

## Common Buzzards in South Bradford - by Vic Kolodziejczyk



I suppose that the story starts in late 2012 when I had my first sighting of a common buzzard in south Bradford. I have been a keen birdwatcher and lived in the area for over 25 years so this was a pleasant surprise. Initially I got a number of sightings locally and then I started to see buzzards on my "patch" which is a couple of miles from my house. The sightings culminated in the summer of 2013 when five flew over my fairly urban back garden. The situation soon moved from having a new local "tick" to being somewhat disappointed if I didn't see a buzzard when out birdwatching. I did have a niggling thought after seeing the five birds flying over in the summer that they may have bred fairly locally in the summer of 2013 so this,

and the fact that I know had more time available, encouraged me to increase my efforts at seeing if I could find evidence of them breeding locally. I had three separate sites to investigate;

**Site 1** This is my local patch that I visit pretty much every week. The sightings were beginning to add up, such that I had five sightings out of six visits in January 2014, six out of seven in February and five out of five in March. These were of one or two birds. In April I managed to see one of the birds carrying nest material and watched two birds "skydancing". I had a good look round for a nest and managed to locate one. After this the sightings of buzzards started to drop off and I was only seeing single birds and this was less often. I could not convince myself that the nest was ever used. Had the breeding failed for some reason? Was I watching the wrong nest and the birds had bred somewhere close by? The fact that I was only now seeing a single bird makes me think that breeding must have failed for some reason.

**Site 2** I stumbled across this site by accident. I was undertaking some survey work for the Yorkshire Wildlife trust and this sent me to a local area that I would not normally visit. As I walked down a beck I disturbed two very agitated buzzards. I then looked up into a tree and found a huge nest. Unfortunately, the only way to view the nest was to stand directly under it which meant a) disturbance was inevitable and b) it was impossible to see into the nest. I was torn between trying to check for breeding but not disturbing the birds. I visited the site a handful of times in the next few months (buzzards incubate eggs for seven weeks and once hatched, fledging takes another seven weeks) and each time the two adults were present and



were very agitated. The nest was getting scruffier and there were visible signs of guano and white, downy feathers on the nest. Signs that there was a youngster at some time but I did not go back to confirm that it had fledged.

**Site 3** This is the site closest to my home. Throughout early 2014 I visited about once a month and there was always one or two birds present. The sightings were usually close to a small wooded area. From March onwards, whenever I approached this wooded area the birds got very agitated. I managed to find, what looked to me like, two separate buzzard nests in adjacent trees. Further visits seemed to suggest that these nests may not have been occupied but I always found the adults agitated. When I visited in early July I found a very young, recently fledged buzzard clattering about in the tree canopy which suggested to me that there must have been another nest somewhere in the copse that I had not located.

**Conclusions** There were three separate attempts by common buzzards to breed in south Bradford in 2014. At least one of these was successful. The three sites were within a two mile radius of each other. This just emphasises the well documented move of buzzards eastwards across Britain. I wonder why this move has recently started so vigorously?

### **BOG Meeting August 2014 Peter Smith - British Owls**

Peter Smith entertained us with his superb photos and tales of British Owls. His talk encompassed the whole range of this popular species commencing with the commonest: The Tawny Owl. The bird sometimes nests in old Magpie nests, squirrels drays and specially constructed tree boxes. Clues to their presence can often be found beneath trees where pellets are dropped. These contain remnants of bones and features from their prey, usually voles, small fish and birds. Peter had seen evidence that they had taken Great Spotted Woodpecker and passerines.



The Barn Owl is a dawn to dusk hunter and enjoys an open aspect and particularly those fields where hay has been cut. His illustrations showed the species at rest on gateposts, hunting from fences and breeding in barns where, under license, he set up a hide within feet of a nesting pair. His very close observations, supported by thrilling photos showed the owl bringing a variety of food to the newly fledged juveniles. These offerings generally included, rats, voles, shrews, birds and even a bat!

The Little Owl, a bird we are very familiar with, particularly on the hillsides and around the farms of Airedale and Wharfedale was shown on lamp posts, dry stone walls and dead branches. Peter described the owl's habitats which included nesting in walls, trees and even farm machinery. Close to these places the birds are able to search out their food which usually contained moths, worms, voles and small birds. One individual was noted with a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker.

The Long-eared Owl is more diurnal than other British Owls and it tends to roost and nest where there is excellent cover, particularly in amongst conifer trees. Peter's photographs illustrated this perfectly with a shot of an incredibly well camouflaged nest where juveniles could be seen with adults. This is a species that takes mammals and a range of passerines that frequent the forests and adjacent moorland.

The Short-eared Owl was seen sweeping gracefully over rough pasture and moors, using its very long wings to propel it as it searched for small mammals and breeding birds. He also supported his talk with an amusing story of a confrontation between an SEO and a stoat before he completing his talk with the Eagle Owl and Snowy Owl. The former owl, which has a six foot wingspan, has nested in Bowland and on that occasion was seen to attack a policewomen as she followed up a complaint from a dog-walker! These birds take large mammals, such as fox cubs, squirrels and fallow doe. Unfortunately they did not spare nesting raptors having been recorded attacking Hen Harrier, Buzzard and even Goshawk. A photo of a Snowy Owl, which once nested on the island of Fetlar, closed an excellent evening's entertainment. PK