

## THE WILDLIFE OF BUSHELL'S LAKE, ULLENHALL PART 2 – BIRDS

In this issue we will look at the birds which I have spotted at the lake. I'm sure there are others, especially as those I have glimpsed and hence not sure about are not included.

The first one is not what you would call a rarity but again is not common. It nests in the Norfolk reed. Its the reed warbler. A small bird that I always feel looks like a little mouse! They are one of the birds that host the cuckoo but I've not seen cuckoo in their nests at Bushell's.



*Reed warbler*

The next bird I will mention is definitely a rarity. It is the lesser spotted woodpecker. Once fairly common its numbers have declined dramatically since 1980. Its easy to recognise but not easy to spot. Its like the much more common greater spotted woodpecker but the size of a sparrow. It also lacks the red on the lower abdomen of the larger species. I have only ever seen a handful and so I was very surprised and delighted to see one at Bushell's.



*Lesser spotted woodpecker*

Following on is the quite common greater spotted woodpecker. Lovely to look at but that belies its character. They can be quite ferocious and it is thought that its predation of the lesser species is in part the reason for the lesser spotted's demise. Its numbers have increased in recent years.



*Great spotted woodpecker*



*Green woodpecker*

The other woodpecker seen at Bushell's is the green woodpecker. This bird spends as much time on the ground searching for worms etc as it does in trees. Well known for its call which is a bit like a bird laughing.



*Little owl*

Now we come on to the owls. A surprise was seeing the little owl. This was seen in the oak tree below the lake and I understand it was often there and could be seen during the day. I haven't seen it for a couple of years now. Little owls are not native to Britain but they have been here since the 19<sup>th</sup> century so have become part of the furniture. This is another bird that has declined in recent years.

A tawny owl has been heard on many occasions but not actually spotted. This is our most common owl, often heard but not seen. They have a fearsome reputation and it is a foolish person who gets close to its nest. It will attack and has been known to gouge out a person's eye.

Perhaps the best known and most loved owl, if not of all birds, is the barn owl. I saw one quartering the field one evening but only on that one occasion. Another bird whose numbers have declined in recent years. It has, however, made something of a recovery with farmers being persuaded to leave an uncultivated strip at field edges. This is the home of the short tailed vole, the main prey of the barn owl.



*Tawny Owls*



*Barn Owl*



*Siskin*

Let's now turn to the common birds that we would expect to see almost anywhere in our locality. There are house sparrows, still one of our commonest birds but their numbers have fallen significantly in recent years. I think they are all in my garden! There are robins, dunnocks, wrens, chaffinches, greenfinches, goldfinches, and siskins at Bushell's. Yes, the siskin is a small finch and you are most likely to see it in winter when its natural food in pine trees becomes scarcer.

Starlings used to be incredibly common but now they are much less so. They have declined by 80% since 1980. A bird that is usually seen as drab but if you look at it carefully you will see that its feathers are iridescent and quite a work of art. They are members of the crow family as are blackbirds, carrion crows, jackdaws, rooks, jays and magpies, all of which can be seen at the lake. The jay is one of our most handsome birds in my opinion and has an unjust reputation for taking other birds. Another bird which is a member of the crow family is the raven which I have seen over the lake on a couple of occasions. Song and mistle thrushes are present but their numbers are now very small compared to years ago when they were both common. I love to hear the song of the thrush singing on a summer's evening as there is something quite evocative about it.

The other thrushes that have been seen here are what I call the winter thrushes, the fieldfare and the redwing. They are very keen on berries and if you have berries in your garden you will probably have seen flocks of them there.



*Fieldfare*



*Redwing*

Titmice are to be seen in abundance. The most common is the blue tit which has increased in numbers in recent years. No, its not all bad news! Great tits are almost as common and the third and fourth members of the family to be seen are the coal tit and the long tailed tits. The coal tit is rather smaller than the blue tit with a dab of white on its head as though someone had caught it with a paintbrush.



*Jay*

Long tailed tits are as it says; they have very long tails for such a small bird and they are always present in groups. I've never seen any of the other titmice at Bushell's. Notice I have chosen my words carefully here!



*Coal tit*



*Long tailed tit*

Ducks abound but the number of species is limited. The mallard is present in numbers but at times is outnumbered by tufted ducks. The latter are small diving ducks which are easy to recognise. They have become more common of late. These are the only true ducks I have seen at Bushell's. What I often call a duck is the dabchick or little grebe. Its often at the lake but under it more than on it. I would also have expected to see the great crested grebe here but so far I have not.

When we get on to geese then the most prevalent is, of course, the Canada goose. A native of North America it has now become established in Britain and their numbers are increasing. Feral greylag geese are also present but only on the odd occasion. Coot and moorhen are seen regularly at the lake but one day I'm hoping that their close relative the water rail will show up. They are all part of the crake family.



*Dabchick*



*Tufted duck*

Two species of swan have been on the water, the mute swan and a black swan. The black swan is a native of Australia and will certainly be an escape from a collection. Much smaller than the mute swan it nevertheless holds its own and I saw it driving a mute swan away in no uncertain terms.

There are two birds of prey I've seen when fishing. These are the buzzard and the kestrel. The buzzard is a tremendous success story and they are now a common sight in most parts of the country. It's a hard job being a bird of prey so they have really done well. To a degree their success is at the expense of the kestrel but thankfully these are still fairly common. They are the only British birds of prey that hover keeping their wings motionless. You can tell also them apart by size as the buzzard is a much larger bird. I'm sure that one day we will have a red kite visit but although I've heard of them not far away I've yet to see one at Bushell's.



*Buzzard*



*Kestrel*



*Red kite*

The red kite is a magnificent bird. It is large and has a wing span of 1.8m (6ft). You can always recognise it by the distinct fork in the tail. If anyone sees one at any of our waters please let me know.

Summer sees the influx of swallows, martins and swifts. The swallow is a familiar sight in summer in England and needs no description. There are two martins in Britain, the house martin and the sand martin. The house martin is the only one I've seen at Bushell's Lake. They often make nests in the eaves of buildings. Swifts are flying machines *par excellence*. They fledge from the nest and don't land again for up to four years, even sleeping in flight! The swift can be recognised by its sickle shape when flying, usually very high on summer days.



*House martin*



*Swift*

Wagtails are common birds. Well, some are. Pied wagtails can be seen almost everywhere with their tails bobbing constantly. They are common at Bushell's. The grey wagtail is also a common bird but is almost always seen near water. Although its name is "grey" it has a lot of yellow about it. I've spotted these at the lake on several occasions. The other two wagtails I have not seen at Bushell's Lake and I'm not surprised as they are quite rare in Britain. The white wagtail is a continental species but does sometimes find its way over here. The yellow wagtail isn't at all common and its name is a little misleading as it's a pale green in colour but yellow on its underside.

One bird at Bushell's which lives up to its name is the yellowhammer. This is another bird that has declined in Britain but can be seen in hedges quite often.

A bird I never expected to see is the corn bunting. This bird has declined and there are now only a few left although I believe there is a thriving community near Stratford. I saw it for the one and only time after I had started writing this article.



*Yellowhammer*



*Corn bunting*

Common birds seen are wood pigeons, feral pigeons, collared doves, pheasants and grey herons.

Birds which are fairly common that have been spotted at the lake are chiff-chaff, willow warbler, blackcap, nuthatch and treecreeper. Its interesting to note that if you see a bird walking down a tree it will be a nuthatch as they walk up and down whereas the treecreeper only goes up.

Birds that I thought I might see but haven't as yet are reed bunting, redpoll, lapwings and common tern. Reed buntings have been seen regularly in the area and with the amount of reed it's an ideal habitat. Redpolls have been seen in a garden only a quarter of a mile away and lapwings are around in the local fields. Some lakes not too far away have a thriving population of common terns. I know that from April to June cuckoos are present as I've heard them but as yet never managed to spot them at Bushell's. I'm not good at recognising birds by their song but even I can manage that one!

Gulls are often at the lake and the two species recorded are the herring gull and the black headed gull. The black headed gull has a chocolate brown head in summer but just a fleck of black on each side of its head in winter.

Finally we come to my favourite birds of those I've seen at Bushell's Lake. The bullfinch is a favourite but again not as common as it used to be. Most of the birds mentioned up to now are superficially similar on both male and female. Exceptions being tufted duck, mallard, chaffinches and pheasant,. Yes, I do know there are some differences with some others but you have to look hard to see them. The bullfinch male differs from the female as shown below. My other favourite is the kingfisher, and who wouldn't put it as one of their favourites? A fabulous bird, and one of the most colourful in Britain.



*Bullfinch (male)*



*Bullfinch (female)*

I was hoping to be able to report that the one bird I hadn't seen was the cormorant. Alas, I was there recently with Dave Evason and one flew over! We can only hope it's a one-off.

I've no doubt that I will see other birds in the coming seasons and I hope you do too. If you see anything that I haven't then I'd be pleased to hear about it.

Next time we will look at the plants and flowers of the site. This is a topic where I am but a novice and had a great deal of help from our late president, Bob Dunnett.

John Lane  
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