

Country Notes for January 2018

The start of a new year brings with it the hope of exciting new things in the months to come. Christmas is now behind us, which means that the days are slowly starting to get longer, minute by minute. Last year brought with it lots of excitement in the bird world. Bee-eaters bred in two places in England, cattle egrets established themselves as breeding birds on another RSPB reserve and spoonbills bred in the north of England.

Here in Hollingbourne little egrets regularly roost, whereas a few years ago they were a rarity anywhere in the UK. We have witnessed the spread of Buzzards, with birds seen on a daily basis and breeding in our woodland in the village. A few years ago it was a great rarity to see one at all!

A few weeks ago I was walking with Bracken on the top of the downs and as we walked along I saw two buzzards at really close range being mobbed by a kestrel! The kestrel is much more manoeuvrable, so was in no danger from the larger and more cumbersome buzzards. What was so special about this was that until recently kestrels have been in decline and in the last couple of years have made a real come back. They may even be seen once more hovering beside the M20, which had become very much a sight from the past.

While I was sitting on the ground reflecting on all of this, a very large crow flew past – and barked! It was a raven! These birds have long been confined to the west of Great Britain but have been spreading further east year after year. This was the second time I had seen them in Hollingbourne recently. They have been breeding on the cliffs in Dover and at Dungeness for a few years now. Perhaps we too will soon have them breeding in Hollingbourne!

I wonder what changes we will see this year?

Happy New Year!

Andrew Snowdon