

Three Haggas Jubilee Wood Bird Report 2015

It will take some time before nest sites become available in the emerging trees and understorey at Three Haggas Wood and as a result birds did not breed on the site during 2015. However, a plentiful supply of soil, pond and plant invertebrates; seeds and small mammals gave sustenance to 22 bird species which were recorded during thirty nine visits. Susie Bradley, whose home overlooks the wood, also supplied some interesting records.

Many of the voles, resulting from the previous year's population explosion, survived into early 2015 and they provided prey for a variety of avian predators. Perhaps the most unusual event of the year was the arrival of two Grey Herons which became resident vole hunters during late January and February. Although Herons will take a wide variety of prey they normally focus on aquatic species and for them to spend so much time on land hunting a mammal is unusual. An adult Heron requires about 400 grams of food each day which is the equivalent to 11 voles. Therefore, it is possible that the Herons accounted for over 700 voles during their stay.

The exceptional feeding opportunity also attracted Buzzards, Kestrels and Barn Owls, all of which became regular visitors. Of course all good things come to an end and by the mid-March most of the voles had been consumed. The Herons moved on and subsequent sightings of Buzzards were mostly of fly overs. However, a male Kestrel which helped to raise a single chick in a nearby nest box continued to hunt throughout the year. The local Barn Owls did not breed in 2015 and so the number of sightings declined as the year progressed.

Invertebrates living in the meadow soil were taken by migratory and resident thrushes well into the New Year. Twenty four Fieldfares were present on 1st February as were c100 Redwing on 11th March. Mistle Thrushes and Blackbirds were also present with the winter visitors though they remained and bred close to the site. Two pairs of Mistle Thrushes worked tirelessly throughout April to raise broods at nests in the Hollicarrs and Thyme Wood which lies immediately to the west. Later, family parties were seen and the maximum count of 9 birds occurred on 23rd August. This is most encouraging because in December 2015 Mistle Thrush was added to the national Red List of birds of conservation concern due to a decline of 60% over the past 25 years. Not to be outdone a male Blackbird was collecting food for young on 22nd June.

In April a mass of tadpoles hatched at the pond though numbers soon began to decline. A trail camera was set to find the cause which turned out to be a pair of Mallard. The photograph below, automatically taken on 30th April, shows the drake sifting for protein.



Towards the end of June damsel flies began to emerge from the pond and for a few days a pair of Pied Wagtails collected them for their young in a nest somewhere to the west of the A19. As the pond water evaporated the surrounding area of damp sand increased. This provided an ideal site for Carrion Crows to consume stolen eggs since the birds prefer a place where the contents are not lost amongst ground vegetation and where nearby water provides the opportunity for a postprandial wash. Eleven white Wood Pigeon egg shells were counted on 2nd July which equates to the content of at least six nests.

A Woodcock wing feather was floating on the pond surface on 11th August and the surrounding sand had probe marks which may have been produced by a feeding bird. Again the camera was installed though this time nothing untoward was captured. The final pond sighting of the year was of a Grey Heron searching for more usual prey on 27th November.

The first Swallow was seen on 5th May and from June to August between four and six birds regularly fed on the invertebrates emerging from the meadow flowers. The maximum count of 40 occurred just after the departure of a thunderstorm on the evening of 22nd August, when a Swift was also present. As the flower and grass seeds became available, family parties of Goldfinch became regular visitors. The largest charm recorded was 18 on 14th August.

Woodpigeons and Carrion Crows fed on the areas of cut grass throughout the year. The former preferred patches of vetch and numbers peaked at 46 on 9th April. On 16th January a female Sparrowhawk was seen in flight over the meadow and it is possible that this bird was seeking Woodpigeons whose predated remains were seen in March and June. A pair of Carrion Crows bred just beyond the eastern boundary and the birds spent much time feeding on the meadow. A family party of 4 was present on 11th July and 6 occurred at the end of the month. A pair of Magpies accompanied the Carrion Crows on 24th March.

The uncut vegetation provided a refuge for game birds especially towards the end of the shooting season. On 17th January 4 Red-legged Partridges flew in and at least one pair of Pheasant was present. The remains of two fox predated Pheasants showed that the refuge was not impregnable. A cock bird held a territory in the central area during March and April though breeding was not suspected. Two young Pheasants, probably recently released, were flushed in October.

Other records included a rather tame Robin which held a late winter territory close to the entrance. Finally, the electricity wires which cross the meadow, and which are always worth viewing from a distance, offered a perch for a Collared Dove (16th January); a pair of Stock Doves (11th July) and a pair of Linnet (24th July).

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