

The Birds

The winter is drawing to an end and spring feels oh so near! With the milder weather and sunnier mornings, garden birds are now singing well, with the **Dunnock's** song being one of my favoured. Though they are a dull bird to look at, the fast warble they give off just shouts out 'spring is nearly here' to me. And it really nearly is! Won't be long 'til my moth trap will be out again during the night, so I hope you are looking forward to some more moth photos!?

Bird highlight goes to a Gull. What would appear to be the third **Caspian Gull** for the Axe was seen briefly on the evening of 23rd. It was a first-winter but only allowed for five minutes of viewing at dusk before it flew out to sea. It's a good job a few photos were taken, otherwise the record would probably have had to remain as only a 'possible'.

An adult **Yellow-legged Gull** on 28th, a good count of 16 **Mediterranean Gulls** on 19th, and the continued presence of 'The White Gull' meant a late afternoon sweep of the estuary was always worth a go.

On the estuary, **Lapwing** numbers are dropping rapidly, but **Wigeon** numbers still seem to be near the 400 mark. The only notable waders seen in the valley during this period include the **Knot** still and a **Jack Snipe** on Seaton Marshes on 27th. A couple of **Gadwall** on 28th and the **Eider** off Seaton Hole still were the only notable ducks seen. Both the **Bewick's** and **Whooper Swan** were still in the valley throughout.



Finally **Firecrest** has made it on to the year list, with one seen in the Undercliff LNR on 21st. Another first for the year was a **Merlin** which flew high over Beer Beach towards Beer Head on 17th.

Five **Black Redstarts** were again at Seaton Hole on 27th, with two being more usual here on other dates. The **Woodlarks** and **Crossbills** are still with us, though numbers of the former seemed to have decreased a little with just five seen on 21st.

Photos: 'presumed' Caspian Gull - Gavin Haig; Whooper and Bewick's Swan - Steve Waite.



Photo Sue Smith

Ringling

I now have the totals for the last few sessions this month. **Whoosh netting** on 5th no birds caught! but on 8th Moorhen 2 and Shelduck (7). **Wet & Wild Weekend** 13th – 15th totals for the three days: Long-tailed Tit 5 (2), Wren 5 (3), Great Spotted Woodpecker 1, Blackbird 5 (4), Dunnock 5 (3), 17th Great Tit 6 (1), Bullfinch 2, Robin 6 (5), Chaffinch 1, Mallard 3 (2), Blue Tit 4 (2), Greenfinch 6, Goldcrest 1, Goldfinch 4 (1), Meadow Pipit 2 and Rock Pipit 1. Thanks to all of you that attended the Saturday 27th, duck catch, especially if you travelled from afar. The tally was :Shelduck 55 (46); Mute Swan 2; and Moorhen 1.

The Trivia

Diane Berry tells of a male **Pintail** on the grass at Seaton Marshes on the 18th

Nick de Cent writes "Not strictly an Axe Valley sighting but the family & I were most chuffed to hear a raptor crying above Honiton High Street when we came out of Honiton Wine Bar at about 1.20pm today - and, no we hadn't been indulging! Looked up at the church tower and just by the right rear turret was a **Peregrine**. I assume the bird is thinking about nesting and wondered whether peregrines were regular at this spot or

whether this is potentially a new nest site.” Perhaps one of the St Michael’s Church in Exeter brood, looking for a cloistered home?

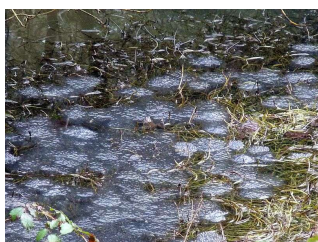
Peter Vernon was out with his dog when he happened to look up and saw this **Heron** about to land in the Holyford Oak. He thinks he was eyeing up the fish pond and waiting for him to leave.



Peter Vernon also says “Spring must surely be here now as I heard my first **Blackbird** singing yesterday evening, it was its full song and not just a test!. It must be one of the loveliest Spring bird songs.

I have also seen the **Long Tailed Tits** prospecting for a nest site in our hedge again and back in *January* a friend sent me images of ducklings and the **Black Swans** sitting on eggs at Dawlish!”

We’ve had lots of photos of Otters, but I don’t think many are good as this one Sue Smith took by the Hide at Seaton Marshes!



And two more images, one certainly confirming spring frogspawn on the pond at Holyford Woods, and the other a Plume Moth on Peter Vernons’s dining room wall This one appears to be *Alucita hexadactyla*, which can be found as an adult at any time of the year. Both images by Peter Vernon



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 – let’s hope for more this year.

Diary Dates

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|-----------|------------------------|------------------------|---|
| Thursday | 4 th March | 10.00 am to 12.00 Noon | Meet the Birds. Colyford Common. Everybody welcome |
| Sunday | 7 th March | 9.00 am to 11.00 am | Birds from the Tram with Donald Campbell. £10.00 per person. Please book on 01297 20375 |
| .Thursday | 18 th March | 10.00 am to 1.00 pm | Early Spring Walk in Holyford Woods, led by Mike Lock. Meet at the lay-by at the top of Seaton Down Hill. |
| Thursday | 25 th March | 10.00 am to 12.00 Noon | Meet the Birds. Seaton Marshes. Everybody welcome |
| Sunday | 28 th March | 9.00 am to 11.00 am | Birds from the Tram with Don Cotton £10.00 per person. Please book on 01297 20375. |

Early advice

Although it's still sometimes hard to imagine summer will come, we want to ensure that you know about the moth collecting night (and morning after) we're holding at Monkton Wyld Court this July. Attendance is free, and participants are welcome to book in as B&B guests with us on the night, the better to admire the tens of varieties on view in the early morning! Details are listed below.

Monkton Wyld Court Charmouth Bridport Dorset DT6 6DQ
www.monktonwyldcourt.co.uk 01297 560342

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.

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