

The Birds

One more month and **Sand Martins** and **Wheatears** will be with us....

What is presumably the same **Spoonbill** last seen on 22nd Jan has returned, being seen along the entire stretch of the estuary, but spending most of its time off Coronation Corner and on Colyford Common. The **Whooper** and **Bewick's Swans** have been located in a swan flock just south of Musbury, nice to know they are both still with us.

Interesting wildfowl has included the **Eider** still off Seaton Hole, a couple of **Gadwall** and a drake **Tufted Duck** on the estuary on 3rd with two at Lower Bruckland Ponds on 12th.

The white Gull seen last period has finally given itself up, and showed well on evening of 14th. It seems most likely to be a small **Herring Gull**. **Mediterranean Gull** numbers have increased, with seven being the highest day count - including at least three different ringed birds. **Common Gull** numbers are also on the up (as expected) with 277 counted on 3rd. A **Ruff** for a couple of days from 4th and a **Knot** from 14th were the best waders on the estuary this period.



Five **Black Redstarts** at Seaton Hole on 9th was a good count, two or three were more usual here on other days. The fact one of them was an adult male was an added bonus too! Once again, **Crossbills** are in the conifers at Trinity Hill; at least four have been seen including two males. As always, good numbers of **Siskins** can be seen here too. The **Woodlarks** are still present near Axmouth/Rousdon.



Despite quite a lot of searching, it took until 14th of this month 'til a **Dipper** was seen on patch this year (by a birdwatcher anyway!), with two on the Coly near Bonehayne Farm.

We are still graced with the fantastic **Otters**, with three reported together on the Borrow Pit, Seaton Marshes on one day. Two together has been the more usual sight, but the Borrow Pit continues to be the prime spot for them.



Photo: Drake **Tufted Ducks** - Steve Waite, white **Herring Gull** - Gavin Haig, male **Black Redstart** - Karen Woolley, female **Black Redstart** - Steve Waite, **Crossbill** - Karen Woolley and **Otter** - Steve Waite

Devon Water Vole Recovery Project

On the 20th May 2009 and in the week that followed, one hundred and fifty captive-bred Water Voles were reintroduced to the downstream end of the Devon River Axe and nearby tributaries, some twenty years since they had been seen in this end of the catchment. Most of the animals were 'soft' released, that is, allowing them to burrow out of a small cage placed on a bank by the water. This has the advantage that the voles have a burrow system to retreat to with some food if needed in what would otherwise be unfamiliar territory. The pond sites were to help safeguard them from flooding whilst any offspring would then have to move on to the nearby tributaries and spread out from the original release sites.



Post-release monitoring confirmed water vole field signs at all the sites a few weeks later although by the Autumn, there were no clear signs on the two pond sites by the Nannies Water, a Coly tributary upstream of Colyton. Also a stoat was seen on the bank of one of the other pond sites which did not augur well for the voles' safety there. By the end of the Autumn, there were no obvious signs at the only main river release site up towards Whitford Bridge.

Water Vole about to be released

However, monitoring visits this year (w/c 1/2/10) have confirmed some signs at all of the four remaining sites. The best of these continues to be Seaton Marshes where most of the wet ditches have some animals present, as does the Borrow Pit. Hopefully, the water voles are not the reason that two young otters are being seen there so regularly!

If anyone would like to help in monitoring the mink rafts at various sites in the Coly and the Axe catchments, then please contact me, Mervyn Newman, Water Vole Project Officer, Devon Water Vole Recovery Project.

Tel: 07766 526209 email: mnewman@eastdevon.gov.uk

NEWS FROM HOLYFORD WOODS .

Jean Kreiseler reports “Yet more signs that spring is here and the woods are a joy to walk in. The awaited frog spawn amounted to 2 clumps, then 10 and the pool is heaving with frogs so more will appear. Bird activity has increased. I had a lovely view of **2 Treecreepers** alternately feeding and chasing each other around a large Oak trunk. **3 Ravens** were swooping and tumbling over the trees today, all the time making their rasping calls contrasting with the clear notes from a **Song Thrush**. A pair of **Rooks** have been inspecting last year’s nest in an ash tree. The very wet weather over such a long period has meant there has always been bright green mosses on trees, fallen timber and the woodland floor. Birds are now scratching it up in search of food. At last the fern fronds are bent down in readiness for the curly new shoots to appear. Primroses and red campion are growing strongly. The majority of catkins are now bright with pollen and soon the pussy willow will appear. On quiet days there have been little clouds of midges dancing over the paths.”

The Trivia

And then Jean goes elsewhere for a change:- “Last week I was in the hide idly watching the Moorhen chasing way her young from last year on the Lagoon, when I saw this 'torpedo' cruising the length of the lagoon. My heart missed a beat when I realised it was an enormous otter! He was there for a quarter of an hour, and caught a fish which he chomped while swimming. Suddenly he disappeared, and I went back to The Borrow Pit in case he had gone there. On the pool were 2 Swans minding their own business, when 3 more flew in. Well, all hell was let loose, and there was a lot of fighting and squawking. Eventually a male bird grabbed a female, and mated with her while holding her head partly under the water. There was one more flurry and then he and another calmly flew off”.



Further evidence of spring, these lambs were snapped by Peter Vernon near Whitwell Lane in Colyford.

Mike Lock says:- “Yesterday evening (10th) I

had an excellent view of two Water Rails by the Axe at Nunford Bridge. A Bewick’s and a Whooper Swan were with a flock of 30 Mute Swans in a field near the bridge. All very flighty; several of the Mute Swans and the two wild ones took off when I was about 100 yards away and on the other side of a hedge! Also in that area, about 250 Redwings and a few Fieldfares in a single field.



Garden Bird Watch

No doubt many of you took part in the RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch again this year, and you may remember that we have done something similar, on a much smaller scale, for the last couple of years. And we plan to do it again this year over the weekend of 6th and 7th March. There is a suitable form attached to this email. It doesn’t matter how far away from the Axe Valley you are – entries from Colyford or California, Botswana or Brisbane all equally welcome. There was not a huge response last year – lets hope for more this year.

Diary Dates

Thursday	18 th Feb	10.00 am to 12.00 Noon	Junior Rangers Bird Watch at Colyford Common
Friday	19 th Feb	10.00 am to 12.00 Noon	Junior Rangers Bird Watch at Seaton Marshes
Monday	22 nd Feb	10.00 am to 5.00 pm	To learn more about The Junior Rangers, phone 01395 517557 Bird Watch with Ian Waite. Stover Country Park (meet Car Park) then Yarner Wood. Contact Ian (01297 20326) if coming.
Wednesday	24 th Feb	6.00 pm to 8.00 pm	Seaton Visitor Centre Free Event, open to all, celebrating Seaton’s Natural Environment. See attached leaflet.
Thursday	25 th Feb	10.00 am to 12.00 Noon	Meet the Birds. Seaton Marshes. Everybody welcome.
Sunday	28 th Feb	9.00 am to 11.00 am	Birds from the Tram with Ian Waite. £10.00 per person. Please book on 01297 20375.

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, Jean and David,

davidwalters@eclipse.co.uk.