

Well Head Walks

The public park and Memorial Gardens owned and maintained by Bourne United Charities are fantastic amenities that are enjoyed by many people and considering their location in the heart of the town it may come as a surprise to know just how much wildlife uses these green spaces. Focussing upon birdlife, there are common birds that even to the untrained eye are easily recognised such as Song Thrush, Blackbird, Robin, Dunnock, Rook, Jackdaw, Mallard, Blue Tit and Moorhen all of which are resident year round. However, there are many more species that by and large go completely unnoticed and yet these too also are present in the park for most of the year.

Entering the park from St Peter's Road a small stream runs away to your left and the dense vegetation on the bank above provides excellent cover for Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Long Tailed and Great Tits as well as the Song Thrushes and Blackbirds that forage in the grass alongside. Keeping to the path and walking underneath the canopy of lime trees, on the right is a small group of conifers where if you listen carefully, the light, tinkling song of Goldcrests can be heard high up in the trees. These tiny birds spend most of their time at height so can be quite difficult to see but on cold winter days you can sometimes watch them as they come down to feed in the wild blackberry bushes that run along the perimeter adjacent to the conifers. Keeping to the right hand path and heading towards St Peter's Pool you pass underneath the Red Chestnut trees and down to your left the grass slopes away to form what is widely believed to be one of the old moats associated with Bourne Castle. This grassy area is usually alive with Rooks, Jackdaws, Song Thrushes and Blackbirds and in the late autumn and winter it is a top spot to watch Redwings. These handsome Scandinavian thrushes usually arrive in mid to late November and if there are plenty of berries around and the ground remains snow free they will probably stay until late February. To the casual observer Redwings can easily be mistaken for Song Thrush so look for the creamy white stripe above the eye and the rusty red colouring just below the wings. The tall trees in close proximity to the pool itself provide an excellent roost for Goldfinches and once the breeding season is done thirty or forty of these colourful birds will assemble here just before dusk. On the pool itself the resident birds include Moorhen, Mallard and Australian Black Swan and for the last three summers, Little Grebes have successfully bred there. Look underneath the weeping willows for these small, elusive diving ducks. Another spring visitor to the pool is Black Headed Gull although they don't come to breed. Its high protein food that they are after and unfortunately mallard duckling are at the top of their menu! A female mallard with a brood of 9 or 10 will probably lose two thirds of these within the first week and the gulls are largely responsible although given the opportunity, rooks and magpies are quite partial as well.

The willows, silver birch and other trees around the western side of the pool provides suitable habitat for a number of warblers and in the spring time Willow Warbler, Chiff Chaff and Blackcap can all be found here and it is also a good spot for Bullfinches that will appear at any time of year. As you move around the pool another green space opens up which was once the site of the Cress Beds. Now completely grassed over, this is a really good place to watch Green Woodpeckers as they search for ants in the short grass during the summer. They are not usually far away at other times of the year and their distinctive "laughing" call often gives away their location. The Great Spotted Woodpecker is not so raucous but is resident all year round and could appear on just

about any broadleaf tree within the park. Nest holes excavated by these birds can be seen in the large trees adjacent to the old cress bed area and high above them the Rooks make their untidy communal nests. Below and at ground level is a length of tall reed bed that has in the past attracted Sedge Warblers although unfortunately not this year. The reeds however do provide a hidden corridor for the resident Kingfishers to move freely up and down the river without being seen. These shy birds don't much care for human intrusion which is why all that most people see of them is their electric blue backs as they streak away from the perceived danger at low level and top speed. However, it is possible to get some top quality views of these magnificent, striking birds and there is no better place in the area to do this than Baldock's Passage. You will need good hearing, patience and a bit of luck. As any birder will confirm, your ears are far more use than sight when it comes to identifying birds because a call or a song immediately gives you a location and more often than not, instant recognition if you know what it is that you are listening to. Kingfishers provide a very good example of this because they are elusive and yet quite vocal throughout the year and their distinctive high pitched piping call is usually made whilst in flight. If you learn what their call is you are already one step ahead of your quarry and can soon be following them with your ears and it's not long before you begin to pinpoint their favoured fishing spots. Once you have achieved this, patience is then required and although complete concealment on your part is not that necessary it is important that you remain still when viewing the birds as any sudden movement and just like everyone else, you will be watching a blue blur streaking away from you.

In this relatively short walk of less than half a mile it is possible to see well in excess of thirty different species of birds on a good day and this is only really scratching the surface as depending upon the time of year you could also see Mistle Thrush, Wren's, Tree Creeper's, Sparrowhawk, Kestrel, Hobby, House Martins, Swifts, Swallows, Pied and Grey Wagtails, Redpolls, Yellow Hammer, Carrion Crow and Spotted Flycatcher to name but a few.

Why not take an hour off and go and look for yourself – after all it's right on your doorstep!