

Bealeswood Common Wildlife

February 2021

Flowers

The first flowers of the year have been recorded through the weeks of January and February, and the following can currently be seen: Primrose, Lesser Celandine, Barren Strawberry, Dog Violet, Periwinkle, Purple Deadnettle, Snowdrop and a Purple flowered Hellebore (garden escape). The Lesser Celandine is often used as an indicator of Spring and flowered in the first week of February this year. Over the last 10 years it has most often been recorded in first week of February, but never in January, occasionally in mid-late February and in the cold winter of 2010, not until the 22nd of March.

Birds

Treecreepers, Nuthatches and Woodpeckers are commonly sighted residents on Bealeswood Common. They are not related taxonomically but more by their habitats, in our magnificent trees.

The **Treecreeper** is a tiny bird, always on the move as it works its way up the trunk of a tree searching for insect food hidden in the bark that it extracts with its thin, down-curved bill. If you watch patiently you can follow it as it flies to the base of the next tree to begin the next climb. It's very well camouflaged, but you might see a flash of white from its underside.

The **Nuthatch** is less secretive, likes to visit garden feeders, and tells us it's here with a loud *pewpewpew* call. It's also unmistakable with its black eye stripe, rusty flanks and blue/grey back. Not nearly as rigid in its habits as the Treecreeper, it will hop along, up and down tree branches and often feeds on the ground. Several pairs bred on the Common last year.

The **Great Spotted Woodpecker** is another unmistakable bird, with its striking black and white plumage, especially as the much smaller Lesser Spotted Woodpecker has now sadly not been seen on the Common for many years. The drumming sound you might hear at this time of year is this bird establishing its territory or excavating a nest hole in a dead branch. They readily visit garden feeders which may explain why they are one species doing well at the moment.

The **Green Woodpecker** is not seen quite as often around the Common but listen out for its distinctive laugh-like call. It's not as closely associated with trees as the Spotted Woodpecker and feeds on ants, ant eggs and grubs by probing the grass and catching them with its long sticky tongue. It also has the telltale rise-and-fall flight pattern of other woodpeckers.

These were photographed on the Common or neighbouring gardens:



Nuthatch in willow tree (photo. Alan Cox) and (right) Green Woodpeckers in nearby garden (male on left, juvenile on right (photo Alex Potts). Pictures not to scale.



Treecreeper, well camouflaged in Oak and (right) Great Spotted Woodpecker (male) on Birch tree (Photos by Alex Potts, not to scale)

Dan & Alison Bosence, Alan Cox, Philippa & Colin Hall, Steve Lockett, Alex Potts, Christina Rasmussen and Anne Tutt. 25th February, 2021