gave a most satisfying woosh as they flew overhead.

They seem to move around roost sites but at the moment they are favoring the trees near the Sewage works at the end of the canal (Edgmond). In the morning at first light ribbons of black birds streak the sky as they wander back into the surrounding fields to feed, but not all birds go straight there! Some birds, paired for life, return to village chimney pots to reaffirm their vows and check all is well with the nest site they used in the spring. The early morning sun warms the back of jackdaw couples as they strut around the village chimney pots. They occasionally adjust a twig or two or even add a new twig to the old nest if they are feeling particularly homely! You can watch the pairs, basking in the early morning sun, going through mutual preening sessions. In this way many birds maintain the pair bond and get ready for the next round of breeding.



Of course, if you are talking about birds flocking, you can't forget Starlings. They have been gathering in the late afternoon, in large numbers on the HAU fields around the village, before heading off to roost. One of their favourite sites for roosting is in the reed beds at Aqualate. The numbers here can reach into the tens of thousands. Starlings are on the UK red list as their numbers are dropping drastically. It would be a shame to lose the amazing spectacle of a Starling murmuration that has entertained us for hundreds of years.

Other flocks to look out for are the large flock of Linnets on the fields where the horses are kept, on this side of the B5062. You will also find gathering numbers of Skylarks here that sometimes number fifty plus.

The fishing pool at Harper in late November had a record number of Little Grebes (9). Small numbers of other water birds turn up here including Teal, Cormorants and Goosander.



In the garden the birds have finished off most of the holly berries before the Redwings and Fieldfares arrived. Having made an effort this year to not remove the dead heads from flowers in the autumn we were happy to watch the Goldfinches taking seeds from the dead aster heads. Long tailed Tits (*nearest bird in righthand photo*) and Nuthatch (*left*) are now frequent visitors and the number of Greenfinches, Chaffinch and Blackbirds have been steadily increasing as the weeks go by and the weather gets colder!



In this cold spell Brown Rats seem to have given us a few unwanted visits and talking to neighbours it seems we are not the only ones to have had this pleasure! Hopefully the Weasel we spotted crossing Turners Lane a few weeks back has been busy hunting!

The Bank Voles and Woodmice have not been seen for a few weeks now and our hedgehogs disappeared at the start of September. Talking to some of our members it seems this has been pretty much true across the village. I have no idea why this is and although we have continued to feed in our

special feeding boxes we have nothing to report but lots of footage of our local cats trying to get to the feed. This has nothing to do with hibernation because typically hedgehogs in the UK don't hibernate until December and we had very warm autumn and early winter temperatures.



There were many field and hedgerow plants still flowering in the last weeks of November like this Hogweed (not Giant!) but the recent very cold spell has put pay to this!

However, these frosty mornings (and indeed days) have left the seed heads of plants looking rather magnificent.



We were still recording butterflies in the garden in early November including Red Admiral and Large Whites. At night you can hear the typical hoot of male tawny owls and eek of females. They are always very vociferous at this time of year. Listen in the first hour of dark for the calls (pig squeal) of Water Rail. They have been heard along the far banks of the canal, in the rough land, as you walk into Newport. Once heard never forgotten. Keep a look out for Red Kites, the number of reports of sightings locally are definitely on the increase in this last year.

Finally, I hope you take the opportunity to get out and walk in the countryside during this festive season. As always, I welcome reports or photographs of anything seen. There have been one or two reports of Reindeer seen locally of late, so if anybody can confirm this I would be most grateful 😊

Happy Christmas - Jon