

A Look at Birds Around Eaton Village – By Chris Preston

Hi my name is Chris Preston, I am a keen bird watcher and I have a local patch where I have been bird watching for many years comprising the area around my house and stretching down to Marston Marshes from Ipswich Road, including Eaton Common and Keswick Mill, the piece of land behind Waitrose and sometimes venturing along the Yare valley towards the UEA. Therefore, as I am a member of EVRA I have been asked by the Committee to give regular bulletins on the EVRA website of my regular bird sightings.

A regular occurrence on my patch as well as fellow walkers with or without dogs, trains and cows is the abundance of Wood Pigeons. In fact any bird activity often makes me assume 'oh it's just another Wood Pigeon.' These birds are considered by many to be pests especially to farmers and gardeners, and have been given the nick name of "Woodies" by some people; I have heard many farmers blame the "Woodies" for causing havoc to their cereal fields and gardeners to their vegetable plots. In late summer and autumn cereal constitutes three/quarters of its food and a single Wood Pigeon requires 50 grams of food a day. When cereals are not available, clover leaves are a favourite.

Sometimes what appears to be just another Wood Pigeon could be a Stock Dove, these appear on the marshes and therefore when you think it's only another Wood Pigeon it could be something more exciting and unusual like a Stock Dove. Pigeons and Doves are symbols of peace and love (but perhaps not in the case of the "Woodie") and are found all over the world. Only in the Arctic and Antarctic are these graceful birds absent.

A total of 289 species are recognised, but only 7 are found in Europe, 6 of these species breed within the boundaries of Europe, whilst one, the Rufous Turtle Dove is an accidental visitor to Europe from its home in Asia.

Firstly, the Wood pigeon, which is also confusingly called by some the Ring Dove, is the most common and widespread Pigeon, it appears to be found everywhere and in recent times has increasingly invaded many large cities. It is easily distinguished by its large size, giveaway white ring on the side of the neck (hence the name Ring Dove) and broad white bar on the wing. Outside the breeding season many Pigeons and Doves can be found in large flocks mixing with their domestic/ feral cousins such as those hanging around Norwich Market Place looking for titbits. I get Wood Pigeons in my back garden on a regular basis and Stock Doves appear now and again. In flight the dark underwing helps to identify the 'Woodie' and there is often a loud clatter when these birds take flight, cooing consists of five syllables with emphasis on the first syllable.

Stock Doves sometimes mix in flocks in towns and villages; they become very tame whilst mixing with domestic pigeons, a good way of separating this species from the Wood Pigeon is when they are seen together in large flocks or on the ground in pairs. The Stock Dove then appears much smaller, about 13" in size compared to the Wood Pigeon which is plumper and about 16". Stock Doves are uniformly grey, lacking the white wing bar and the white ringed neck band. In flight it has faster wing beats and flies straighter than a Wood Pigeon, its cooing is a monotonous coughing sound an "oo-hoo-hoo".

So the next time if/when you are out and about in the area, don't assume the flash of a grey bird in flight or perched in a tree or on a telegraph wire or sitting on the grass is just another Wood Pigeon it could be a Stock Dove.