

JUNE 2020 BIRDLIFE ON ASHDOWN FOREST WEST & NORTH CHASES

By the beginning of June, the dawn chorus on the perimeters of Ashdown Forest had died down noticeably from its peak in early May. Blackbird, Song Thrush and Blackcap males were still singing to defend their territories, but most species had now focused their energies on feeding young broods. This was true also on the heaths, clumps, and copses of the Forest. Here migrant Redstarts and Tree Pipits were no longer prominent on treetops but could be discovered close to the ground quietly gathering beaks- full of insects for hungry mouths.



Tree Pipit with caterpillar by Clive Poole

A male Cuckoo on the West Chase had been calling faithfully most days up to 12 June and having been on the Forest now for over two months must very soon be preparing for his staged journey back to the Congo rainforest.

The main vocal entertainment on the heaths has been the “heavenly” singing of male Skylarks wherever there were large open expanses of grass and heather and in the gorsy areas with sapling birch the scratchy song of summer-visiting Whitethroats from the Sahel. In both those habitats could be heard and seen ubiquitous family groups of noisy Stonechats having reared their first brood.



Skylark with crest by Clive Poole



Stonechat male with food by Clive Poole

Flocks of mainly brown-coloured Linnets could be seen perched on gorse bushes or feeding on sandy tracks. Look carefully and you might spot the breeding-season pink breast of the male.



Linnet male with rosy breast by Clive Poole

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A few Barn Swallows have been venturing onto the heathland areas from their nesting sites dark within barns and outbuildings, skimming low over gorse and heather to pick up insects for their nestlings.



Barn Swallow male by Clive Poole

A feature in recent summers around Forest pines and woodland edges has been the daredevil noisy, tree-top song flights of Siskins a smaller green and black relative of the much more common Goldfinch. Watch out for small twittering flocks of little birds flying across the heath; you may have spotted a “charm” of Goldfinches.



Goldfinch (red face) by Clive Poole

A much bulkier finch, the Crossbill, has also been making appearances in recent weeks on the tops of mature Scots Pines where its massive crossed-over mandibles are used to prise seeds out of pinecones. A particularly gaudy orange-red male was doing this atop a pine near Chelwood Gate this month.

This morning, in bright sunshine, a sound of twittering low over the heath drew attention to a flock of ten House Martins taking advantage of a source of insects above a pool created by the Conservators’ countryside workers to provide water for grazing Exmoor ponies. That morning’s pleasant surprise was soon trumped in a nearby copse by the sudden daytime “churring” of a Nightjar disgruntled by the accidental closeness of myself and another walker. He will fly out after dusk, this evening to hunt for moths in peace.

Clive Poole

Ashdown Forest Voluntary Ranger

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