



What to look out for in September and October

Here comes autumn, bringing with it new and different birds, changing colours and fewer insects. But, all is not lost: there should still be plenty to see out and about in Rushcliffe.

BIRDS



Autumn is the favourite season of the year of some birdwatchers, as expectations grow for migrant species from all points of the compass! Here in South Nottinghamshire, expectations may need to be lower than, say, Shetland or the Isles of Scilly, but some good birds do turn up in our landlocked area. Birds migrate along the Trent Valley, so keep your eyes and ears open for everything and anything!

Summer visitors may linger through to October, or pass through our area; for instance, there should be one or two **Swallows** and **House Martins** to be seen. **Blackcaps** will be feeding up on berries before they head south and one or two **Willow, Sedge** and **Reed Warblers** may still be around along with a handful of **Whitethroats**. Any sunny patch of brambles should be studied carefully to see what pops out of hiding!

Resident species will be more evident after hiding away for most of the summer. Young birds should be noisily finding their own territories, and feeding flocks of **tits, Goldcrests, Treecreepers** and **Nuthatches** (*right*) will be flitting through the trees and bushes busily searching for food, flocking together over winter in a fairly tight group: more eyes to find food and spot predators! Rare or scarce species such as **Yellow-browed Warbler** have been known to latch onto these feeding flocks, so keep looking and listening – there may be something unusual



One feature of autumn is the unpredictable appearance of waders passing through the county. Blott's Pit, especially, attracts species such as **Wood, Green** and **Common Sandpipers, Black-tailed Godwit, Curlew, Whimbrel, Curlew Sandpiper** and **Little Stint**. But be warned, these birds can drop in at any time and stay for only a short while, so you will have to be on your toes if you wish to find or see any of them.

While some breeders linger, others will be long gone. Species such as **Swift, Cuckoo, Grasshopper Warbler, Hobby** and **Spotted Flycatcher** will all be well on their way back to Southern Europe or Africa. We look forward to welcoming them back next spring and wish them a safe journey! On the other hand, winter visitors may well be on the move, especially if the winds are from the east. By the end of October, South Notts should have seen its first **Redwings** and **Fieldfares** of the winter –



fresh in from Scandinavia. You may also notice a more subtle change in your local avifauna: your garden **Blackbirds** and **Robins** may well be joined by continental birds for the autumn and winter.

September and October are prime months for **Wrynecks** to turn up at migration hotspots but can be found inland in very small numbers. Every Wryneck in Notts during the last ten years have shown up in private gardens, so don't forget to check your own lawns before heading out to find passage birds elsewhere! (And let us know if you find one!).



Wildfowl numbers will be building up through the autumn, so an interesting project is to regularly count the number of **Tufted Duck** (*left*), **Pochard**, **Coot**, **Goldeneye**, **Gadwall**, **Shoveler** etc. to see how the number of each increases day by day. Check the flocks carefully, as something scarcer may have joined them. Ducks will still be in their duller 'eclipse plumage' but may be moulting into their colourful winter garb by the end of October and into November.

Birds such as **Great White Egret** and **Spoonbill** are increasing and birds that have bred in the UK will be dispersing and looking for feeding ground and new breeding areas. You should look out for these in South Notts, as they may pay us a visit.

TRES AND FLOWERS

September and October fade from the multiple colours of summer to a more muted palette of browns and greens as trees lose their colour – and then leaves – and plants die or go to seed. Apart from the odd patch of **yarrow**, **thistle**, **knopweed** or **ragwort**, the brighter colours come from **rose hips** (*right*), **rowan berries** and **brambles** etc.



Seeds and berries do form a major source of food for birds, but what about insects? It is at this time if the year that our gardens become a vital food source for many different insects, particularly those with late-flowering plants like *dahlias*, *helenium*, and *persicaria*.



INSECTS



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There is one widespread wild flower that comes into its own at this time – **ivy** (*left*). Having grown its new glossy leaves in the summer, flowers form in autumn and act as a magnet for insects such as **ladybirds**, **bees**, **wasps** and **hoverflies**. Go to Skylarks on a sunny day in late September and be amazed at the numbers and varieties feeding there.

If you do go to Skylarks, be sure to look out for a relative newcomer, the eponymous **Ivy Bee** (*right*). Originally discovered in Southern Europe in 1993, it was first recorded in the UK, in Dorset, in 2001. Since then it has advanced northwards, reaching SE Scotland in 2021. It was first recorded at Skylarks in 2016, and has grown in number there since. The one on the left was photographed at Skylarks in 2021 (when one was also recorded at Wilford Claypits). They nest in loose, light or sandy soil on southern-facing banks, and as their name suggests, feed on ivy flowers.



On warmer, sunnier days, butterflies will still be flying including **Small White** (*below left*), **Large** and **Green-veined White**, **Comma**, **Small Tortoiseshell** and even a late-season **Painted Lady** (*below right*).





While **Bumble Bee** numbers will dwindle, as nests die off, look out for fertilised queens searching for hibernation sites for the coming winter. **Common Carder Bees** will be seen in gardens, and **honey bees** (*below left*) will remain active searching for pollen.



Hoverfly numbers will decrease, but keep an eye out for *Eristalis tenax* feeding on ivy (*top right*). Also known as the **Common Dronefly**, they are so called because they mimic bee drones (male hive bees)



Spiders become more evident on misty and dewy Autumn days, and one the best-known and commonest orb web spiders *Araneus diadematus* or the **Garden Spider** (*left*), also known as the Cross or Diadem Spider, will be particularly evident at this time of the year. The female is longer-lived and much larger than the male.

Autumn is also a good time to look out for bugs: bugs of many different shapes, sizes (mostly small so look carefully!) and colours, such as the **Red and Black Rhopalid** (*below left*), and the **Green Shieldbug** (*below right*). Adult Shieldbugs lay eggs in the early spring, which develop into adults by autumn through a series of ever-larger instars (stages), so you are most likely to see a 'new' adult in autumn.





As many of us know to our cost, September particularly is the month of the **Wasp** (*left*). Although there will be a mix of solitary and social wasps in evidence, it will be mostly the social Common and German Wasps that we notice. Newly-fertilised queens will have left the nest to seek a hibernation home, leaving behind male worker wasps with nothing to do apart from – seemingly – annoying us!

At the start of the September many species of dragonfly are still on the wing, but as autumn progresses the two most frequently seen species are the **Migrant Hawker** and the **Common Darter**.

Migrant Hawkers (*below left*) are about 6 cm long; the male has paired blue spots on a black abdomen, the females have paired yellow spots on a brown abdomen. **Common Darters** (*below right*) are smaller, about 4cm long; the males are orange maturing to red, and the females are yellow becoming brown as they mature.



Both species may remain on the wing until November, if the weather remains mild. As the season progresses, they will become increasingly lethargic and will spend more time basking in the autumn sunshine. **Migrant Hawkers** prefer to perch in bushes, while **Common Darters** often settle on bare ground. If you approach slowly and are careful not to cast a shadow over them, then it is possible to get close enough to see the intricate patterns on their wings and subtle markings on their bodies.



The **Vapourer** (*left*) is a day flying moth that could, on the wing, easily be mistaken for a small orange-brown butterfly. It may have got the name **Vapourer** because the caterpillars have clumps of hairs on their backs that were thought to resemble rising vapour, or because the wingless females produce a strong pheromone to attract the males. The distinctive features of the males are their jinking, erratic flight and the long feathery antennae that they use to find the females.

Night flying moths that may be attracted to artificial light in autumn include several species of **Underwings, Thorns, Sallows, Rustics** and **Carpets** such as the **Silver-ground Carpet** (*right*).

Incidentally, Carpet moths did not get their name because they eat carpets, but because of the complex patterns on their wings, which were thought to resemble eighteenth century textile designs.



Credits:

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Images by Keith Wakerley (Migrant Hawker, Common Darter and Silver-ground Carpet Moth) and Cas Kramer (Vapourer Moth). All other images by Chris Overton.

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