

The Birds

The weather's been a bit of a mixed bag over the past few days, hasn't it? There's been plenty of effort from the local birders but the rewards could have been richer...

I'll start with wildfowl, and the list is quite varied. The best were **Eider** off Beer Head; one was here on 16th, then three from a few days later which are still present at time of writing, they spend most of their time with the small group of **Common Scoters** which have also settled here. Other wildfowl over the sea included small numbers of passing **Brent Geese** and a total of four **Red-breasted Mergansers**. In the valley, **Wigeon** are above the 100 mark and there are still nearly 200 **Teal** about. Small numbers of **Shoveler** are starting to appear and oddities seen included a female **Tufted Duck** on Lower Bruckland Pond, a female **Pintail** on the estuary on 16th with a **Gadwall** here on 27th.



Waders on the estuary have been very poor again, with the only difference from the last newsletter being a single **Avocet** feeding on the mud north of Coronation Corner on 28th. A couple of migrating **Golden Plovers** have been noted flying west over Haven Cliff and Seaton.

With a spell of windy southerly winds all eyes were on the sea. There was one major highlight on 20th, when a juvenile **Long-tailed Skua** stunned three observers (which I'm pleased to say - included me!), as it flew east along the beach, passing just feet from the birders! About fifteen minutes later it reappeared over the beach before heading inland and disappearing for good. Two **Great Skuas** also passed on this day. **Mediterranean Gulls** are starting to become more regular, with three on 22nd the most seen at once so far.



There have been few passerines worth noting, but visible migration has produced a single flock of 28 **Crossbills** east over Beer Head on 20th, with the first **Brambling** of the autumn. **Black Redstarts** have started to appear, with two on Beer Head on 29th and three in Beer the following day. **Redwing** and **Fieldfares** have invaded the UK, and the patch, since the last newsletter. Although there are few settled birds, large numbers are flying over during the day and night. As usual **Fieldfares** were slightly later than **Redwing**, the first of the autumn was seen on Beer Head on 16th but not again 'til the last few days. A brief **Ring Ouzel** on Beer Head on 16th was surprisingly the only one seen despite some good numbers reported from other parts of the south coast of Devon.

I shall finish the birdie section with few last summer migrants hanging on.... On the 16th three **Wheatear** were at Haven Cliff and 50+ **House Martins** over Beer Head; the most recent report of **Swallows** was of two over the river valley on 28th.

Great news is of two **Otters** that have been seen on several days recently. They showed the best (so far anyway!) on the Borrow Pit on 27th, giving excellent views for about an hour in total. On 30th, they were both seen on the river at Colyford Marsh, so are proving to be quite mobile. This is certainly the best opportunity that there's been to see **Otters** on our part of the Axe, so it's well worth going out and having a look...

Photos: **Gadwall** - Gavin Haig; **Pintail and Mediterranean Gull** - Steve Waite.

The Trivia

Renting out one of your rooms or moving in with friends are options that many people have taken during the recession, but it seems some wildlife has had the same idea. At the time of year when the RSPB is urging people to put up nestboxes ready for next spring, a surprising number of unusual shared occupancies have come to light.

Barn Owls and Kestrels (Photo: RSPB-images)



Sue Smith, as usual armed with camera, got two unusual pictures recently. A Green Pheasant. It is apparently *Phasianus versicolor*, closely related to the Common Pheasant, and is considered a sub-species by some authorities. Native of Japan where it is the favourite game bird, introduced to America and Hawaii - just how it got here I don't know. It does breed with the Common Pheasant. Interesting...

The other one is a happy fox, with a rabbit in its mouth. That's one that won't go hungry for a bit!



Peter Vernon has been busy with his camera to – and even enlisted his wife Diana to show off his new headgear! “I was going out to photograph a pupa I had spotted earlier in the day to find it wriggling from side to side and being attended by two Ichneumon wasps! One of the wasps departed shortly after I arrived but the 2nd carried on and actually pushed in it's ovipositor and presumably laid some eggs in the poor pupa. I will keep an eye on it to see what happens.

We were also out for a walk when a Common Darter dragonfly landed on my hat! I carefully passed the camera to Diana who managed to get a shot of it.”



A battery, probably from a camera or video has been found in Seaton Marshes Hide. Ian Waite at waite@freenet.co.uk is keeping it safe.

Diary Dates

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| Sunday 1 st November 10.00 a.m. | Bird-watching tram trip. Booking essential on 01297 20375 |
| Friday 6 th November 10.00 a.m. onwards | Meet the Birds at Seaton Marshes |
| Sunday 15 th November 10.00 a.m. | Bird-watching tram trip. Booking essential on 01297 20375 |
| Friday 27 th November 10.00 a.m. onwards | Meet the Birds at Colyford Common |

For more information, ring EDDC on 01395 517557.

This twice-monthly email newsletter is freely available to anyone who would like it, as is a periodic one about the activities of the East Devon Local Group of the Devon Wildlife Trust. Just send me an email with Axe Estuary Birds and/or East Devon DWT in the subject line. Also, for those without a computer, I will send a copy by post if you would like to send me some stamps.

Thanks to those who keep us informed – please continue to tell us of any unusual, interesting or amusing sightings, and what is about locally, and send any photos you would like to share.

Steve and David,

davidwalters@eclipse.co.uk.