



**Sutton Poyntz
Biodiversity Group
News January 2024**

Garden Bird Watch January 21-27th 2024

I was walking home along Sutton Road, on Thursday this week, around 8:00am with frozen hands and face, when I noticed this pair of herring gulls warming their feet. There was no relief for my hands. The temperature was at least -1^oC possibly colder with the wind chill factor. The afternoon of Thursday 11th January, saw some of the heaviest rain, we have seen in the 20 plus years we have lived in Sutton Poyntz. The River Jordan was well over the road by 5:00pm with water pouring from drain gullies. The road past the Whitcombe stables was under at least 150mm of water at 4:30. By 8:30am on Friday morning, we would not have known it was there.

However, on Monday this week 18th January, Colin and I went to the National Trust property at Turnworth at the head of the Winterbournes valley. The road was still under around 100mm of water at one point to the north of Winterbourne Whitchurch. The ground was frozen hard on the grass slopes higher up the valley.

Small Mammals

Shortly after Christmas, Mike from Mullions on Plaisters Lane, was contemplating his garden through the patio doors, when he observed a weasel right up to the window looking in. This is the first I have heard in a garden, but you may know better. The hard weather has brought mammals out more in daylight. Recently, we noticed a pair of roe deer loitering on Combe Valley Road to the west of our junction with Sutton Poyntz. Dave has reported a couple of sightings of mink in the waterworks area using a trail camera. There was a fox about on Sutton Road at 7.15am on 17th January.

Flocks of birds:

During the past month, Puddledock Lane has seen flocks of numerous goldfinches and up to 30 starlings. On Tuesday 16 January, there were around 30 redwings on hawthorn at the top of Plaisters Lane, but unusually none around Came Down woodlands and the associated earthworks. On Thursday 18th, I witnessed the end of a murmuration of over 500 starlings on the electricity cables near the Whitcombe stables at 5.15pm. Flocks of 200 plus redwings over Rhosewood Drive Preston at 7:45am and a few minutes later 100 over Sandbourne Road both flying east. In bright sunlight there are many small birds, especially blackbirds feeding close in to hedgerows.

Garden Bird Watch:

With December being the last month of the year, there are two sheets. One relating to the month's records and the second being a summary of the totals of records from our sources. So, we had just one record of barn owl in June. The numbers are always spasmodic with people often reporting seeing a barn owl perched on a fence post, whilst driving back to the village in the evening. It is years since any bramblings were seen in the recording area, likewise cuckoo. What is disappointing is no yellowhammer but we no longer receive reports from Wyndings. However, we can pride ourselves in seeing 52 species from our gardens in the course of a year and it is a particular pleasure

to record one sighting of a tree creeper, which should be more common but we do not seem to have the right form of tree.



David sent me this picture of one of Britain's smallest birds the goldcrest. Weighing just 2g, it needs to eat its own weight in food each day to survive. The highlight includes two records of fieldfare, with grey wagtail hanging on with just one record and one of mistle thrush. House sparrow numbers are down. Just seven gardens and I am not seeing them in the usual places when I go on my early morning walk around Preston. Nuthatch seems to have disappeared and no redwings in the gardens despite record crops of hawthorn (mostly stripped bare) and apples.

Garden Bird Watch and the Sutton Poyntz Biodiversity Group started in 2009, when we did a biodiversity audit of the village to the top of the Downs. Some 14 years later we are still hanging on and I keep busy producing this *Newsletter*. Thank you everybody for contributing.

The final bit of news is that thanks to the efforts of one of my co-volunteers in the National Trust, in King Charles June Honours list I was awarded the BEM for services to Ecological Surveying and Reporting. This honour is reserved at the present to thank people for making voluntary services to the nation. The Lord Lieutenant, Angus Campbell, himself was awarded the GCVO for personal services to the King in the New Years Honours List. The National Trust made Portland House available for my ceremony on a dank grey day on 23rd October. Colin represent the Group at the award.



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