

Wildlife Notes 49, September 17th, 2024

I've finally added a special bird to my garden bird list, when it actually landed in my big tree – a Raven! I know we have them everywhere round here now, but it is the first time I have been able to say I've had one in the garden! Some people keep garden bird lists of all the species they have seen in or from their garden – if any of you were at the talk by Will Cresswell in the Spring you may remember a photo of him sitting on his chimney with a telescope so that he could see puffins out near the Isle of May, and add them to his garden list! I am more strict and only count those which have actually set foot in the garden. So, as of yesterday, my garden list stands at 62 species!

Back to the Raven, it is the largest of our corvid species in the UK, being the same size as a buzzard, and thought to be one of the most intelligent of birds. In fact, all the corvids are intelligent and quick to learn new things, which has helped them to be a very successful group all over the world. Britain has 7 species of corvid, or 8 if you count the Hooded Crow as a separate species and not a sub-species. Of the seven UK species, we have six in our immediate area – Carrion Crow, Jackdaw, Raven, Rook, Magpie, and Jay. All of the corvid species have been doing well in recent years, with Jays and Ravens in particular becoming much more widespread. I know some of you have Jays coming to your bird feeders but it is one species I've not noted in my garden yet! Maybe next year!

This little spell of hot weather is bringing out the butterflies and giving insects a last chance to feed up before the winter, for those which survive overwinter. I think insects have struggled a bit this summer – have you noticed that there are not nearly as many wasps as usual? I spent a while a few nights ago, earnestly peering through a magnifying glass at the face of a dead wasp, found in Carol's house from a wasp nest in her roof. The wasps seemed to be very small compared to usual and I wondered if they were a different species. The way to tell the common wasp species apart is to look at the markings on their faces. I had a friend who used to catch live wasps and hold them between his fingers while he studied their face to decide which species they were. I'm afraid I'm not that brave (or foolhardy!) so I made do with looking at the face of a dead one. Anyway, the result of my study is that Carol's wasps are indeed just the Common Wasp, but they are smaller than usual. I think that must be because they have not been able to find as many caterpillars etc. to feed their broods and they have matured at a smaller size.

It is the start of the fungi season, when I have to start re-learning the common species, which I never seem to keep in my head! I find them very attractive and interesting! We can spend ages on a dog walk looking at fungi and taking photos, while the dogs get bored and flop down nearby. I had a countryside ranger friend who had his dog with him on a fungi walk, and as he pointed out a particularly poisonous species, the dog joined in and gulped it down! It had to be rushed to the vet to deal with that, but luckily all was well in the end.



One “fungus” which we saw in Eastwood last week was in fact a slime mould – pictured. I knew that slime moulds are not fungus at all, but are a colony of micro-organisms, so we asked google what they were. Well – Wikipedia came up with: **“Slime mould** is an informal name given to a polyphyletic assemblage of unrelated eukaryotic organisms in the Stramenopiles, Rhizaria, Discoba, Amoebozoa and Holomycota groups..” Goodness, that is too much for me! My understanding of slime moulds is they are a well organised colony of some sort of single celled organisms, which work together, to breakdown organic matter in the soil, and when they come to reproduce, they climb up grass stems or bushes and trees, and some of them are programmed to produce spores which disperse in the wind. They then have to come together with other suitable spores to form new colonies, and so the process goes on. The photo is not really a typical slime mould, which are more commonly like blobs of orange, yellow or white badly scrambled eggs in consistency!

Alison.