**The changing pattern of bird species visiting Monks Wood 2009-2014**

***Introduction***

*The area we now call Monks Wood has been cultivated for at least a century. Its last wheat crop was harvested in 2008 and the land sold to the Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust who had a grant from WREN grant. Nettleham Woodland Trust is responsible for creating and maintaining the new woodland of English native species for the next 125 years.*

*We have recently chosen to tell the story of changes in the flora and fauna, which have moved into the area since arable farming ended. Over time we will continue to publish relevant data, photographs and personal perspectives of which this is the first. In due course we are likely to produce more detailed and separate reports on summer and winter visitors, which should be of considerable interest.*

*One of our senior trustees, Dennis Tate, is the ideal author for this inaugural article. He was a supplier to the farming industry for several decades as a soil specialist and has a keen life-long interest in bird watching.*

*Chris Williams, Chairman*

**A review of the first five years 2009-2014**

When Monks Wood was first planted in 2009, it soon created an entirely different habitat from the arable fields which had primarily been used for growing wheat and oilseed rape for many years.

The main change of course is the establishment of grassland, as well as wild flowers that we have planted, and weeds and other more desirable wild plants which have re-established from a seed bank left in the fields. The effect of the establishing young trees is as yet, I think, quite minimal although already they will be providing insects and grubs to those birds that feed on them.

There are also of course several other factors that have encouraged an increasing bird population. The already established Watts Wood planted in the 1990’s and the surrounding grass meadows that make up the rest of the Ashing Lane Nature Reserve are most significant. More recently the Co-Op Lake and the new trees planted there in 2012 have further enlarged the wild space. Ground nesting birds can now use both the existing and new woodland without the risks of cultivation and other necessary farming activities.

The growth of grass and weeds between the rows of young trees has also created a habitat that is ideal for voles and mice to thrive, and this in turn will be a big attraction to birds of prey. In 2013 Short Eared Owls were winter visitors, and sparrow hawk, kestrels, buzzards and barn owls have been seen.

The most obvious difference to the bird population has been the larger number of winter and summer migrants that are using the area.

In particular we have noticed large numbers of Redwing and Fieldfare from Scandinavia and the frozen north, and in summer a good number of warblers from Africa. Indeed since June 2013 a bird count has been completed every month by two very kind members of the RSPB, which is very much appreciated by all of us.

The count of 70 species in 2014 consisted of some 52 species that you could easily see in your garden. Of the rest three are winter visitors - Fieldfare, Redwing, and Golden Plover. Nine are summer visitors including warblers, swallows, swifts and sand martins. The rest of the non-garden birds, are migrants on their way north or south or opportunist feeders like gulls and Carrion Crows. Information on the changing pattern of bird species in Monks Wood will have even more value when Maurice Nauta and Brian Chapman have completed the 2015 bird counts so we can compare two full years.

As the trees continue to grow, we really need to find ways to involve all the visitors to Ashing Lane in our bird counts. Not everybody will have the interest or the knowledge to be able to identify all the birds they see. Or indeed carry binoculars with them to help. However, I think that we should make it possible for all visitors to make a note of any less common birds that they see. And perhaps a board at the Watts Wood entrance should be provided (as in RSPB reserves) to make a note of any interesting birds that they see.

Dennis Tate, Trustee

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