

April 2018

Dawn Chorus Walk - Sunday 29th April, at 4.45am. from Hillbarn farmyard (parking by kind permission of owner) Cost £9.00 per person in advance

20 members walked half a mile into the Brail and back accompanied by expert naturalist and birder, Ed Drewitt (www.eddrewitt.co.uk). Here's Judy's report of the event as sent to the Parish News:

Alarm clocks rang out early in Bedwyn on Sunday 29th April for our members to get to the Brail for the 4.45am start of our dawn chorus walk. We gathered in the dark of a still and chilly dawn to be greeted by Ed Drewitt, our professional guide.

During his introduction, to my surprise, he drew our attention to a skylark singing on the wing in the dark before dawn to attract a mate. Those of us not having a good quality of hearing (and I include myself here) were encouraged to cup our ears in our hands and, doing this, I did indeed hear the distant skylark. The short hoot of an owl brought the night shift to a close and we waited in silence for the dawn chorus to begin.

The blackbirds and robin usually kick things off but they were briefly upstaged by a startled pheasant and woodpigeon. Having been woken, the robins, blackbirds and wrens sang away throughout most of the morning, leaving the chorus a little earlier than the others to tend to their nests. Other birds joined in now and then as we walked along the Brail track accompanied by the ambient sound of the blackbirds and stopping at intervals to pick out the songs of other birds. A song thrush and mistle thrush took it in turns to sing out across the track. I loved Ed's description of the mistle thrush song: it sounds like a blackbird that has forgotten the words!

The dawn chorus was more drawn out than usual because of the chill so the smaller tits and finches were a little slow joining in but after about half an hour they had warmed up enough to sing and claim their territory. Although we heard the chaffinch we didn't hear as many as expected. Ed explained that a disease of pigeons has in recent years been affecting the numbers of the chaffinch population too. The tree-creeper treated us to both its alarm call and morning song. The Ravens were unexpected and flew away startled with a distinctive 'cronk'. The largest of the crow family, ravens are slowly moving into territory further east and we were told they would probably not have been seen here 10 years ago.

Sadly we didn't hear a cuckoo on our walk in the Brails. However, there have been a number of reports of them being heard in Bedwyn this year near the water meadows by the canal. Ed commented that early reports of cuckoos maybe ones that are still travelling back to other locations but let's hope that some of them might stay here a while.

Ed's passion for all wildlife really came across and was evident when I nearly tripped over him as he suddenly stooped to move a snail out of the path of the approaching group. Personally I'm very much in awe of his ability to stop mid-sentence and pick out the tiniest snippet of song amongst the general chorus – a real talent! I'd like to thank everyone who supported this sell-out event, including Richard Charles for use of the farmyard and barn. Ed identified 25 different species singing in just over an hour over a short distance through the Brail!