



2017 WMBC Cannock Chase Survey

In Memory of Frank Gribble MBE

### April Summary

The trickle of **Willow Warblers** reported last month soon became a deluge. Within a few days, they were in every sector so becoming the first of our targets to achieve that status. Their descending song and abundance are a lasting memory from April on the Chase. The warm weather of the weekend of the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> brought in other migrants too. These included **Tree Pipits** which is a bird with another lovely song but also coupled with a parachuting display flight. Their parasitic nemesis the **Cuckoo** arrived at the same time and by the month's end they had been seen or heard in at least 12 sectors. Cannock Chase is probably the best place to hear them in the County. I have personally heard or seen a Cuckoo on my last twelve visits. So far only one female has been heard issuing its bubbling call. The month soon turned from Jekyll to Hyde thereafter as cold northerlies promptly shut the migrant door. Birds went quiet for awhile and birding became harder. **Redstarts** were especially difficult to locate and perhaps worryingly have only been found in 5 sectors. Nowhere are they numerous.

The good news though relates to **Pied Flycatchers**. Our Annual Bird Editor found two singing males and I found another one elsewhere. No **Spotted Flycatchers** have appeared yet. They may have been held up by the northerlies.

During the latter part of the month the first **Whitethroats** and **Garden Warblers** were seen and heard just about on time. They have been found in six and four sectors respectively so far but we could expect more next month. In what appears to be a good year for **Grasshopper Warblers** it is disappointing that they are represented currently, albeit in good numbers in only one sector within the Survey area.

Regarding our resident birds or early breeders there is evidence that **Ravens**, **Siskins** and **Crossbills** have all fledged their young. **Grey Wagtails** and **Woodlarks** either have eggs or are feeding youngsters. **Redpoll** flocks are not uncommon even at the end of the month but there is no positive proof that they breed on the Chase. **Linnets** have returned to eleven sectors. Nest building has been witnessed. At least one pair of **Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers** have been seen by a very lucky few. Although they are very scarce now there are **Willow Tits** but in no more than three sectors. **Woodlarks** are in at least ten sectors and several are on eggs or are feeding chicks. They are far more difficult to locate for the time being but expect more song from them later in the next month or so.

The potential of Cannock Chase to see passage migrants is not readily appreciated but three separate **Ring Ouzels** and reports of **Wheatears** and **Whinchats** either within the Survey area or adjacent to it could justify some visual migration studies in the future.

**Tawny Owls** were slightly easier to detect in April. They are more likely to call now during the daytime. There is a new site for **Barn** and **Little Owls** too but hopefully as our thoughts wander towards balmy evenings. Nightjars and more could be on the birding menu as well as the odd **LEO!**

What can we expect to see in May? Our thoughts will be very much focussed on **Nightjars** and other crepuscular species in the last ten days. There is more than that for us to lookout for before that. It will be intriguing to discover whether any of those **Bullfinches** or **Reed Buntings** that we saw in February raise families. Good signs to look for are seeing birds diving into cover and staying there for awhile before reappearing. Some birds such as warblers get very agitated when you are too close to the nest site especially

if they have a family nearby. It is always special to see a nest with eggs or chicks but remember that it is a criminal offence to disturb breeding birds. Other signs are observing birds with nest material or food or faecal sacs in their bills. Watching a parent bird feed a fledgling or a juvenile acting independently can be definitive!

One of the joys of being involved in this project is the enthusiasm and dedication that the volunteer surveyors bring to it. None more so than Paul Bateman. As some of you may know Gentleshaw Common was subjected to three separate fires over the weekend of the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>. Paul covers Gentleshaw Common and travels up from Birmingham to do it. Undaunted Paul came on two successive weekends to survey the birds that remain on the Common. The Club has now been able to handover his findings to act as a baseline prior to recovery to the Staffordshire Wildlife Trust. The Phoenix will rise from the ashes!

Unbelievably we are now about halfway through the Survey We are in the second half and there is all to play for. Let's go for it!

Best wishes and thanks to all involved including those that submit casual observations.

Roger Broadbent

Project Manager

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