

Okay, the Vernal Equinox has passed, the ponds and canals have plenty of frog and toad spawn in them, there is plenty of bird nesting activity and a few butterflies have taken to the skies I think it is safe to say that spring has arrived.

A quick glance on the Gwent Ornithological Society website www.gwentbirds.org.uk shows that another summer migrant, the wheatear has started to arrive and that lots of other birds including chiffchaff and blackcap have started to sing. I've personally been watching magpie, jackdaw, wood pigeon, collared dove, grey wagtail and wren all busily building nests and am keeping an eye on a mistle thrush sat on eggs near my home. I've also been looking out for one of my favourite birds, the ring ouzel, as I walk my dogs on the nearby mountains. I haven't seen one yet this year but usually spot a few around this time as they stop off en route to Mid Wales for the summer.

Fewer and fewer Ring Ouzel visit the UK each year and the bird seems to be in serious decline. This year a nationwide survey is being held to monitor their numbers, with volunteers, armed with MP3 recordings of the bird's song (to attract other birds), traipsing through the upland areas of England, Scotland and Wales.

In Gwent there were an estimated 50 breeding pairs in the early 1980's, but unfortunately, they haven't bred here now for several years. This is really worrying as there is a trend of disappearing summer migrants; turtle dove and nightingale also no longer visit Gwent and birds such as wood warbler, whinchat, yellow wagtail and cuckoo are becoming much thinner on the ground.



City Wildlife Care

I spoke to my friends Mike and Cath recently as they ready themselves for the spring. As soon as young birds begin to fledge this local wildlife charity sees a huge increase in the calls they receive. If you would like to know a bit more about their work visit www.citywildlifecare.org.uk

Good News for Badgers

Its good to see that common sense appears to have prevailed and the planned cull of badgers in West Wales has been called off. I could scarcely believe that it had been sanctioned in the first place and sincerely hope that this is the end of the matter.

Birdwatching Events

Don't forget tonight's birdwatching talk at Goytre Village Hall (just off the A4042 - turn off by the Goytre Arms PH), when Ian Harrison presents 'Birding in Oman'. I don't know about you, but to me Oman conjures up the image of a pretty hostile desert environment that doesn't seem very appealing to birds. However, this can't be the case or Ian wouldn't have anything to talk about! Why not pop along and find out what this Middle Eastern destination is really like?

The talk starts at 7.30pm and entry, including tea and biscuits, costs £2.

Put a note in your diary for Saturday 31st March, as GOS have been able to arrange a visit to the Great Bustard Group release site on Salisbury Plain. In 2003 the GBG launched an ambitious project to reintroduce great bustards reared in Russia back to Britain - If you would like to find out more about the success of the project then meet at Enford Village Hall, Wiltshire (SU 143 500 or for satnav users enter postcode SN9 6DD) at 11.30am. There is an admission charge of £10 plus

£1

parking. For more information contact Steve Butler on 01873 854583 or 07970 558583.

On Saturday 14th April there is a walk scheduled a little closer to home, when my mate Lyndon Waters will be leading a 3 – 4 hour leisurely stroll along the Severn Estuary at

Collister

Pill, near

Magor

. This is a good place to see ducks and waders – and I'm sure lots of newly arriving summer migrants will also put in an appearance. If you are interested please meet Lyndon at

Undy

Church (ST 440 869) at 8.00am.

Argus readers are particularly welcome to come along to all the events featured in this column. Walkers should remember to bring boots and waterproof clothing, refreshments and binoculars if you have them.

For more details visit www.gwentbirds.org.uk or give me a call on the number below.

Keep in Touch

Thank you to all readers that have taken the time to get in touch.

I always enjoy hearing from you and can be contacted at smegstevens@gmail.com or on 01633 866470.