

### Wildlife Notes 34, 8<sup>th</sup> January 2023

Happy New Year, to everyone. I've got quite a few sightings to tell you about, so thought I'd get some notes done a bit sooner than my usual gap!

The weather continues to affect our wildlife in lots of ways. When we had all the rain and flooding between Christmas and New Year, I had a very unexpected sighting in the burn in Coalpit Den – a Dipper! These lovely little black and white birds are usually found on rivers and streams with a bit more water than the little trickle which comes down from Downfield, through Coalpit Den and eventually ends up in the Kettle Burn and the Eden. However, at that time the Eden was in complete flood and even the Kettle Burn was a torrent of brown water. So I think the little Dipper had been unable to feed in any of its usual spots because of too much water, and it had made its way upstream to somewhere safe to search about in the water for insects and grubs. It posed nicely on a branch across the burn, bobbing and dipping in the way which gives it its name.

Today I saw a Red Squirrel crossing the road near Middlefield, and about 20m further on a Grey Squirrel crossing as well. At this time of year, squirrels can spend quite a lot of time on the ground as they search around for buried nuts which they cached in the autumn. They will have been hampered by all the rain and the short days, so any chance to get to feed will be taken. Squirrels do not actually hibernate, but they can stay curled up in their dreys for a few days at a time if the weather is really against them.

I'm quite excited to have my own mini winter murmuration in Burnturk. For the last week about 100 to 120 Starlings have been flying around in a tight knit group just at dusk, before coming to spend the night in a very small and unassuming ivy-covered tree in my henrun, easily seen by everyone, as it is just at the road junction in Burnturk. Now I know 100 Starlings in a murmuration is nothing compared to the 100s of thousands they get at Gretna or Brighton Pier, but nevertheless, I've really been enjoying their aerial acrobatics every evening.

I've decided that our bird life in Burnturk area must be really optimistic! It has been a little bit milder the last few days and I've heard no fewer than four species starting their Spring songs. Robins are plentiful in the garden and I have been hearing their territorial "Spring" song for a couple of days. Prior to that, I have heard both Woodpigeons and Stock Doves calling and this morning there was a Great Spotted Woodpecker drumming, also the start of it marking its territory.

And finally, 10 days later than last year, I have found the first Aconite blooming today. These beautiful yellow members of the buttercup family are a garden bulb which grows in great profusion in my garden and it is such a lovely boost to see them coming into bloom. They won't be in full bloom for a month or so yet, but they provide a welcome source of nectar for any early emerging bumblebees.

Alison