

Incomers



We should be wary of ‘incomers’, some are quite harmless, even attractive or useful, some not so welcome. As discussed in the last issue, the arrival of the fungus that causes ash die-back may change our landscape markedly. Such colonisers may arise from our increased traffic of people and goods, both nationally and internationally, through climate change, deliberate introduction or escapes, even opportunistic adaptation. Here are a few local examples.

I was sitting in The Fountain around last Christmas and became aware of a couple of beetles wandering around the window. And then more. I thought they looked a bit odd and took a couple home, but couldn’t find them in any of my books. But even from my description, Peter Hodge, the beetle recorder for Sussex, knew instantly what they were. The Welsh Oak Longhorn beetle, *Pyrrhidium sanguineum*, was a first for East Sussex. Although widespread on the continent, for many years it was known in UK only from a very small area of Wales and the border counties. Then it began to spread. It was first recorded in West Sussex in 2012 and is now known from about five localities there. As its scientific name suggests, its body is a bright fiery blood red, while its head, legs and antennae are black. It lives under the bark of oak trees and takes about a year from egg to adult. It normally emerges in about May, but the warmth of the pub was waking them up early from the logs piled up for the fire. They continued to emerge for a few weeks. I did establish that the logs were supplied from Chailey and came from a tree felled at East Grinstead, so there will surely be some further records from around here.

Another recent Plumpton coloniser is the feral pigeon. It’s only in the last few years that I have seen them around Plumpton Green and later realised there was a breeding colony established in East View Fields. More recently they seem to have settled around the Village Hall and are also lurking between Strawlands and The Fountain and in the St Helena Lane area. It was clear that the East View Fields birds were nesting behind solar panels and that quite a few of the panels in that area had been wired off to stop the birds gaining access. It is intriguing that the birds should have adapted so quickly to take advantage of solar panels to colonise a new area. Wanting to know if this had been observed elsewhere, I resorted to ‘the web’ only to find page after page of pest control companies advertising to deal with pigeons under solar panels!

Well, 'pests' or not, it looks like they will be here to stay. I know there are those who wouldn't be without them, and I know they are not competing with turtle doves (which we now seem to have lost) and stock doves (which are doing OK around here), but I'm still not sure whether I welcome them. There's some amazing old dovecotes still around at places like Alciston, Parham and Climping and perhaps, come Brexit, they might get drawn into use again. The pigeons and doves are an interesting group, since the wood pigeon seems to be becoming increasingly numerous, tame and commensal, the collared dove is now so well acclimatised here around towns and villages after a sudden explosion of its range through south-east Europe to arrive here in the 1950s, and I think even the stock dove is becoming a little more ready to visit gardens.

The marsh frog was introduced to Romney Marsh, Kent, in 1935. It took a long time before it started spreading through Kent and East Sussex but it is now established in dykes and ponds and ditches associated with most of the East Sussex rivers; for some reason it doesn't seem to much like the Cuckmere. Unlike the common frog it stays associated with water most of the year, and it has a very loud and distinctive call from late spring through most of the summer. You can easily find them near bits of the Ouse, such as on the Railway Land reserve in Lewes or around Barcombe Mills. But only the odd stray around here. How they get moved around is not clear, but individuals turn up in ponds and ditches and croak away for several years and then disappear. I am only aware of a couple of records from Plumpton and one nearer Chailey Common, but there are probably more and it is likely to become better established in our area.

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