



Hi All,

For all those who are not familiar with the striking little bird at the top right of this page, it is a Firecrest, and was the best Christmas present that I could have wished for during an afternoon 'birding' in the park during the festive season. In an attempt to burn off the excesses of 6 days of feasting, I visited the park on 30th December with the dog and my binoculars. Whilst sitting at the orangery reflecting on the lovely day, I caught a glimpse of a small bird flitting through the cedars. At first I thought it to be a Goldcrest, but as the bird approached closer, and the distinctive eye stripe and red bonnet came into closer view, I was amazed to confirm a Firecrest, a first for me and the park. This little bird is a scarce winter visitor, with only a handful of sightings in Gloucestershire each year. Another season at the park beckons, with it the possibility of new discoveries. I am lucky that my role here affords me the opportunity to record and document the wildlife, for without this much would be overlooked and not recorded. As always, I look forward to the forthcoming year's events with the museum in the park, the possibility of finding new birds and insects, and continuing with developing the biodiversity along with others associated with the park.

Mike



News from the Supervisor's Trap



National Nest Box Week Feb 11th -17th 2012

As part of national nest box week organized by the British Trust of Ornithology, park staff are constructing more nest boxes this month. 6 more 32mm (entrance) boxes are being erected in and around the woodland to encourage further Nuthatch breeding. 3 25mm boxes will be sited on cedars adjacent to the woodland for Coal Tit. Another Little Owl box based on the new design will be placed in another oak tree on the main field to provide greater nesting opportunities for this species. This will bring the total number of nest boxes in the park to 48. The Kestrel box sited in the oak above the play area will be re-sited in the far oak on the Northern boundary of the park which is more secluded from public interference. All of the boxes are being built with discarded wood from the recent leisure centre refurbishments, and underpins the Landscape Group's commitment to recycling materials at the park.

Regarding our 'camera' box, we intend to site this on the walled garden wall adjacent to the museum where a stronger signal can be transmitted to the viewing monitor inside the museum. 2012 will be the fourth year of nest box monitoring, and we hope to emulate the successes of the previous 3 years especially with the target species like Nuthatch and Coal tit. For further information on national nest box week and how you can help wild birds in your garden, visit www.bto.org



Winter Moths

January is not a month renowned for its rich insect life. Of course, there are still billions of them out there, but they are unseen, dormant, waiting; either as eggs, pupae, nymphs, caterpillars or even as hibernating adults. There are also a few insects, such as a collection of moth species, which specialise in emerging as adults in the depths of midwinter. These include the aptly named Winter Moth, Mottled Umber, Early Moth, Spring Usher and Dotted Border. Most moths

at this time of year are rather drab, majoring in dull brown and grey tones. Anyone brave enough to venture out into the park on a mild January or February night armed with a good torch can find these moths among the hawthorns along the top perimeter of the main field. We have recorded several 'winter' species of moths in the park, and some of these are illustrated below. (Note the dull wing markings).



Early Moth



Mottled Umber



Winter Moth



Pale Brindled Beauty



Spring Usher



Dotted Border

(All of the above moths have been recorded in Stratford Park)

Large influx of Pied Wagtails in the Park

The end of 2011 saw a large influx of Pied Wagtails in the park. During the middle of December a flock of around 100 birds was present on fields around the play area, and 30 birds were seen feeding on the bowling green. Although the pied wagtail is a resident species, the continental race (White Wagtail) is a regular passage migrant, and it is this sub-species that we are seeing in the park. The communal roosting habit of pied wagtails has been widely studied, and those of you who are familiar with the Subscription rooms in Stroud may not know that until recently there was a huge roost in the 2 trees at the frontage which contained thousands of birds in winter. These could be seen illuminated in the street lights. Roost sites range from reed beds and thick foliage to sewerage works and city centres. One of the largest roosts in the country (situated in a Kentish reed bed) has held over 5000 birds in September. In general pied wagtails

occur in the park throughout the year in small numbers, but the recent influx of birds is the largest that I have recorded during the past 3 years.



Pied Wagtail (race *alba* White Wagtail)



Pied Wagtail (juvenile)

Landscape Group launches new website

November 30th 2011 saw the launch of the Landscape Group's new website. The new site has a strong emphasis on customer service, performance and quality both in landscaping and grounds maintenance. Sarah-Hughes Clarke (business development director) has been keen to highlight many of the company's outstanding contracts, and the site provides links to these including Stratford Park. The Stratford Park link provides a case study detailing some of the biodiversity work carried out during its tenure as grounds maintenance contractor for SDC including some nice photographs of the park. There is also another link to Stroud in Bloom. I recommend visiting the website for a broader overview of the company who is maintaining your park at www.thelandscapigroup.co.uk



Finding winter raptors in the park

Winter provides many opportunities for the raptor fan in Stratford Park, but specific skills are needed to prolong that all-too-brief sighting. Initially, look for quartering birds. Birds of prey will frequently follow landscape features when hunting, and hedgerows, woodland edges and ridges should be scanned for movement. Common Buzzard can be vocal over the woodland, though Sparrowhawk is generally silent in winter. These can often be detected by scanning gaps between the trees or the tree line itself. Sparrowhawk is showing well at the park this month, and the best place to watch them is by the lake, where panoramic views can be had over the arboretum. Sparrowhawk will often soar then make sharp turns in the sky when hunting for prey.

A sudden explosion of birds from a shrub or hedge is a certain sign that Sparrowhawk has made an attack. Kestrels are the cheetahs of the bird world. Look for birds hovering over rough grass above the play area, and quartering over the adjacent fields. When not hunting, birds of prey will rest for lengthy periods. They can be detected by scanning fence lines, bare trees and posts or even bare ground. Another tip, particularly on warmer days, is to keep your eyes to the skies. All birds of prey will soar and ride the thermals, and can often be detected circling high up. Visiting an established raptor watch point will maximise your chances of setting eyes upon these dramatic predators, but using these techniques in suitable habitat will, with luck, give you the satisfaction of finding your very own birds. The best watch points at Stratford Park are along the top perimeter of the fields and from the lake adjacent to the A46. Here you will have good opportunities to detect all the birds of prey mentioned.

Footnote

Sparrowhawk is very active in the park this month. During December fresh kills were being discovered on a daily basis, mainly pigeon, but also some Black-headed gulls. The evidence of a kill is always a pile of breast feathers, usually caused by the impact of the kill. These are usually by hedges or shrubs which provide cover for the bird to 'mangle' its prey. On 21st December Adrian Watts (park staff) saw a female Sparrowhawk take a feral pigeon which was feeding on corn placed out for the park's wildfowl by the lake. He explained, 'The bird hit the pigeon like an exocet missile', knocking the bird several feet. 'The hawk then flew off, clapping the pigeon' before alighting near the bandstand to devour its kill. On the 22nd December, the same female was again quartering over the arboretum.



Sparrowhawk in flight



Kestrel (hovering)



Common Buzzard



Sparrowhawk (with kill)



Kestrel (with prey)



Buzzard (with carrion)

Stratford Park bird review (additions to the list)

The following species were omitted from December's bird review, Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*

Status: Only 1 record on Stratford Park lake September 4th 2010. Stock Dove *Columba oenas*

Status: Scarce. 2 sighted on 13th August 2011. Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin* **Status:** Local summer visitor. 1 on 12th May 2011. Brambling *Fringilla montifringilla*. Red-legged Partridge

Alectoris rufa **Status:** Resident. 3 sighted on Callowell fields 23rd May 2011.



Red-legged Partridge

Wildlife to see now at Stratford Park

Birds: Goldcrest, Nuthatch, Treecreeper, Great-spotted woodpecker (all in the woodland). Sparrowhawk (showing well over the arboretum this month). Kingfisher (lake). Mistle Thrush (a few birds on the main field). Pied Wagtail (Play area and top car park). Parties of mixed finches and tits are feeding in the tree canopy adjacent to Salmon Springs. Buzzard (over the woodland). Fieldfare, Redwing (on the main field).

Events:

- Sunday 8th January 2012 'Winter bird walk in the park with Mike McCrea' Meet at the museum 2.00pm
- Sunday 29th January 2012 'Winter trees walk in Stratford Park with Countryside manager Paul Rutter.' Meet at the museum 2.00pm.

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