

What's on the wing in the woods?



Green woodpecker.



Nightjar.

The operatic nightingale

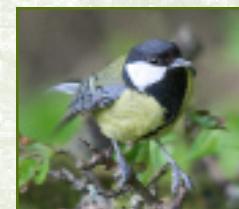
One of the greatest joys of a spring walk in the Blean is listening to the full and varied song of a nightingale. This nationally declining summer visitor from Africa still has a stronghold in the Blean Woods, where it favours dense regrowth about four to eight years after trees have been coppiced (cut down but allowed to regrow as fresh shoots from the stumps). The rapid disappearance of traditional coppicing throughout the UK in the 20th century has been largely responsible for the nightingale's retreat, and Kent is one of the few counties where coppicing and nightingales are both still reasonably common.

Mysterious nocturnal birds

Another bird that is no longer familiar to most people is the nightjar, which favours large open areas within woodland. Its evocative, mechanical churring call on balmy summer evenings is usually



Nightingale.



Great tit.
(Susan Provan.)



Siskin.

preceded by the equally curious grunting sounds of woodcocks flying in great circuits as they search for mates, and you may also hear the squeaky calls of young tawny owls demanding to be fed.

Ups and downs

Timing is of the essence: birdsong peaks in April and early May, and the woods can seem surprisingly quiet in the mid-summer heat. During winter much depends on whether you are lucky enough to bump into a roving flock of tits, redpolls, siskins or redwings.

All the common woodland birds are to be found here, including three species of woodpecker, but there have been a number of losses in the past twenty years, such as willow tit, redstart, wood warbler and, more surprisingly, starling, once a common nester in old woodpecker holes. Tree pipit, turtle dove and spotted flycatcher are all now extremely scarce. On the upside we have gained two birds of prey - the dashing hobby and stately buzzard.



Great spotted woodpecker, adult feeding fledgling.
(Susan Provan.)



Hobby.



Buzzard.

the Blean is just minutes away...

Covering over 11 square miles, the Blean is one of the largest and most distinctive areas of ancient woodland in England, important nationally for both its wildlife and its history. The Blean has been a working woodland for over a thousand years, and continues to provide woodland products, including firewood and fencing materials, for local people. The splendour and tranquillity of this special landscape can be enjoyed on a network of paths and trails. This panel is part of a series of 18 located around the Blean. To see all 18 panels, visit www.theblean.co.uk. For information about walking in Kent visit www.kent.gov.uk/explorekent.



Produced by



December 2011

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