



Barbarian Invasion

With ponds frozen and the ground covered in snow and ice, the last few weeks will have had a significant impact on local wildlife. We know, for instance, that many barn owls have been found dead elsewhere in the country, starving to death as they cannot find food. Other birds are more fortunate, being able to rely on the goodwill of their human neighbours and getting through bird food at an astonishing rate. Along with the regular garden birds many of us will have seen birds such as reed bunting, long-tailed tit, brambling and redwing in our gardens. Nevertheless we know from past experience that a hard winter like this will mean a decrease in the population of many small birds that simply can't keep their energy levels up, although most species will recover again within a few years.

For a fortunate few, however, there has been an even more exotic garden visitor. Waxwings come to this country every year – usually in ones and twos, but every ten years or so there is a major population eruption and large numbers appear. This has been one of those years. Like some kind of Viking invasion, thousands of waxwings, one of our most beautiful birds, have poured into the country from their regular homes in northern and eastern Europe in search of food. And when they find it, like their Nordic predecessors, they simply plunder it and move on! Fortunately their prey is not monasteries and treasure, but berries. Once they find a berry tree they will quickly strip it bare, feeding at whatever angle - up-side down, sideways - is required to get to the fruit.



Just to illustrate their voracious appetites and the ‘consequences’: a recent study watched a bird consume between 600 and 1000 cotoneaster berries in a six hour period – and defecating every four minutes!

Of all places the Crab and Winkle pub in Werrington provided the best opportunities to see waxwings locally, although small numbers have been reported too from gardens in West Deeping and Bainton, and there is a regular flock marauding around Bretton. The Crab and Winkle though played host to the largest band – up to 140 of them feeding on white berries right by the road over the New Year period and attracting a host of birdwatchers at the same time. The birds could often be seen perched magisterially in tree tops surveying the world, before swooping down to eat or to the road to drink from the puddles caused by a burst water main! They seemed little affected by the hubbub around them - the traffic, a double-decker bus passing beneath their perch, or the several photographers vying for best shots. The two mistle thrushes whose berry hoard was being robbed were reduced to screeching in anger from the Crab & Winkle ridgeline.

If you haven’t seen waxwings you will wonder what all the fuss is about – if you have, you won’t. They are truly beautiful and full of an arrogant character that makes catching up with them well worthwhile.

If you are interested in nature, then do join the Trust on one of our walks or visit one of our nature reserves. You can find out more about the Trust at www.langdyke.org.uk or via the membership secretary David Cowcill on 01733 252655, dcowcill@aol.com

Richard Astle

Forthcoming Langdyke events

Saturday 29th January	Work Party	1:30 start, location Etton Maxey Pit – meet at the car park off the Etton-Maxey Road
Wednesday 16th February	Indoor Talk	Wildflowers of Britain, an illustrated talk by Dr Richard Keymer of Natural England Botolph's Barn, Helpston 7.30 pm
Sunday 27th February	Work Party	1:30 start, location Swaddywell Pit
Saturday 19th March	Work Party	1:30 start, location Torpel Manor Field