

By Colin Graham (Barnsley Biodiversity Trust)



On the damp morning of Thursday May 6th I had the great pleasure of searching the ecology friendly grounds of Hoylandswaine Primary School for signs of wildlife.

I was so glad to find a pair of bedraggled tree sparrows feeding young in one of our nest boxes. By 1990 90% of British Tree Sparrows had disappeared, so this was a true success story. It was also pleasing to see that House Sparrows and Starlings, also on the red list, were nesting nearby. Two male Song Thrushes (Biodiversity Action Plan Species) were claiming territories with their strident, repeated notes. One was singing from within the school grounds! This is excellent news! It would be great if a feeding station could be set up to maintain a Tree Sparrow population.

Other birds showing signs of breeding within the school grounds included Blackbirds, Wrens, Blue Tits, Great Tits, Chaffinches and Dunnocks. In the fields near to the school two male Skylarks (Biodiversity Action Plan Species) were claiming territories, a Chiffchaff from Africa was singing and two Little Owls were rearing young.

The new pond had a whirligig beetle swirling round and round with its bubble of air attached. These beetles have two sets of eyes, one to look above the surface and one to search below the surface for prey (eg mosquito larvae).

Pond Skaters had arrived and they were darting across the surface of the water in search of flies. One Greater Water Boatman had arrived. It swims on its back with an air sack wrapped around it and will be searching for small tadpoles and other water creatures to eat.

Many water creatures have wings and will fly to new ponds. We look forward to damsel flies and dragon flies laying their eggs in the pond.

Only a few tadpoles were noted but I am sure that, once the pond is established, more spawn will be laid.

One or two wild flowers were beginning to show. It would be wonderful if the Council could leave the field edges to grow so that wild life has a better chance of survival.

Last Summer Mr Woodhead and I noticed a significant Summer roost of female Pippistrelle bats streaming from the school building towards the nearby woodland. They had obviously bred there. Males roost separately after mating. This is a huge success story as bats are a Biodiversity Action Plan Species. Very soon I will bring my bat detector and find out whether they are Soprano or Common Pippistrelles. Of course they may have gone elsewhere to breed this year.

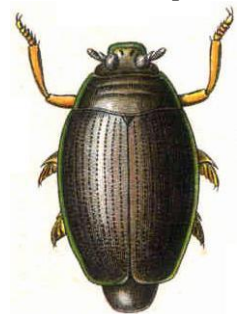
The school garden is excellent for bees and Goldfinches because of the Hebes and Teasels. Can't wait to see how it all develops!



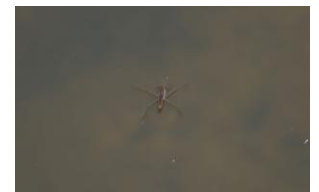
Tree Sparrow



Male House Sparrow



Whirligig Beetle



Pond Skater



Pipistrelle Bats



Greater Water Boatman



Song Thrush

