



AUTUMN 2020 WILDLIFE MOVEMENTS ON ASHDOWN FOREST

September is the “pre-nuptial” time of year for **Fallow Deer**. Does (accompanied by last year’s fawns) have been heard barking and seen more conspicuously on wood margins. A Fallow buck, sporting antlers which were still a work-in-progress, was watched as he grazed nonchalantly with a small harem of does prior to the forthcoming rut.



Fallow deer by Clive Poole



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An unexpected side-effect of the growth of rough grassland following Forest fires on the East Chase has been the “stop-over” of migrating **Whinchats** (a close relative of our resident **Stonechats**), on their way to sub-Saharan Africa.



Whinchat by Clive Poole

No such perilous adventure for our **Dartford Warblers**. Most of these little treasures will not leave us to migrate south (unlike almost all our other warblers) but will stay put on the heaths to brave the coming winter.



Dartford Warbler by Clive Poole

Dartford Warblers are quite localised on the Forest preferring areas with a mix of gorse and heather and a few saplings. In autumn they become less bold and hide inside gorse and scrub like the one photographed on the East Chase. At this time of year pin-point them by their harsh call.

One summer-visiting warbler can still be heard throughout September, occasionally rendering his onomatopoeic song - the **Chiffchaff**. Some will not be leaving us until as late as early October since these tough little warblers make only a relatively short migratory journey to Spain or either side of the Mediterranean. You may hear his call in gorse or scrub on the Forest - a melancholy "tweet".



Chiffchaff by Clive Poole



Flocks of **House Martins** have been watched flying south during September. Alerted on several occasions by twittering overhead (not as sweet a sound as a Barn Swallow; listen to an app for comparison) I have been delighted by their hawking for insects often above water on the Forest. Ashdown has been a magnet for them on their journey south to Tropical Africa.



Common House Martin

The absence of insecticides has meant a welcome chance to fatten up en route south. Unfortunately for them their aerial antics come to the attention of a keen-eyed falcon, the rare **Hobby**, a pair of which have spent the summer on the West Chase.



Hobby

They like nothing better than to augment their frugal diet of dragonflies and other large insects with a plump House Martin or Swallow before they too leave us for Africa.

Clive Poole, Ashdown Forest Voluntary Ranger 11/09/2020