



The Year of the Bird

The Wildlife Group's activities over the years have included surveys and conservation actions for a variety of species flora and fauna, including toads, bats and dormice. We still plan to carry out annual surveys or, for example, harvest mice habitats and have been active since January in the evening escorting migrating toads with no road sense - usually in the pouring rain. However we also decided that 2024 would be 'The year of the Bird', with more than the usual focus on the birdlife in our local area.

It is generally agreed that British birdlife is in decline, with the RSPB reporting that since 1980 one in six birds has been lost, an estimate of 600 million breeding birds. Those most in serious decline are the Song Thrush, Skylark, Lapwing and House Sparrow. Declining numbers are particularly noted among farmland birds, such as skylarks, with loss of habitat and intensive farming practices being cited as the main reasons for their disappearance.

Not all bird species are declining. According to the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) the number of some birds including Carrion Crows, Magpies and Jackdaws, stock and collared Doves, Woodpigeons and Buzzards has increased. Also truly non-native exotica such as Ring-Necked Parakeets - which have been spotted in Plumpton - and the Egyptian Goose. It is assessed that doves and pigeons have benefited from increased areas of brassica crops, particularly oil seed rape and corvids from changes in game management practice. Also birds traditionally thought to be 'woodland' such as Nuthatch and Long-tailed Tit are increasingly recorded in gardens, probably as a result of increased feeding opportunities.

The Wildlife Group is planning a number of events throughout the year which we hope will encourage residents to be more aware of the bird life around the area and spot what's here and what's missing, such as recording the date of the first summer swallow and hearing the first cuckoo. This will really help to ascertain how loss or change of habitat and farming practices, climate and weather events are affecting our local bird population and promote advocacy of bird friendly practices such as retention of wild, uncultivated margins in arable fields and sensitive hedge trimming. The Wildlife Group's website has more information about how the record bird sightings including the BTO's Birdtrack and, of course, local information can be sent for our records using the [contact form](#). There is also details of [local bird surveys](#). The Year of the Bird kicked off with the January Big Garden Birdwatch, held at Old Mill House, the results from this, and previous years, are available on the website.

On March 27th Reg Lanaway is presenting an illustrated talk 'Through the Season's in Sussex'.

There will be more events in the spring, keep an eye on your in-box and the [website](#).

Nightingale Walk and Sausage Supper -date to be advised, once the Nightingales are back and singing! Join an evening walk to hear these wonderful summer visitor's atmospheric song.

Downland Dawn Chorus Walk - rise and shine to hear the bird chorus and enjoy a bacon sandwich after a Downs yomp. Again date to be advised. The Group plans to install swift boxes in East Chiltington Church tower to encourage these summer visitors to return to a previous roost. There will also be an annual survey of rook nesting sites.