



Friends of Hambrook Marshes

July 2014 Bird Report

Michael Walter



Linnets

Autumn in the birds' calendar seems to start in July: most birdsong dries up, and juveniles that have bred elsewhere drift onto the reserve prior to migrating southwards. A recent example of a young, displaced bird was the willow warbler which, unlike its close relative, the chiffchaff, from which it is barely distinguishable, does not breed on the reserve. Unusually amongst birds, the juvenile willow warbler is brighter than its dull khaki-hued parents, so the bird I saw beside the cycle path, busily feeding in the tall vegetation (since mown) was whiter, yellower and greener than the adults that arrived in spring.

A pair of linnets, which are recorded here only sporadically, were also seen, possibly a pair that had already nested or suffered a breeding failure. A turtle dove was purring from telegraph wires a couple of times just off the reserve, but won't be heard again this year, and two swifts on 13th were definitely my last records, as they all head off to Africa by the end of July, an annual phenomenon that never ceases to depress me. Another sign of impending autumn is the return of occasional black-headed gulls.

Fortunately the cheerful whitethroats are still poking up in scrub and bramble patches and, although no longer singing, their seemingly irrepressible chirpiness never fails to cheer me up.

Due to holidays, only two visits were paid in July, but a second month passed by with virtually no sightings of swallows or house martins, and it seems to have been another dismal year for them locally.

It's my impression that there is far more teasel around than last year, mostly along the cycle path verges, but also in some of the fields. In the past the dead flowerheads, with their rough, hooked barbs, were used to tease wool, combing it straight prior to spinning into lengths. Nowadays it is more likely to be spray-painted for indoor decoration, but it is always intriguing to watch the flowers over a period of days; the head is composed of hundreds of small mauve flowers that, instead of appearing simultaneously, blossom in coordinated bands around the head, gradually spreading upwards as the lower flowers die off and fresh upper ones open up. On some heads the performance is even more intricate, with two bands ascending simultaneously.



Whitethroat

Photos courtesy of Dave Smith