



Wyre Forest Study Group

WAXWINGS COME TO WYRE

Rosemary Winnall

On 2 March 2005, during a late afternoon walk in the garden, I noticed a small flock of birds up in the Hornbeam tree. I thought at first that they might be Redwings coming in to roost in the Hawthorns. Although the light was poor, I looked more closely and realised that they weren't Redwings and, with some excitement, wondered if they might be Waxwings! A quick check with the binoculars confirmed the identification and this species became our 70th bird species record for Willow Bank, Callow Hill!

The following day we were away from home all day, but on our return there were 21 Waxwings up in the Ash tree at 4.50pm, their crests showing as conspicuous features. So, they were roosting close by, but what were they feeding on?

On 5 March we spotted 66 Waxwings up in the Ash Tree at 7am as it was getting light. They stayed in the garden, and by 8.15am they were coming down in small groups to feed on berries on our small Guelder Rose bushes. I quickly went down and erected my bird hide close to the bush, but by then there were not many berries left. The flock flew off down the valley, but I hoped that they would return.

It wasn't until lunchtime that I spotted the flock again. I abandoned my lunch and dashed down into the hide to set up my camera. It was awful light, and hail showers were frequent. These were not ideal conditions for bird photography! It wasn't long before a small group of birds came down – an exciting moment. They are beautiful birds to see at close quarters. What surprised me was the speed that the birds moved on the bush. They were never still and fed voraciously as if their lives depended on it, which no doubt it did, especially when food was in short supply! Between feeds the flock sat up in the nearest tree – a Damson. Small group of birds would fly down, about 15 at a time, as the bushes were so small – about 6 foot high. This continued for 50 minutes before all the berries were eaten and the flock flew off at 2.30pm.

I knew that my photos were not particularly good, and I would have liked another hide session. So I drove into the forest to the nearest Guelder Rose tree, cut a few berried branches and came home and wired them to the bushes in the hope that this might prompt a return of the flock. I had also heard that attaching apples might work, so I wired a few of those on as well! The tree did look a bit odd, I must admit, but I was prepared to try anything to encourage the birds to return. At the time, I didn't know that Waxwings were not going to be seen again in the vicinity that year!

I then checked my pictures on the computer. I had been following reports of the Waxwing invasion across the country and I knew that some of the birds had been ringed. So I was delighted when I

spotted 2 ringed birds when I blew up my shots on the screen. One bird had a metal ring only on its right leg. The other was a colour-ringed female with an orange, blue, light green ring sequence. After some enquiries I found that this bird had been ringed as a youngster in NE Scotland, at Westhill near Aberdeen, on the 7 November 2004 by the Grampian Ringing Group. It had made a journey south of 710km!

Gavin Peplow has compiled the 2005 Waxwing records for Worcestershire in Worcestershire Record. Records from the Wyre area are as follows:

18 January	– 45 in the Wyre Forest
20 January	– 20 in Bewdley
21 January	– 30 in the Wyre Forest
02 March	– 20 at Willow Bank, Bliss Gate
03 March	– 21 at Willow Bank, Bliss Gate
05 March	– 66 at Willow Bank, Bliss Gate
06 March	– 15 at Willow Bank, Bliss Gate
13 March	– 30 in Bewdley
14 March	– 4 in the Wyre Forest

I wonder when we'll next see Waxwings in our area?



Waxwing – Willow Bank, Bliss Gate, Bewdley. 05-03-05 at 14.26 hr
Rosemary Winnall

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References

Notes on Colour-ringed Waxwings in Worcestershire by Gavin Peplow.
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