

## The Birds

At last it feels like winter should! Beautiful crisp and clear mornings, with a touch of ground frost in places. Could a white Christmas be on the cards for us...? After the previous exciting period for birding on patch, this period was a bit of a let down, but there's always things to see. Mind you, November offered one last highlight...

On the 29<sup>th</sup>, an incredible wreck of **Leach's Petrels** occurred in Chesil Cove, with at least a thousand seen in the Portland area. We almost missed out, but not quite. Two singles flew past Beer during the early afternoon, and four flew west past Seaton Hole within the last hour of daylight.

Now to December, and as there has been less seen of interest, I'll list the local specialties. In Devon as a whole these species can be tricky to see, but we always seem to do well for them...

**Water Pipit:** Up to four have been showing well on Colyford Common during this period with **Rock** and **Meadow Pipits**. In previous winters they are normally beyond the tram line and behind the main scrape, but at the moment they are favouring the common either side (or sometimes on!) the new boardwalk.

**Black Redstart:** Up to eight **Black Redstarts** have been seen on patch during this period which is a brilliant winter count. Four female-types have been fairly easy to see on Beer Beach, two female-types and a male feeding in a garden near Seaton Heights for several days and a final female-type still by the Yacht Club. I'm sure there are more about that have as yet been unseen or not reported.

**Firecrest:** Two have been reported so far this winter, both on 12<sup>th</sup>. One at the usual site, Jubilee Gardens in Beer and one in Axmouth.

As well as the usual specialties, our two **Whooper Swans** remain and have been joined by two **Black Swans**! Quite where they have come from, who knows? Maybe Dawlish? Talking about our specialty species, it is worth mentioning how scarce **Mediterranean Gulls** have been so far this winter, only one has been seen at all during this period (an adult on 14<sup>th</sup>), which is VERY unusual.



The most notable sighting during this period was of a **Black-necked Grebe** off Seaton Hole on the afternoon of 14<sup>th</sup>. This is the patch's rarest **Grebe** species, and all previous **Black-necked Grebes** have been relatively brief and only been seen by one or two.

A few good wildfowl highlights have included a drake **Velvet Scoter** off Beer on 6<sup>th</sup>, a couple of **Eider** past on both 2<sup>nd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> and a drake **Goosander** west also on 6<sup>th</sup>. The **Common Scoter** flock off Beer peaked on 7<sup>th</sup> with at least 110 counted on the sea. There's been a few Divers about, with **Great Northern** and **Red-throateds** passing in ones and two along with a lone **Black-throated Diver** on 2<sup>nd</sup>.

After going missing, or remaining unseen, for a few weeks, the two **Otters** have been showing well on the Borrow Pit again. On the evening of 12<sup>th</sup> they were watched munching contentedly on roach.

Lastly I would like to wish all readers a very Merry Christmas, I hope others are better prepared for the big day than I am!



*Photos: Black Swans and Robin- Karen Woolley*

## Ringling



The last ringing session was enhanced by mince pies and mulled wine – much appreciated! In spite of that 32 birds were ringed - three in the Abberton Traps - Teal 1, Mallard 1, Moorhen 1, and the rest in the mist nets, Greenfinch 7, Blue Tit 11 (2), Great Tit (1), Cetti's Warbler 3 (2), Blackbird 2, Song Thrush 1, Kingfisher (2), Chiffchaff 1 and Long-tailed Tit (1). Most of these were caught close to the feeding station and in the gateway to Black Hole Marsh.

*Photo Mike Tyler*

## Holyford

Jean Kreiseler says "It may be December but there are several **Oaks** which have not shed their autumn top leaves, and below there are many **Hazels** with green leaves and signs of spring in their fresh catkins. Several of the **Holly** bushes had red berries, but a lot have fallen to the ground. In spite of the storms, only one ancient **Oak** smothered with **Ivy** has come down, broken off close to the base, and taking out a few smaller trees.

## Woods

An AVDCS work party spent a hard damp day trimming along the paths and cleared and tidied the glade that runs down through the conifers on The Hangings. A big thank you from the Trust for their hard work .

In sheltered spots there are several **Red Campion** flowers, and **Foxglove** plants are well up already.

The **Roe Buck** is still living a bachelor's life and should shed his antlers soon. According to Paco there is only one Badger sett occupied at the moment, probably by a young male, so a family have not moved in after all.

These colourful **Orange peel Fungus – *Aleuria aurantia*** - were on the path on a half buried **Conifer** branch.



Birds seen and heard recently are **Greater spotted Woodpecker, Nuthatch, Long-tailed Tit, Great and Blue Tit, Song thrush, Blackbird, Goldcrest, Robin, Wren, Moorhen, Kestrel, Jay, Buzzard**, all **Corvids** (often absent in the mornings when they go to the nearby pig fields at feeding time), and finally Paco disturbed a bird in the valley bottom, which flew off too fast to be certain if it was a **Snipe**, or a **Woodcock** (saw one there last winter)"

*Photo Jean Kreiseler*

In the same area, but not actually in the woods, Peter Vernon. was in the garden the other morning when all the birds started "kicking off", it was a right raucous row and when he went to investigate he found this (attached image) Tawny Owl perched in the middle of their Ash tree in full view, being mobbed by every bird in the vicinity – except the tits! Why do they not fear owls?



### The Trivia

Peter Mason asks "Have you read about the fact that winter residents in the UK are now different to those in Spain? - longer/narrower beaks and rounder wings - after only 30 years of evolution! Apparently they all eat insects, grubs etc. in Germany, but here they eat a lot of bird table food while in Spain they eat berries etc, and the bills have adapted accordingly. The UK is 500 miles, Spain 1000 so, for the UK, maneuverability is favoured over long distance flying ability. Millions of years not necessary for evolution, nor complete separation by e.g. islands. I hope this research is true – fascinating?"

Do you feed fat balls to your birds? The RSPB advises that they should be taken out of their netting, which can get entangled in feet and beaks, and placed in special fat ball feeders.

The AVDCS's Tram Trip was great, with some 43 species seen including three different Swans – Mute, great views of the Whoopers, and – surprise – the pair of Black Swans mentioned above.

*Photo Jean Kreiseler*



### Diary Dates

Thursday 14 <sup>th</sup> January	10.00 a.m.	Meet the Birds, Seaton Marshes. <u>These are on Thursdays now.</u>
Monday 18 <sup>th</sup> January	7.30 p.m.	"Dormice" Illustrated talk by Pat Morris Kilmington Village Hall. AVDCS event with DWT. All welcome. Donations requested.
Thursday 28 <sup>th</sup> January	10.00 a.m.	Meet the Birds, Colyford Common. <u>These are on Thursdays now.</u>

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.

A Very Happy Christmas to you all, with great birding in the New Year.

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