

## Haworth Tawnys - by Stephen Parkes

**The Oak** My Haworth garden may be just a small piece of ground, but makes up for it vertically at over 60ft, due to the dominating presence of a 100+year old sessile oak. The remnant of an old woodland, there is now just one neighbouring oak and a handful of sycamores. Apparently oaks support more wildlife than any other native tree (with 280 species of invertebrates alone) and ours appears to be no exception. On the bird front it's a magnet for larger birds such as jackdaw, rook, crow, magpie, wood pigeon and collared dove. We have the occasional great spotted woodpecker, but it's too isolated for nuthatch and has attracted a tree-creeper in only once during a very cold winter – escaped parrots have been seen more regularly! Oak moths support blue-tits that breed in nearby bird boxes and coal and great and tit are also frequently sighted. Below its branches, a sparrowhawk ensures the house sparrow colony never gets above 12.

**The Tawnys** Over the years, I have got used to the wide range of calls from male and female tawny owls with the occasional fleeting glimpse. But that all changed at the end of June 2014, when we were treated to the arrival of two "Squeakers" or fledged tawny owlets. For the following two months (fledging lasts from age 32 to 100 days) they spent most of the night calling for food. Their incessant, wheezy squawks increasing in tempo every time a parent arrived with food. On warm summer nights sleeping with the window open stretched the patience of even the keenest owl lover! We never found where they nested, but during the day they appeared to roost in our neighbours tree and start calling from around 10 pm.

**The Diet** According to the BTO tawny owls take a wide range of prey from earthworms (taken on wet nights from lawns) through to small mice and rats, starlings and even grey squirrels. Our birds also had a varied diet based on the discarded remains I saw below the tree (though I never saw any pellets). Smaller prey would have gone down without a trace, but the adult birds would have had to do a bit more prep on larger prey. These include wood pigeon, collared dove, magpie and starling.

The magpie was a juvenile bird but not far off full size, judging its discarded head. The starling's beak looked particularly sharp and something you would want to avoid your youngster swallowing. I also found a partially decomposed mole which I guess could have been rejected or dropped by a youngster – I can't imagine the parent would have let it go to waste. Some birders may be pleased to know that tawny's can take magpie, but how well do we really know their diets? I now wonder if some of the bird remains I have seen in prior years (including a pair of mistle thrush feet) may have been the result of tawny owls and not magpie predation.



Tawny Owlet - about 40 days old

## 12th December Pied Wagtail Spectacular in Keighley Town Centre - John Preshaw

At the Bus Station in the centre of Keighley it was rush hour. There was a crystal clear sky, the temperature was below freezing and it was just going dark. There are 7-8 small trees in the Bus Station itself. There was nothing to be seen at first. Then the tweet tweet call of a Pied Wagtail which landed in one of the trees. Then one or two more. Then a gradual build up as more and more flew down to the trees from surrounding rooftops. There was a lot of flying around and jostling for position for the best branches. The noise of the calls became louder and louder. Finally I managed to count approximately 300 birds. It is a spectacular sight. No-one else seemed to notice them as they rushed to get home after work.

## Annual Report 2014

The Committee wishes to thank all local birders who submitted a staggering 18,500 records by 31st December. In the meantime, we are busily compiling the Annual Report, which, if all goes well, will be available from 1st May.

You can catch up with what's been happening, forthcoming walks, meetings at Hallmark and the daily reports of bird sightings, all through our website. The site now has links to interesting blogs, managed by local birders. These include: Low Moor & Oakenshaw Reserve (Martyn Priestley), West Yorkshire Birding (Brian Sumner), Calderdale Birders, Ben Rhydding Gravel Pits Nature Reserve (Stephen Parkes), Danny's Birds (Nigel and Danny Priestley) and Stephen Lilley's Images.