

The Birds

Although on the whole it was rather quiet during this period - mainly due to lack of observer coverage - there were still a couple of Christmas crackers!

I'll start with the most confiding of the two goodies. The two **Whooper Swans** decreased to just one on 17th, but on 20th two yellow-billed Swans were in the Axe Valley again. The new bird being a **Bewick's Swan**, the first on patch for about eight years! The bird is still present at time of writing and has been very popular with Devon birders. At least one **Black Swan** remains too, making the swan flock four species strong, which is amazing!

The patch's second and Devon's third **Caspian Gull** was found on the estuary by the tram sheds during the afternoon of 23rd. It remained until 16:10 when it flew out to sea to roost, and was never seen again. The first record for the patch concerned a second-winter bird in October 2007, this bird was a first-winter. This species is closely related to **Herring** and **Yellow-legged Gull**, in fact it has only been recognised as a full species for a couple of years. The main pro-Caspian feature which can be seen on this bird is the distinctive head pattern, the very white head and necklace of small grey spots.

Wildfowl highlights include a **Velvet Scoter** off Seaton Hole on 21st, seven **Gadwall** on the estuary on 25th and a family party of five **Brent Geese** which have been feeding in the fields north of Seaton Marshes throughout most of this period. The cold weather encouraged **Golden Plovers** onto the patch, with up to 100 alongside the A3052 between Tower Services and the Honiton turn off on 25th.

2009 has been another excellent year on patch! I will not write a review of the year here, you'll have to buy the 2009 Bird Report to read that! Some of my personal highlights though have been the six **Glossy Ibis** which graced the valley on 19th September, Beer Head's autumn **Wryneck** and **Snow Bunting**, the array of **Iceland Gulls** during the first four months of the year - and of course - the two **Otters**!

I'd like to wish everyone a Happy New Year, I wonder what goodies 2010 will bring to the Seaton birders....

Photos: **Bewick's Swan** - Steve Waite and **Caspian Gull** - Karen Woolley.



The Trivia

Following Steve's comments on our Swan flock, Mike Lock reports "This afternoon 30th December there are two Whooper Swans with 19 Mute Swans on the fields by the Axe below Waterford Farm, Musbury. I would guess they have moved up from below Stedcombe - perhaps disturbed by shooting? But maybe they are a different two!"

And Moira Anderson writes "We have had fieldfare and redwing in the trees opposite our house since the start of the very cold spell - good to see. Also saw 2 purple sandpipers on the rocks near Jacobs ladder in Sidmouth just before Christmas. The surprise for me was when we went to the Colyford bird hide on Monday when we saw a peregrine sitting in the field nearish to the main road. We presume it had had a good feed as there were 3 Shelduck near to it and totally unconcerned by it. It stayed for some time and eventually flew off, but wonderful view through my scope."



What would the Christmas season be without Robins? So here are a few to maintain the season of goodwill - although the one on the left doesn't look as if he has much time for all that! Definitely a Robin with Attitude.

And as for Scuffy - looks like he could do with a good brush.

Robin with Attitude - Peter Vernon. Scuffy - Sue Smith



And this fellow is no slouch– he knows where to find his Christmas Dinner.

Sue Hutchinson in her Colyton Garden



These three photographs all by Sue Smith at Seaton Marshes recently.

Diary Dates

Tuesday 12 th January	10.00 a.m. – 4.00 p.m.	In Focus demonstration and sales of Optical Equipment. Seaton Marshes Hide
Thursday 14 th January	10.00 a.m.	Meet the Birds, Seaton Marshes. <u>These are on Thursdays now.</u>
Monday 18 th January	7.30 p.m.	“Dormice” Illustrated talk by Pat Morris. Kilminster Village Hall. AVDCS event with DWT. All welcome. Donations requested.
Thursday 28 th 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.

Steve and David,

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HAPPY NEW YEAR EVERY ONE!