

## Bradway Birds

April and May yielded more blackbird song than I ever remember hearing before. The bird, the male, is by far our most prominent local songster, with his rich fluty tune and scratchy end. You might not appreciate it if its song-post is a TV aerial or tree near your bedroom, for it will start at 4am, before dawn, and continue for up to two hours.

At dusk, it is a different matter, as all the locals sign off, announcing that their particular territory is still occupied, thank you very much, and here I am if any potentially adulterous females are interested. It sends a tingle down the spine to be in the garden watching for bats and to have your local bird throwing forth its song. Often, they counter-sing, replying to a neighbour/competitor/possible territory-stealer, as soon as its last note fades. As they move to their roost, they will give repeated chink-chink or pink-pink calls, obviously of significance to them but with a meaning unknown to us.

What is noticeable this year is the number of birds and the amount of singing, facts I suspect are related. To walk down Everard Avenue, or Rosamund, during the day rather than its beginning or end, is to be bombarded by sound. One stretch of my Bugle delivery round has a singing male every fifty metres, which is an unheard of density. The species has clearly been doing well locally, even if declining gently in the country as a whole. Many gardeners feed birds, and we had fewer continental birds competing for food last winter, so winter survival was good. Dry conditions are also bad for blackbirds, reducing their ground-surface prey in both number and accessibility; and drought was not a problem they faced last year, so numbers are high.

As a consequence, territories are compressed. The pressure is on to maintain what they have. Too much squeezing means that young cannot be fed, which of course would reduce future numbers and cause territories to return to earlier sizes. Each male, however, fights (sings) to keep its space intact, and as large as it can under the circumstances.

And of course the presence of so many other nearby birds raises the stakes and the stimulus. Subduing the song of one neighbour is not enough, because there are so many others which our bird can hear all too clearly. My own garden bird is singing from the middle of bushes, as it flies and as it feeds on the lawn. A bird across the road sings from its conifer-top, and one sings from the roof. The song comes from Rosamund, and the bird flies to our back-garden birch and has another go.

Singing so loudly requires a lot of energy. The bird is of no great size, yet can be clearly heard for half a mile. A song thrush can manage even more. A tiny wren quivers and shakes as it pours forth its rattle. The evidence is that females select the best singer, because powerful and prolonged singing is good evidence of general strength and fitness. Males are therefore impelled to sing and sing.

Meanwhile, enjoy and marvel at it, and rejoice that at least one species is in good health currently.

Last year, Canada geese discovered Tyzack's Dam – a couple bred on the small island, I think for the first time. Large and striking birds, though smaller than a swan, they are brown of body, with a black neck and white cheeks. Introduced from North America to the lakes of rich landowners' parks, three hundred years ago, they have escaped, spread and become naturalised. They are doing very (too?) well and now number up to 100,000 in Great Britain.

Go to Bakewell and you will see why there is concern at their success. By and on the Wye, there are now dozens of them, shoving smaller birds out of the way, and pestering for food – as they have every right to. Their droppings are large and copious, can foul ponds, grass and paths. In Canada, they are culled by wolves, species of fox such as Arctic foxes on their breeding grounds, lynxes, gyrfalcons and so on.

We are without these predators (pity about the lynxes!), so numbers are rising.

Anyway, last year's pair raised four young. The babies, of course, are delightful, with yellow fluff, and trusting winning ways. They used to swim in line astern, behind the parents. In summer, they departed, presumably to the Moray Firth in north-east Scotland, where for some reason thousands gather to moult. In bad winter weather they might then leave for Europe south of us.

This May there were six adults! So the increase is now on for us. Two bred (last year's?), and again there were four goslings – on sunny days, such as there were, the parents took them to Beauchief

Gardens, where the babies potted about in the flower beds for grubs and soft leaves. They didn't mind being approached, but mum and dad set up a stern honking, and approached, heads up in pugnacious style.

The other four adults were elsewhere on the lake or dozing on the dam wall. Canadas live for twenty years or so, and do not breed till they are three, so the four could well be young of recent years (last?) learning the ins and outs of adulthood but not yet able to breed.

Watch them in 2014. There is little doubt that they will be back.

*John Kirkman*

PS. On the beautiful last Sunday of May, a check on Tyzack's Dam revealed the goose family, parents proudly and watchfully guarding the goslings, which were still naively pottering.

However my earlier count of four was too low, because there was now a bunch of six. The guides say that families are of five six or seven, so our pair is well up. Once again, the birds were ignoring the pond, and were on Beauchief Gardens' lawns and in the flower beds. Two dozen mallards were dozing, heads over shoulders, and they were also on the grass rather than the (much safer) water.

## Quicker access to scans

The physiotherapists at Activ Physiotherapy, based in Bradway, have recently been through IRMER training at Clarendon hospital. This allows them to refer fee paying patients for X-rays, Ultrasounds, MRI and CT scans without visiting a doctor. This avoids waiting long periods for a doctors' appointment and could involve a scan in the same week of the physiotherapy appointment and thus speed up the process of assessment and treatment. This will also take the pressure off the busy GP's who tend to ask for assessment as to whether a scan is required for certain musculoskeletal problems in the first place

## Snippets

**Incidents of fly tipping** on parks and open spaces in Sheffield have more than doubled in the last year according to council statistics.

**Sheffield** is the happiest city in the UK according to a new survey, with a third of respondents saying they felt happy every single day.

**The Blackstock Road 'dump-it' site** in Gleadless Valley is now open for an extra two days a week, 10am to 4pm from 1st October, only closing on Wednesdays.

**Proposals** to redevelop the former Abbeydale Picture House as a centre for climbing and other community leisure uses have been approved by the council.

**Demolition started** on the Edwardian Jessop Hospital at the end of July, despite a long running protest from conservationists.



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