

Bealeswood Common Wildlife

April 2023

Bealeswood Wildlife Recording Group (BWRG)
Copies of this and previous notices can be found at:
www.dockenfieldpc.org.uk/wildlife

This issue celebrates the new status of Firecrest on Bealeswood as a breeding bird.



The Firecrest is one of two very similar tiny birds, the other the Goldcrest, less ornate, lacking the zebra pattern through the eye. At just over six grams, no more than that of a spoonful of sugar, they are two of the smallest birds in the world, never alone Britain. They hunt for spiders and other invertebrates amongst evergreens. Both species are sometimes seen at Bealeswood, over the winter or on autumn/spring passage. Goldcrest are confined to coniferous woodland for breeding such as nearby Alice Holt Forest but an unlikely Bealeswood breeder. Firecrest was first discovered breeding in Britain in the New Forest in 1962 by Mike Adams- 60 years later he is still submitting records chronicling their further colonisation.

Twenty years ago, Alan Cox discovered several breeding in a mixed colony with Goldcrests at Willows Green Inclosure, amongst the first pioneers away from the New Forest. A survey this year, by local birder Keith Betton, registered 121 territories across Alice Holt. So, perhaps not surprising when one appeared here in June 2021, except that it landed on Alan's study windowsill, just inches away, as he worked.



This year Alex Potts has found 3 nesting pairs early in the breeding season. With camera and notebook Alex has mapped their feeding circuit and recorded their nuptials. The male (opposite) sang lustily to ply his troth.

When paired, he provided nesting material for his mate (photo. 3) the nest builder. Firecrests are well adapted to breeding in more scattered conifers and scrub as found on Bealeswood. The nest will be located high up, suspended under a conifer branch, or in the densest holly;



well-hidden to thwart detection by marauding Grey Squirrels, Magpies and Jays. The family name for the crests is *Regulidae* or Kinglet - named more than two millennia ago in ancient Greece. Aristotle or perhaps Aesop, according to modern classicists, spread the following legend. One of these tiny birds hitched a lift concealed in an eagle's wing in a contest to settle who was King of the Birds. The exhausted eagle having flown higher than any other, hence seemingly sovereign, was dismayed to see the Goldcrest or Firecrest (both equally likely in Greece) flying out above its perch to claim the crown. Others insist that the name derives from their colourful head-dress. But surely that is the point of the myth: the Firecrest, or his cousin the Goldcrest, bestowed with their victor's crown

thereafter. A mystery yet to be solved. As can be seen in photo 2, there is a tiny stiff feather protruding above the base of the bill which seemingly protects the bird's nostrils. Only the Firecrest shows this feature: Why do they need it, and not Goldcrests?

Alan Cox, all photos by Alex Potts

Diary Dates for 2023:

Earth Month

Alex Potts and Claire Jackson will be showing their photographs and paintings in an exhibition to celebrate our local wildlife as part of a wildlife corridor from Frensham Ponds through to Bentley. This can be seen during normal opening days/hours at the West End Centre, 48 Queens Road, Aldershot, GU11 3JD from the 26th April to 24th May. www.westendcentre.co.uk/whats-on/exhibitions

Nature Walks Programme

Meet at Bealeswood Common noticeboard unless indicated otherwise.

Sunday 7 May. 05:00-06:30 Dawn Chorus.

Saturday 27 May. 20.45-22.30. Nightjars and Woodcock, walk to Abbots Wood Inclosure.

Leader Alan Cox

Saturday July 8th. 9.30 Butterfly walk Noticeboard or 10.00 at Abbots Wood Inclosure carpark- GU10 4HA, Good paths. Target: Purple Emperor and certainly others along the way. Leader: Claire Jackson

Friday 11th August. 20.30-22.00. Bat walk. Listening and watching bats at sunset, walking to Frensham Mill and back, good paths.

Saturday 9th September. 09.30 -11.00. Small mammals of Bealeswood Common.

Leader: Roger Trout

Friday 13th October. 11.00 -12.30. Fungi of Bealeswood Common, adjourn to the Bluebell.

Leader: Manda Adolph

What can be seen on Bealeswood Common in late April?

With a few hours to spend, patience and a good eye and hearing much can be seen and heard on this small 4 hectare (10 acres) of common land. On the 20th of April between 9.30 and 12.00 am Alex Potts saw and recorded the following impressive list of birds insects and mammals. All sightings are on the Main Common by this noticeboard except where it states Lower Common which is the area around Bealeswood Lane, down the bridleway from this Noticeboard and past the pond.

Birds:

- 3 pairs of Goldcrests in 3 different scrub areas
- 1 pair of Goldcrests in Lower Common scrub area
- 1 Firecrest in the scrub with oak
- 2 pairs of nesting Chiffchaffs
- 2 male Blackcaps
- Many Great tits
- 1 pair of Coal tits
- 1 nesting pair of Long-tailed Tits – Lower Common
- 6 Blue tits – Lower Common
- 1 Chiffchaff – Lower Common
- 1 Wren – Lower Common
- 1 Dunnock – Lower Common
- 1 Robin – Lower Common
- 2 pairs of Nuthatches Main and Lower Common
- 1 pair of Bullfinches
- 2 male Blackbirds
- 1 Song Thrush
- 1 Great Spotted Woodpecker

Butterflies:

- 2 male Orange-tips on Dog Violets, Dandelions, Blackthorn and Cuckooflower
- 4 male Brimstones- Lower Common
- 1 Holly Blue
- 4 Speckled Woods – Lower Common
- 1 Small Tortoiseshell

Bees:

- Social: Buff-tailed bee
- White-tailed bee - all on gorse or goat willow
- Honeybee
- Carder bee
- Solitary: Gwynne's Mining bee
- Red Mason bee all using gorse or goat willow
- Female Hairy-footed flower bee
- Chocolate mining bee - on flowering hawthorn

Mammals: 1 vole, 1 muntjac deer, 1 roe deer and 1 fox earlier in the week

And that's it!