



BIRD LIFE AT BARTON GLEBE IN 2007

INTRODUCTION

Whilst providing a peaceful rural setting for woodland burials, Barton Glebe is managed in ways that is sympathetic to wildlife. Since 2000 about a half of the Glebe has been planted with about 9500 specimens of 12 species of endemic trees, the remaining land forming the 9 glades. Some trees, such as silver birches, are growing quickly; others, such as oaks more slowly. The trees will develop naturally whilst the glades are mown a couple of times each year. How are birds responding to these changes? Last winter (2006/7) and Spring I recorded what I saw on regular Wednesday morning walks and I will summarise the main findings.

WINTER

The most noticeable birds were fieldfares, visitors from Eastern Europe. Flocks of up to 200, sometimes in the company of up to 20 redwings and a few blackbirds, were constant visitors to the hawthorns in the large hedges bordering the Glebe to the West and South. They had a profusion of 'haws' to feed on for most of the winter. The hedges also held mixed flocks of up to about 20 blue, great, and long-tailed tits searching for insects and spiders. Almost every week there was a sparrow hawk quartering the hedges trying to catch one of these small birds.

There was a regular kestrel (sometimes two) hovering over the glades looking for small mammals. The grassy glades have healthy numbers of field voles - a favoured prey. The glades have started to develop a range of seed bearing plants such as teasel, docks, sorrel, fat hen and knapweed. Up to 30 each of chaffinches and linnets fed amongst them, together with a few yellow hammers and greenfinches, and up to a dozen skylarks. Flocks of up to 15 goldfinches were especially attracted to the teasels. Surprisingly, I never saw a house sparrow all winter! A green woodpecker was ever present feeding in the quieter glades. As time goes by, the glades will hold more ants (and ant hills) and become a more dependable food source for them. A great spotted woodpecker sometimes flew over, and small numbers of carrion crows and magpies were always present looking for food in the glades.



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SPRING and SUMMER

Most of the breeding birds were dependant on the larger boundary hedges which held practically all of the 'woodland' breeding birds. They included 6 pairs of chaffinches (the commonest breeder on site), 3pairs of yellow hammers (with their 'little bit of bread and no cheese please' songs), 2pairs of whitethroats, and between 1 and 3 pairs each of robin, dunnock, wren, great and blue tit. A pair of magpies and 3 pairs of wood pigeons nested in the larger hedges. Surprisingly, there did not seem to be any breeding greenfinches or goldfinches.

The glades themselves and the plantations were full of singing skylarks all summer. Up to 12 birds could be seen in the air at one time, but I think perhaps 5 pairs nested on the ground along with 2 pairs of meadow pipits. There were a couple of pairs of pheasants, a pair of red - legged partridges and- pleasingly, 2 pairs of grey (English) partridges. There was also an unlikely brood of mallard, probably from a local pond! Throughout the summer sparrow hawks, kestrels and green woodpeckers were constantly present.

WHAT CAN WE LOOK FORWARD TO?

As the trees develop, and the land is no longer farmed, we can look forward to a more diverse understory of plants appearing. Already there are healthy growths of scrubby plants such as 'volunteer' hawthorns and brambles starting to appear amongst the trees. Their development over, say, the next 5 to 10 years will be essential in attracting in the 'woodland' birds currently restricted to the hedges. It will be nice to see the blackbirds, robins and wrens extend their range. They may be followed by chaffinches and gold finches and some warblers. I look forward to the day when there is enough cover for breeding nightingales! In any event I feel sure we will have a thriving assemblage of birds that will gladden our souls and lift our hearts with their sights and songs.

Dr Gareth Thomas, Trustee.

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