

Country Notes for July 2016

“My love is like a turtle-dove, all true.” Geoffrey Chaucer

"Like to a pair of loving turtle-doves,
That could not live asunder day or night". William Shakespeare

These are quotes from two people for ever associated with England. Their writings are as famous as the bird they are talking about. It would be inconceivable for us to think about summer without mention of the Turtle Dove.

These birds join us for the summer, having wintered in Africa. They look rather like a delicate Collared Dove but they are darker with many more subtle colours in their plumage. They are also rather more slight and have white in their tail feathers. If in doubt however just wait for them to call. The Collared Dove has a fairly mournful call, similar to a Wood Pigeon. Turtle Doves however sound like a rather loud purring cat. If it isn't purring, it isn't a Turtle Dove!

But now for the bad news. The Turtle Dove is in danger of disappearing altogether from our shores. There are remarkably few places where they may be seen now. Extensive reedbeds and marshland are probably your best chance. No one knows what has happened. Perhaps it is the ever expanding size of the Sahara over which many have to cross to get here. Perhaps it is the shooting of song birds which still seems to happen in many countries through which they pass.

What is certain however is that if you think you have seen a Turtle Dove in Hollingbourne it is almost certainly a Collared Dove!

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