

Local Bird Report – by Chris Preston

Many birdwatchers keep lists of their bird sightings. Lists comprise all the birds one has seen over a period of time and this period is mostly annual. Examples of lists could be birds seen on holidays either in the UK or abroad or birds seen away from local locations and of course birds seen in a local patch. Most ornithologists keep a life list and some become 'twitchers' and go for mega sightings and lifers but more on this another time.

As I mentioned in my last article, my local patch is in the area around Eaton, and my total species of birds seen on my patch (within the last 4 years since moving) is approximately 90. Of course different birds seen in different environments can vary a lot. For example if I lived at Cley I would see many more different species and probably more than 90 and I'm not likely to see gannets flying along the River Yare at Eaton, unlike Minsmere.

Birds on my local list consist of the usual suspects, such as carrion crows, kestrels and jackdaws however rarer birds can turn up. It was exciting when a grasshopper warbler turned up on the marshes. It was identified by its song, known as 'reeling' whilst sounding like an angler's reel being wound in or like a free-wheeling bicycle. This bird could be heard quite clearly on the Keswick side of the river.

A few days ago, I was walking along the riverbank and glimpsed the flashing blue and orange of a kingfisher, I quite regularly see these birds in many different areas of my patch in close proximity to water where they find the fish they need to survive, hopefully this means that the river water and dykes are quite healthily clean as they are supplying fresh fish for these beautifully coloured birds. One day I was standing on the bridge near Keswick Mill and just stood watching a bird going up and down the river five times under the bridge, this was in the summer and presumably it had a nest nearby. If you are lucky to know the whereabouts of a nest you are guaranteed many sightings and possible photographs. I have also espied them in other places such as the UEA Broad, Earlham Park and near the dyke close to the bird feeders at Marston Marshes.

Kingfishers nest in holes in riverbanks and the nest is a deep tubular tunnel lined with fish bones, and of course if the hole isn't high enough up the bank and the river level rises then the nest can be washed away and obviously any young will be lost. In some harsh winters kingfishers don't survive as they are susceptible to cold wintry conditions.

Amusingly I have seen kingfishers sitting on 'No Fishing' signs at Cringleford and Keswick Mill. Most people when seeing a kingfisher for the first time think they are surprisingly small. They are a bit smaller in size than a starling and despite its bright colours they are much more unobtrusive than may be expected and in the dappled shade of foliage above rippling water they can be difficult to spot. Kingfishers tend to have favourite perching spots and if you get to know where these branches or posts are situated you have a better chance of seeing them. Often it is the sharp call that gives it away, followed by a glimpse of a bright blue back as these birds fly away at a good speed over water. If you are very lucky you can have really close, clear views, and could see a kingfisher diving dramatically from a perch and also briefly hovering. Occasionally they will take advantage of a garden pond full of goldfish, but visits are usually brief as kingfishers are shy birds and they quickly fly off when disturbed. Male and female kingfishers appear similar but the female has a black bill with a red base compared to the male's the male's entire black bill. It makes a quite loud sharp, high 'kit-cheee' sound and also has a fast, high trill in spring.