

Beacon Hill LNR

Newsletter No 26

Winter 2018/19

Note on Beacon Hill Birds, Nov-Dec 2018, Jan-Mar 2019

Nov 5 The **Short eared Owl** continues to be seen late afternoon/dusk and these excellent photos were taken by Teenie Connolly. Many thanks for letting us share this splendid bird.



Libby also reported 2 Kestrels and a Sparrowhawk around the Hill and a Great spotted Woodpecker in North Wood.

Nov 8 I decided to go for the Short eared Owl that was being seen regularly but missed out on this occasion. On the Hill were half a dozen each

Skylark and Meadow Pipit, and 2 Kestrels were hunting.

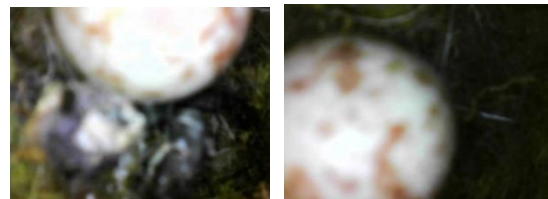
Nov 11 A visiting birder had a count of 20+ Goldcrest in the woods this morning. There had been a fall along the Sussex coast with 100+ seen at Birling Gap a day or two earlier.

Nov 18 Steven and Tim chanced across a rarity in the form of a **Richard's Pipit** today. Recognised on call Steven took a few flight photos before it went to roost in long grass along with a number of Skylarks and Meadow Pipits. Richard's Pipits are larger than Meadow Pipits and about the same length as Skylarks. They are a rare vagrant from Siberia and Asia and of course is the first record for the Reserve.



Nov 23 A Grey Heron was seen flying over the reserve by Libby this morning.

Louise kindly provided some details from the monitoring of the tit nest boxes. Using an endoscopic camera they were surprised to find two boxes with eggs. Even more surprising is that one of these was only erected in September, meaning that the female tit was laying for a third brood which is very unusual. To find eggs in November means that either the birds deserted or were predated. The total of boxes is now 20 and it was pleasing to find 10 boxes with nests and had presumably reared broods, plus a further 3 showing evidence of being visited. The eggs of Blue and Great Tit are fairly similar, but I would favour these to be Great Tit:



Nov 25 Libby watched a Sparrowhawk bringing prey (probably a mouse or similar) and devouring it on the picnic bench. Earlier in the week she reported a handful of Goldfinches feeding on the reserve.

Dec 4 The Short eared Owl was seen again this morning and a Kestrel also seen at first light by Libby. Louise reported the owl had been seen again after being absent through the middle of November.

Dec 6 A second species of owl was a visitor to the Hill this morning with a **Barn Owl** watched by Libby along the fringe of South Wood.

Dec 13 There were some video shots of the **Barn Owl** early morning and seen to fly off eastward. Thanks again to Libby.

Jan 4 Barn Owl seen again by Libby.

Jan 18 Two Grey Herons were seen flying over and the local Skylarks were starting to sing.

Jan 26 Louise reported that a small group had cleaned up all 20 of the bird boxes and now looking forward to the Spring to see what success they may bring. Visitors to the woodland are asked to contact Louise for signs of activity and report the box number. Here are photos of the 11 nests extracted from the boxes taken by Louise:



Note the one on the far right that had a liking for pink wool!

Jan 31 Barn Owl still being reported.

Feb 1 A dog walker reported the sighting of two Tree Creepers in North Wood.

Feb 13 The Barn Owl seen again by Jay - at dawn and at dusk today.

Feb 15 Plenty of Skylark activity and a pair of Meadow Pipits seen along the southern fenceline.

Feb 26 A very unseasonal spell of high pressure brought summer temperatures to the UK. Sussex was no exception and as Swallows and Martins were coming in from the continent in small numbers it was hoped one or two might venture over the reserve - but none reported. A migrant in February would be a very rare occurrence.

Mar 13 Jay spotted a probable **Mediterranean Gull** over the Hill this morning. Black headed Gulls also present, and this bird noticeably a fraction larger.

March is usually a very quiet month, with the chance of early arrivals of Summer Visitors like Swallow, Sand Martin, Chiffchaff and Wheatear. Recorded elsewhere in Sussex but none reported here. With the absence of a regular bird expert monitoring the area it is hoped that we can encourage reports of sightings from locals.

Miscellaneous

Nov 16 I came up to view the site where the British Legion bonfire took place on the evening of the 11th in memory of the end of WW1. The expected scorched earth will doubtless regrow. I also heard that the sheep seemed unaffected by the occasion. There are some plants still in flower around the reserve with Greater Knapweed noted and a couple of Pot Marigolds - no doubt an escape from the allotments or nearby gardens:



Nov 17 Maybe the last butterfly of the year - a Red Admiral seen by Libby ahead of a forecast cold spell.

Dec 2 Our grazing sheep moved off for the winter.

Feb 15 Two consecutive days of unseasonal sunshine and warmth. No butterflies reported but Bumble Bees noted. The old allotment area has been overgrown for some years but clumps of Snowdrops can be seen through the brambles:



Spring Starflower is just beginning to flower alongside the allotment fence. Three new picnic benches have been erected. Here are two of them:



Feb 27 A record breaking spell of warm weather with only a male Brimstone to report. Species which over-winter occasionally wake up and fly around in suitably warm conditions, but this latest spell was UK record-breaking and many butterflies were being seen over the County.

Mar 7 The sheep returned to the Hill for grazing, a few days after the planned date.

Mar 19 The sheep were moved to the central area.

Apr 7 A peacock butterfly was seen on the euonymus bushes and a Dark edged Bee-fly was spotted in North Wood.

We seem to have skipped rather suddenly from Winter into Spring so this newsletter should end now and we look forward to a splendid run up to Summer with some sunshine and plenty of renewed interest.

Many thanks for contributions from Louise Arnold, Jay Butler, Teenie Connolly, Libby Darling, and Steven Munday.

Compiled by Peter Whitcomb