

Our Vision:

A Parish and its people that are enriched by wildlife, where people enrich the natural world and help to safeguard it for the future.

Our aims are to:

Share knowledge of the wonderful wildlife in the Parish of Chudleigh.

Raise awareness through events and activities that involve and motivate the community.

Encourage positive action by local residents to attract and sustain more wildlife in the town and Parish of Chudleigh.

Conserve and enhance our existing wildlife and local habitats, features and species populations, through working together and with others.

Survey & record what we have, holding and sharing our wildlife records with others.

Advise groups and individuals on biodiversity and land management for wildlife.

Monitor development proposals that may result in damage to important wildlife.

Be environmentally and socially aware and responsible in what we do.

Interested in joining us?

If you would like to be added to our mailing list, are interested in joining the committee, or would like to volunteer, please contact info.chudleighwild@gmail.com



We make no apologies for the festive theme, especially as we have had two amazing Christmas gifts already.

The first was a cheque for over **£3000 from the Co-op Local Community Fund**. We are very grateful to the Coop and to those of you who chose to support us. The money will be used towards a trail around Chudleigh.



Interpretation boards will point out some of the more interesting wildlife, geological and historical features.

QR Codes will allow people to access more information on line and ...



Brass Rubbing posts will make the whole trail fun, especially for our youngsters.



Maps will show the trails; a short one, taking in the brass rubbing posts and a longer one, for locals and visitors who want to see and learn more about our amazing town.

Work on the trail will start this winter and it is hoped that it will be up and running by early summer. If anyone feels they would like to help with constructing the trail, contact Bobby Hughes bobby@cernywhughes.com

Our second Christmas gift was some **amazing wildlife photographs**, in mounts and ready to frame. These have been generously donated to us by award winning Plymouth Photographer Pete Norwood. We have already started selling them for £5 each and sales at the Christmas Fayre brought in £220 towards our Chudleigh Trail fund.

If you are interested in buying any of these photos, please contact Sue at info.chudleighwild@gmail.com



Welcome to our new website!

www.chudleighwild.org

We have been very grateful to Chudleigh Town Council for hosting us on a page of their website, but it has constrained what we would like a website to do for us. So, with the invaluable help of Emma Smith, we have set up our own website, which is still being worked on - not everything is up and running yet.

We hope that you will find the website easy to use. You will be able to access the newsletters as they are produced; see what events are coming up; find out about and join our groups; look at the various wildlife checklists and old newsletters; watch our videos; and much, much more.

Thank you Emma for the huge amount of work you have put in getting the website up and running!

AGM and talk

Birds of the Exe Estuary - Dave Smallshire

Tuesday January 18th at 7.30pm - via Zoom

Dave is very familiar with the Exe Estuary, where he has been carrying regular bird surveys for over 30 years, and more recently giving the commentary on the Stuart Line birdwatching cruises. He will be talking about the many and varied birds of this nationally important site.

The talk will be followed by a short AGM

(booking details will follow in early January)

Local Wildlife Highlights - John Walters

Friday February 18th at 7.30pm - Woodway Room

Buckfastleigh artist, John Walters, will be well known to many of you for his wonderful artwork as well as his astounding knowledge of wildlife, particularly in Devon. His talk will take in some of the amazing things he has seen locally as well as some of the rarer things he has been studying.

Hedgehogs, in Need of Your Help - Stephen Powles

Friday March 18th at 7.30pm - Woodway Room

Vet, Stephen Powles, retired early to pursue his passion for filming wildlife and to give talks to the public. For many years now he has been videoing Otters on his local river and much of his footage has been used in various television documentaries. Both he and his brother have been raising awareness of Hedgehogs in their local communities and this talk will contain some of his amazing video footage.

Further information on these talks will be sent out, and bookings taken, in the New Year. We have further talks and guided walks planned for later in 2022.

Chair's Chat

As it's December, I thought I'd focus on some of the birds associated with Christmas.

In the *Twelve Days of Christmas*, no less than six birds get a mention:

A Partridge in a pear tree

This is probably a Red-legged Partridge, which sometimes perches in trees, unlike the native Grey Partridge; the latter is all but extinct in Devon and the former is occasionally reared and released by Pheasant breeders. This may explain why a Red-legged Partridge came into a building on the edge of town recently!



Two Turtle Doves



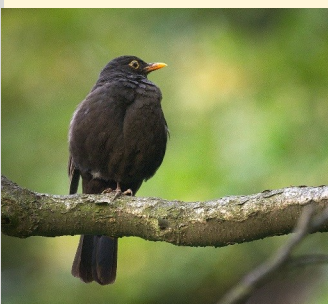
Sadly, Turtle Dove is fast approaching extinction in Devon, although one gave its soporific purring song on Haldon, just outside the Parish, in May. In years gone by, pairs could sometimes be seen eating grit (to aid digestion) on the lanes around Kerswell.

Three French hens

I don't know about French ones, but all hens are descended from the Red Junglefowl of south-east Asia. A friend of mine was with a bird guide called Tikka in India some years ago when a male crowed from the jungle. My friend felt obliged to say "it's a chicken, Tikka!", but the joke was lost on him!



Four calling birds



This was originally four 'colly', or 'coal-black', birds and referred to Blackbirds.

Six geese a-laying

The only wild geese laying eggs in Britain are Greylag Geese, which are the descendants of domestic geese. These days they are greatly outnumbered by feral Canada Geese, introduced from North America in the 17th Century.



Seven swans a-swimming

In winter, our resident Mute Swans are joined by Whooper and Bewick's Swans, rare visitors to Devon from Iceland and Siberia, respectively; although Mute Swans are common here, there is no documented record for Chudleigh Parish – can anyone tell me otherwise?





Of course the **Robin** is the classic bird of Christmas cards, as a result of Victorian postmen being nicknamed 'Robins' because of their red uniforms. Here are some things you might not know about the Robin:

Most British Robins are sedentary, rarely moving more than 5 km (three miles) from their birthplace, but some, mostly females, spend their winters as far south as southern Spain and Portugal. In winter, the resident birds are joined by migrant Robins fleeing the harsh winter weather in Scandinavia, continental Europe and Russia, while some continental birds also migrate through Britain to winter further south.

The average life-span of a Robin after fledging is only seven months; very few live to be more than two years old, so 'your' Robin that inhabits your garden year after year is unlikely to be the same one. In harsh winter weather, Robins struggle to eat the quarter to third of their body weight that most birds need to survive. So like other resident insectivores, winter mortality is high and they make up for this by rearing several broods each summer.

Male and female Robins are identical, the red breast being used in display. Don't be fooled by their loveable appearance, as they are fiercely territorial and will fight off any intruding Robin than lands in their patch. One in ten Robins may die in these territorial battles!



This Robin may look as though it's eaten an orange, but it's fluffed up to stay warm

Like many birds, Robins have a streaky brown plumage after fledging; the red breast appears after moulting in late summer.

The male Robin sings to announce his breeding territory, but the species is unusual in that both males and females sing in the winter and maintain separate feeding territories. The winter song is slightly different.

Robins sing at night, especially where there are streetlights. They are among the first birds to start the dawn chorus and one of the last to stop in the evening. They have large eyes, well-adapted to finding food in shady woodland, and can often be seen in car headlights as they feed along the verge.

As any gardener will know, Robins are fearless birds and will often follow you while you dig to catch worms or other delicious creepy-crawlies. As a result, our British Robins have become trusting of us, unlike the shy, skulking Robins on the Continent.

The pioneer settlers in North America found a different bird with a red breast and called it the American Robin – unfortunately, it was a type of thrush, similar in many ways to our Blackbird!



American Robin

Dave Smallshire

Volunteers

Our volunteers continue to manage the wildflower areas, and have recently been working on the land alongside Palace Meadow. They have planted Foxgloves at Millstream Meadow and have regular litter picking sessions. Litter is a big problem in the town, and although many of us clear up the areas around our homes, some of the more out of town areas are looking grim. We are looking for a **Litter-picking Coordinator** who will look out for particularly untidy areas and alert the volunteers into action.

If you would like to join our team of volunteers, who carry out a whole range of tasks throughout the year,

contact:

Sue Smallshire (*secretary*)

info.chudleighwild@gmail.com



WANTED Litter-picking Coordinator

Contact Sue

info.chudleighwild@gmail.com



Bat News

The Bat Group have worked hard this year, gathering data on the Greater Horseshoe Bat flight routes, to find out how they are being affected by new housing, lighting and roads. The Station Hill lighting was of great concern earlier in the year, but Highways have now reduced the number of the lights and their intensity, to satisfy the levels agreed in the plans for the Oaks estate.

The trial for the **Motus Radio Tracking Programme**, described in the last newsletter, has been highly successful. Seven Greater Horseshoe Bats from Chudleigh Caves were tagged and the movements of all seven were picked up and recorded by the masts and nodes that had been erected around Chudleigh. These have been removed now until the programme begins in earnest next spring. Professor Fiona Mathews and her team will be spreading their research further afield, using 18 masts in all, and will cover a much wider area in the first year of the project.

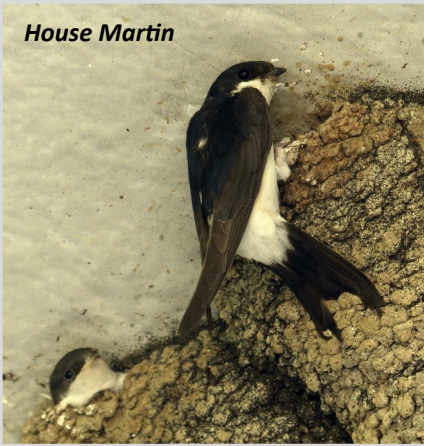
Thanks go to Tess for suggesting people who might be willing to have a mast, or node and to all those who have so kindly allowed them to be erected on their land.

Sue Smallshire

New 'Red List' Birds

Swift, House Martin and Greenfinch have recently been 'red-listed' because of large declines in their numbers – by 58% since 1995, 57% since 1969 and 62% since 1993, respectively.

House Martin

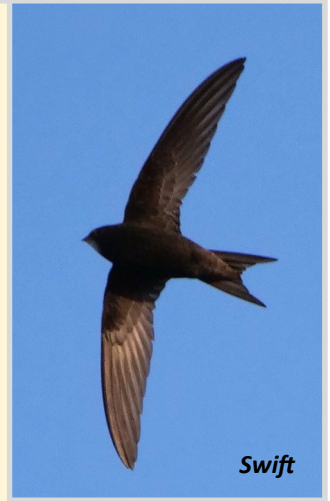


As a long-distance migrant to Africa we know very little of the House Martin's life outside of the UK, but possible causes include a lack of food (as a result of insect declines) and fewer suitable nest sites due to the move to plastic soffits.

Swifts have also suffered as traditional nest sites in roof spaces have been lost with renovations.

The sharp crash in Greenfinch numbers has been caused by a severe outbreak of the disease trichomonosis, related to poor hygiene at bird feeding stations.

Swift



All three of these birds breed around our town - how can we help them?

Putting up artificial House Martin nest cups may not be the whole answer, but it's a positive step many of us can take. In a similar way, Swift nest-boxes and 'Swift bricks' can be installed to replace the lost nesting sites. As for Greenfinches, then making sure we clean and disinfect feeders regularly will reduce the levels of the parasite that debilitates and kills Greenfinches and some other finches.

Greenfinch



A rare bird, nearly in the Parish!



While for us the Swallow is the harbinger of spring, in Greenland this accolade goes to the Snow Bunting. The bunting moves south for the winter, to find milder climes, including the coast of Britain. Always a scarce bird, inland sightings are rare, especially in our part of the world.

Snow Buntings have been more numerous than usual this winter, perhaps after a bumper breeding season (maybe it was a 'Lemming year', when predators like Snowy Owls and Arctic Foxes focus their attentions on Lemmings instead of nesting birds?).

Nevertheless, it was still a surprise when someone found one feeding along a heathland path at Ideford Common recently. It stayed just one more day, simply flying up to sit in a bush (a novelty for this species) while people and their dogs walked past just a metre or so away. Arctic breeding birds such as Snow Bunting rarely encounter people and so individuals typically show no fear of humans. This all makes for a great birdwatching experience if you happen to find a Snow Bunting on its own!

Dave Smallshire

Rare sighting: a Snow Bunting in a bush!

