

Well, we left you last time at the beginning of April after having seen some interesting birds and we were waiting for Spring to really kick off.

The Grey Partridges that were found in March continued to remain in the fields around Burgess Way throughout and may/probably have attempted to breed. We'll probably never know since they're secretive birds at the best of times, keeping their heads down in the grass and crops. We do continue to hear them occasionally and they are probably now resident rather than visitors.

The first House Martins were seen on the 4th April, the first Swallows were seen over Pewley on the 8th April and the Swifts, as usual, didn't pitch up until the 27th. This is normal. Swifts are always later than Swallows, for some reason, and they're always the first to leave. By the end of July those screaming parties that you can hear now around the houses will all have headed south. We'll see the odd one or 2 throughout August but the majority of Swifts will be back in Africa and beyond. Our first Hobby of the year was found sitting on the very top of a tree on the Chantry on the 26th April. Hobbys are small, sleek, pointy falcons that come here for the summer.



They look like big Swifts and they are super-fast and agile. They need to be because they specialise on hunting fast moving birds and insects like Swallows and Dragonflies. You know when there is a Hobby about because all the Swallows and Martins in the area start yelling at the tops of their voices and fly as high as they can to get above the "Bandit at 12 o'clock".

Surprise Bird of the Month for April went to a Fieldfare which was seen on the horse paddock just down from Rosamund on the 11th April. Fieldfares are winter thrushes and normally long headed north to their breeding grounds in Scandinavia and the Arctic circle – but one was still knocking about here much later than normal. I wonder why?

May is the month where the birding can be spectacular. It's one of the months that birders look forward to most – the birds are easy to identify as they are in their best breeding plumage AND because they are all showing off and yelling their heads off to find a mate, they're at their easiest to find. And so it proved – on May 1st Rosamund was host to not one but TWO Lesser Whitethroats.



Lesser Whitethroats are lovely things – much nicer in my opinion to Greater Whitethroats. Greater Whitethroats are all over the place – there is a breeding pair at least in Rosamund. Lessers are rarer for a start, and they are a vision in greys and blacks. They have a cool song too ... a bit scratchy to start with which turns into a pleasing little rattle at the end. [You can listen to that song here.](#)

But, if we can have a drum roll – the May Bird of the Month was when David of Pewley Down Volunteers found what must rank as the best male spring bird on the planet – a male Pied Flycatcher! Just look at him! He was only seen once and for a short time but what a bird that is! On his way to his breeding areas – possibly in Scotland or further north – he decided to stop off in Pewley for a few minutes.



Possibly the only bird that could rival the Pied Flycatcher is the Yellowhammer. Earlier in the year there was one calling briefly from a hedge. This May there was one, possibly two, singing their heads off from between Longdown Road and the horse stables towards the Chantries. Everyone should know

the classic “Little-bit-of-bread-and-no-cheeeeeeeeeese” song that the Yellowhammer sings – if you don’t [then you can get that song here](#) – and try and remember it because hopefully it will become commoner on Pewley as it was a few years ago. I hope ...

Other good birds in May were a Hawfinch and someone reported a Nightingale and Woodlark. Hawfinches probably fly over reasonably regularly but they never stop. And I’ve never heard a Nightingale on Pewley – I don’t know anyone who has. (Cue a bunch of people saying that there are loads of them over here, or there, or ...) But I await the day when a Nightingale sings from the hedge on the western side of Rosamund. It will happen – Nightingales are around this area of Surrey and not far away. There was at least one in Shalford in May for Pete’s sake. But for the time being it’s a “next year” ...

So, we moved into June which is, traditionally, the worst month for a birder. The birds have bred or are still breeding. There’s a whole load of dowdy, dull juveniles skulking around trying not to get eaten and since their parents don’t need to attract a mate – they’re all losing their breeding plumage and keeping out of the way too. June and July can be a slog both to find birds and to identify them.

But not on Pewley this year! Recently, having seen the approach of a .. ahem ... “significant birthday” ... I invested a small sum in wildlife recorder. I won’t bore you with the technical details – I can bore you with a talk about it if you want – but basically you strap it to a tree overnight, take out the SD chip in the morning and then download the .wav files and see what was recorded overnight. AND GUESS WHAT??!! ... it found a QUAIL. A proper, wild Quail! In fact TWO Quails!



The thing is – a Quail is a proper rare bird in the UK. Firstly, they are very secretive. Seriously secretive. They’re worse than Partridges. Secondly, they only give away their presence by “singing” – and only singing normally at dawn and dusk. Thirdly, they’re rare and only appear in the summer. In most years there’s a “few” around the country. But some years – and this year is one of them – it is called a “Quail Year” where there are lots of them up and down the country. Probably triggered by the intense heat in Spain and France – this is a Quail year. And on the night of the 26th June – as the recorder was doing its thing – we recorded not one, but two, Quail singing their “wet-my-lips” call. [You can hear the real recording of “our” Quails here!](#) and revel in the fact that this might be the first ever Quails heard on Pewley Down. Well, at least in the recent past.

They only “sang” for around 10 minutes at around 4am – and then were heard no more despite extensive searching. Such is birding. Other birds that have been picked up by the sound recorder during the recent days and nights – Moorhen, Coot and Little Grebe. These are all “new” birds for Pewley and all of them are actually water birds. As you are all aware there is no water on Pewley, or very little, but they do relocate between wet areas at night – they’re not strong fliers – and so we pick them up as they call to each other overhead during the night.

Finally to round off June – which is normally a quiet month – on the 7th June a Cuckoo flew south over the meadow and away. Cuckoos – by definition – don’t spend a whole lot of time building nests and raising chicks. So as soon as they have mated and laid their eggs – they are gone. So, our one will be at least in Southern Europe by now – maybe even further.

And on the 9th June a group of mobbing birds was making a huge racket. Clearly they were upset at something – and so it proved when an adult Tawny Owl and a young bird who was clearly just out of the nest were seen just in the trees on Burgess Way. The juvenile bird is pictured below



As we hit mid-July, you need to know that officially (in the bird world) it is early autumn! Young, recently hatched, juvenile birds will be dispersing all over the country. The adult birds that have bred will also be dispersing and looking to head back to their winter areas. Because of this dispersal, July and August is when we start to see different birds turn up on Pewley as they stop off on their long migration south. The autumn migration is not as urgent as the spring migration and so birds tend to be a little more sedentary and hang around a little longer at their stop-off points. The downside is that they are mostly in dowdy, duller plumages – but we should start to see Redstarts, Pipits, Flycatchers and warblers knocking about the hedges soon and some of these might be very interesting indeed.

So, yeah, you’re probably all on your summer holidays – but for us birders the nights are drawing in. Look up!