

## Cockaynes Wood Newsletter No. 13 January 2013

*A newsletter of recent wildlife sightings and events at Cockaynes Wood and the adjoining countryside.*

### Bird Notes



What is this mean, moody and magnificent creature with its pink candy stripes, blue back and yellow feet? Anyone might be forgiven for thinking it was some kind of parrot escapee from an aviary. In fact it's a male **Sparrowhawk**, photographed by Glyn Evans in his Wivenhoe garden.

The midwinter build-up of ducks on the Cockaynes marsh was well under way in early January, with about 20 **Gadwall**, 20 **Mallard**, and 3 **Tufted Duck**. On 3<sup>rd</sup> January as many as 5 **Snipe** were recorded on the marsh, and a male **Brambling**, lots of **Greenfinches** and a few **Siskins** were on the bird feeders at Sunnymead. At the time of writing (17<sup>th</sup>) we have had a few centimeters of snow and the water bodies have frozen over. Mo's photo shows the lonely pair of **Mute Swans**, in the largely frozen lake now deserted by the ducks. There are some big flocks of winter birds around Alresford, with perhaps 200 each of **Lapwing** and **Golden Plover** on Church Farm (visible from Ford Lane), more at Sunnymead Farm, and at least 250 **Fieldfares**, mostly at Alresford Creek. A mixed flock of finches and buntings at the Creek numbered at least 30 each of **Yellowhammer** and **Reed Bunting**. The **Siskin** shown below in its yellow and black livery was photographed feeding on alders.

Many thanks to Glyn, Mo and Dave for their news and photos.



### **Seeing the Wood for the Trees**

Trees are such long-lived beings that changes to them happen almost imperceptibly. We have a general knowledge that trees are susceptible to various diseases (we all heard about **Ash** dieback recently, but have no idea how it will affect our local landscape because until the trees have gone, we won't realize how much of a gap they

will leave). **Alders**, which are perhaps the characteristic tree of Villa Wood with its many wet areas, were reported about 15 years ago to be suffering from their own dieback disease but somehow the trees stayed up year after year, attracting the swarms of **Goldfinches**, **Siskins** and **Redpolls** that rely on their seeds for part of the winter.

But all is not totally well with the Alders, and when we from Cockaynes Wood Trust accompanied an expert from Essex Wildlife trust in carrying out a tree safety audit this month, many alders were found to be in a poor state. If these trees were next to a footpath and judged to be likely to fall across the path, risking injury to footpath users, they have been marked for safety felling. This was basically a safety audit, not a tree health survey, and it's not quite clear whether the Alder mortality is natural or accelerated by the dieback disease first identified so many years ago. Meanwhile, walkers may see small metal discs on some trees. This doesn't necessarily mean they are to be felled as in many cases the scheduling will be that the tree is to be monitored – felling is a last resort and we are well aware that many dead trees are a standing source of shelter and food for wildlife from bats to beetles.

Returning to the theme of slow change amongst trees, over a period of more than 20 years one of the changes seen in Cockaynes Wood is the phenomenal increase in the amount of **Holly** since the 1980s. Quite why this has happened is a mystery to me and I'd be interested to know if anyone can offer an explanation. Coincidentally ( and Christmasily), there has been an increase in the amount of **Mistletoe** around the village of Alresford. I've recently read that wintering **Blackcaps** ( 2 of which are in my garden as I write) are being fingered as a likely agent of Mistletoe spread. If true it's an interesting by-product of the genetic change that has led to these warblers of central-European origin flying west to winter instead of south!

*Please note: Some felling will take place on Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> January and some footpaths will be affected – warning signs will be posted.*

## Work Party News

Subject to weather conditions a work party from The Conservation Volunteers will be extending the boardwalk (and doing some clearance work) on Tuesday Jan 22<sup>nd</sup>. Other volunteers will be very welcome. For this occasion only we will meet near the shooting range on Sunnymead Farm track as this is where the materials will be stacked for carrying to the work site.

The next regular monthly work party date is **Sunday February 5<sup>th</sup>** All welcome and for any part of the time. Meeting place is the former quarry yard. Contact number for work party is 077545 20323 (Robin).

This monthly newsletter is available on request to anyone interested. All contributions of wildlife observations will be welcomed by the Editor Robin Cottrill ( [robin.cottrill@gmail.com](mailto:robin.cottrill@gmail.com)) (tel 01206 826418). These can be from the Cockaynes Wood site or surrounding area (Alresford, Wivenhoe or Elmstead). Please keep me supplied with your wildlife observations!

For those with a particular interest in birds, the excellent website <http://www.wivenhoeforum.co.uk/discussion/1062/birds-of-wivenhoe> will provide recent bird news, discussion and pictures.