

Country Notes for June 2022

As we move into June, all of our summer visiting migratory birds should have arrived. I really enjoy charting the first of each species as I see them and comparing the dates with previous years. At the time of writing, in the second week of May, I have still only seen two house martins and no swifts at all. This is a worrying trend, and it has been the case for the last few years. Happily, a reasonable number of house martins did eventually appear in our villages last year, although by no means in the numbers that we used to see. Last year I saw my first swift on 21st May and in the past I expected to see them soon after 1st May. However, soon after their eventual arrival, they were in evidence around Hollingbourne Church, where they remained throughout the rest of the summer.

Over the past few years I have particularly watched and listened for the arrival of our whitethroats, a small warbler with a grey head, brown back and white throat. They are to be found in thickets and tangled bits of hedge where they sit near the top, giving their brief scratchy call and occasionally rising into the air and parachuting back down. This should make them relatively easy to see, but in point of fact they are quite difficult to find, even when you can clearly hear them calling. However there always seemed to be more whitethroats than lesser whitethroats.

Last year however, and this year especially, the number of lesser whitethroats seem to have grown, which is very encouraging. Lesser whitethroats tend to be found in denser hedges than their cousins and they are grey above, with a white throat that blends into a similarly white underside. Their call is very different from the whitethroat – a brief warble followed by a single note burst, which is really quite loud. If anything, they are harder to see than the whitethroats!

How good to find a bird that, in a villages at least, seems to be doing well, despite its perilous journey from the south each year.

Andrew G Snowdon