

**L**OOKING BACK at the newsletter for last March I see that I mentioned that we had seen fewer greenfinches this winter. While attending the AGM at the hall, Roger Cheesworth told me that he thought they had all arrived at the end of New House Close as there were so many there.

I'm glad that they have not all disappeared. In fact now that the birds have been singing, I am also glad to say that although we have not seen that many I have heard them a great deal with their long churring note. The RSPB's Big Garden Bird Watch earlier this year stated that there had been a drop in greenfinches overall. It also showed that the population of song thrushes has dropped by two thirds, blackbirds by a quarter in a year and house sparrow numbers have risen by 4.2 per garden.

We are lucky here in that we still have quite a lot of song thrushes; house sparrows are here in good numbers and, as for blackbirds, if there aren't two males chasing each other around the garden it's very unusual. They are still coming into our house and eating cat food and fruit and don't take kindly to being chased away. One actually came into the extension whilst the cat was still eating his breakfast! We have a nest-box with baby blue tits at the moment and have collared doves nesting in one neighbour's tree, and wood pigeons in another. We are certainly doing our bit for sparrows as I have seen four at one time on one of the fat balls, which need replacing in less than a week. Robins now cling on to them. I have not seen that before this winter. One resident was telling me how delighted she was to see a great spotted woodpecker on one she had hung in the garden. She had never had such a close view of one, and of course they are in full breeding plumage now.

A NEIGHBOUR in Stuppington Ct Farm tells me that for the past four years she has had a pair of ducks and their family on her pond. She doesn't know where they nest, but they put in an appearance in late spring every year and the family have enjoyed watching the youngsters feeding. At least in a garden pond there is no fear of the family being taken by a carp. However, although mum and dad have shown up this year, so far there's no sign of any babies.

THIS TIME last year I also mentioned year that I had not heard a cuckoo and the same so far has been the case this year. I know that they decimate small birds, but not in the same numbers as jays, magpies and squirrels. A neighbour saw a squirrel on a lamppost and wondered if it had been treed (or posted) by a dog.

CAROLE DAVIS telephoned me one morning to tell me that she had seen a very large bird flying but was not sure what it was. It coincided with reports of an escaped vulture but decided that it was not that big. Talking to Steve at the chicken farm he told her that he had sighted no less than three



## Hilltop's alive with the sound of singing



### My VIEW

By JOAN GOWER

buzzards and had found chicken beaks on hay bales on the farm. They have been helping themselves to his chickens. I understand that any other predator would leave feet etc. I spoke to them about it as buzzards in this part of the country are rare and if there are three, it would indicate that they are not escapees. They told me that they believe that they are somewhere on the downs. Not good for the farm though. Farmers have enough problems but at least the bird flu did not affect them.

GLEN SHARMAN called the other day and showed me photographs of a tawny owl that has taken up residence in a nest-box he put up for the purpose. It's nice to know that what you have done has been successful. He also had a lovely photo of a red legged partridge walking up his drive. We have seen them in the field opposite a good many times over the years, but they never ventured into the garden. Glen's orchard is quite a nature reserve as he uses no pesticides or insecticides.

A MESSAGE for all living in Iffin Lane... Geoff Porter has offered to take over the Neighbourhood Watch Link for me. His number is **01227 766 539** so any problems now would you please contact him instead of me. I'm extremely grateful to him. I feel that any one that does this job should have email and I don't I am far too old now to learn new tricks.

THAT'S ALL for now. I don't know about you, but I am looking forward to the Hog Roast. I hope we get a wonderful evening like last year. All the best for the summer.

**Joan**