

Broadway bird report March 2016

Mark Turner & Christine Turner



01. Hawk. Mark Turner

How could I not be beguiled by Buzzards and other raptors when my Cotswold country rambles take me into the heart of their respective territories and be given an intimate insight to their lives around their farmland homes?

On 4th February 2016 my interest had been aroused from 8.30am when from our kitchen window I observed a female Sparrowhawk flying about in a curious manner. She wasn't hunting, more patrolling I would say, when all of a sudden she would accelerate away only to return and circle around in a watchful almost agitated manner. Before too long I realised what her problem was; there was another female on her patch. She rose quickly then turned and plummeted earthward followed by a sharp jink upward in a show of aggressive manoeuvres; she was displaying.

The day was particularly mild with hardly a breath of wind and quite cloudy. I needed a few sprigs of flowering Gorse for a colour plate I had in progress so I set off for the fields nearby after 11a.m. On reaching my destination adjacent to the Broadway bypass I was soon aware of a patrolling female Sparrowhawk overhead. For the next half an hour I was treated to incredible display flights by the two female hawks I had seen earlier on. A towering climb was followed by a near vertical stoop then sweeping sharply upwards just above the woodland canopy. Both birds seemed to be claiming rites to the same hillside haunt.

Whilst all this was going on I had noticed local Buzzards rising one by one until I had five in view. Here too I observed territorial behaviour with birds tussling in flight and soaring around with talons lowered. On reaching an ancient derelict Cotswold stone barn at the

lower edge of the Knap my ears were accosted by repeated caterwauling from above as three buzzards glided over the canopy clearly unhappy in each other's presence.

On returning to survey Broadway's wildlands after quite some time passing, I have to say I was hoping for great things and not wishing to leave disappointed. I had chosen a clear frosty morning with gentle warmth from the sun to revisit an old haunt of mine on the Cotswold escarpment at the end of February.

This is not the quietest of locations having passing traffic and nearby farm machinery at work and Broadway is hardly remote, but when I watch a large broad-wing hawk coasting gently over plantation canopy I could easily be in deepest Wales or even Scotland. I love those tantalising glimpses of my favourite birds moving phantom-like through the trees.

February into March is an exciting time of the year to be out watching raptors hammer out territorial rites' over their home range, sometimes with Raven pairs displaying nearby as on this occasion. Holding up my splayed hand to cover the sun I was suddenly aware of a Buzzard stooping headlong towards the canopy with wings folded in and talons lowered on the final approach.

At 11.25am another displaying bird entered the aerial arena; a female Sparrowhawk. In order to let any on-looking hawks know this was her home-front, her airspace, she flared out a great white powder puff of feathers beneath her long tail. With rapid flicks of her short rounded wings passing directly overhead, she crossed flight-paths with a Buzzard.

As I made my way back along the road feeling the need to get the blood flowing again, I was suddenly tail-flagged by a couple of startled Muntjacs in an adjacent roadside thicket, the buck paused to look back at me as if to say where did you come from?

March 2016 presented many opportunities to get out in dry sunny conditions, if a little on the cool side at times. However, this did not deter our local raptors from putting on a spectacular show around the North Cotswold escarpment on the Worcestershire/Gloucestershire border. There are regular appearances by all the usual players including Red Kite and Peregrine and Ravens now ever-present and displaying feverishly. Indeed five species of raptor plus the great Corvid are now possible to see being resident in the Broadway area and certainly achievable finds on any given day. One particular walk during this period at the lower end of Broadway Tower Country Park (waymarked for the Cotswold Way from the Upper High Street) I had a rare vision locally of a Red Kite and a Peregrine within the same binocular view. Such never dreamt of scenarios are now very real goals during a casual stroll and what is more, after a rather protracted period of settling in, (first-ever Broadway village Red Kite was 12th April 1998), Red Kites are showing more bravely around the community.

Away from the 'scarp, Hill and Moor Landfill site in March provided this Corvid watcher with gangs of up to a dozen or more Magpies daily around the skip-yard and on one occasion we had close views of two massive Ravens scavenging in the road with the Magpies looking on at a cautious distance.

Behaviour-wise I was intrigued by three Carrion Crows paying close attention to what goodies came to the surface from the rootling about by two large Pigs in a Broadway orchard. The birds grouped tightly around the Pigs' muzzles ready to stab quickly at any morsels that might appear.

Reference

Turner, M.E., 2007. *Hawkwatch*. Trafford Publishing.

Image

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