



## EARLY SUMMER 2020 REPORT ON BIRDLIFE

### ON THE WEST & NORTH CHASES OF ASHDOWN FOREST DURING LOCKDOWN

The highlight of June had been the unusual sighting of an **Osprey** which I saw while walking on the North Chase. It made several appearances across the north of the Forest being seen by several individuals.



**Osprey by Alistair Gray**

Bird song on the heaths of the West and North Chases died down significantly towards the end of June despite some male **Tree Pipits** stubbornly rendering their ditties from the tops of prominent trees. A juvenile was flushed from gorse litter on the ground almost under my feet and perched on a local pine branch prominently showing the yellow "gape" on its beak. The main Sussex population breeds on Ashdown's heaths.



**Tree Pipit juvenile by Clive Poole**

**Dartford Warblers** could still be heard calling deep within thick gorse and occasionally, if patient, a male might pop up onto the top of a gorse bush and give a scratchy song-burst before flitting away to a safe furze bush. From some dead gorse a grating contact-call revealed a yellow-gaped juvenile which perched long enough to have its photo taken and proving that a first brood had already fledged.



**Dartford Warbler juvenile by Clive Poole**



Male **Whitethroats** were still very active in areas of gorse with sapling birch and have continued to use those saplings to announce their territory and occasionally rise into song-flight - if you can call the scratchy burst a song! They always sound grumpy!

The male **Cuckoo** which had been tracked on foot around the central part of the West Chase lingered surprisingly long with us, calling up to 20<sup>th</sup> June before leaving for his solitary long journey back to the Congo in tropical Africa.

The presence of **Stonechats** on the heaths never goes undetected: the males in breeding plumage sit boldly on top of gorse and sapling trees calling and singing to defend their territory. They need to since they will probably sire a second brood later in the summer. They make a noisy call, sometimes described as being like two stones bashed together: hence their name "Stonechat"? Females can be seen nearby in family parties with their fledglings.



**Nightjar by Nick Cranfield**

The expected highlight of early summer has been nocturnal and has not disappointed. Sunset on warm evenings on both Chases when the wind has died down has brought out moths and later their predator the mysterious **Nightjar**.

Males who arrived last month from tropical Africa, have welcomed the night with their strange song called "churring" (in Sussex folklore likened to the sound of a spinning wheel: hence the local name "Wheelbird") which they usually emit from a horizontal tree branch. Can you spot a perched Nightjar, well-camouflaged, on a branch of a tree in the photo?

They have been seen, once their churring stops, flying out from trees over the heaths, wing-clapping and making their squeaky contact-call.

Thankfully, late June evenings also rewarded us with the ever less frequently witnessed crepuscular flight of the male **Woodcock**, a wading bird which bizarrely roosts in woodland with bracken. Alerted by the male's whistle overhead we have watched the barrel-chested males make their "roding" display flight above the line of trees bordering open heath to demark their territories.



Although much more common in winter on the Forest, there has been a male **Reed Bunting** holding a territory of wet heath on the West Chase, the male doing his best to be assertive there with his pathetic 3-note song! Presumably not pathetic though to his mate or any prospective rivals.



Reed Bunting male by Clive Poole



Reed Bunting male 2 by Clive Poole

The second species of bunting present on these Chases is the **Yellowhammer** (sometimes called “Yellow Bunting”), but it is more common on the other Chases in extensive areas of gorse often with Holly.



Yellowhammer male by Clive Poole

Clive Poole,

Voluntary Ranger

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