

DANEHILL PARISH (INCLUDING CHELWOOD GATE & PIPPINGFORD) BIRD REPORT OF SOME NOTABLE CHANGES IN LIVING MEMORY

ARTICLE 3

This is the second of a series of articles reflecting upon the most significant changes in the birdlife of our parish comprising Danehill, Chelwood Gate and Pippingford, from the 1950s up to 2022.

It draws on the rich local knowledge of Paul Marten, who has worked as an estate gardener for many years for local private landowners. Paul is also the clock-keeper and flag-raiser at All Saints Parish Church Danehill where his wife Jennie is Verger. Both live at Oak Tree Cottages nearby. Born in 1942, Paul lived at first near Freshfield Brickworks and later moved with his father Alfred to live with his father's sister in Horsted Keynes. He has always retained a close connection with our parish. His grandparents lived in Laundry Lane (the road recently re-named "Isle of Thorns ") in Chelwood Gate. Added to Paul's local knowledge stretching back decades past that of my own (Clive Poole) a relative newcomer to the parish having moved to Beaconsfield Road in 2006.

The two birds we shall highlight here are the turtle and collared doves.

TURTLE DOVE

Paul remembers clearly hearing lots of male Turtle Doves making their lazy "purring "songs from thickets, scrub and hedgerows in many parts of our parish from the 1950s through to the 1970s. At that time they were common summer visitors. (they are the only European dove or pigeon which migrates, spending our winter in the Sahel region of Africa). In Paul's words "Turtle Doves then were taken for granted ".

By the time I had arrived in the parish in 2006 they had



become very uncommon here. A pair was present in scrub woodland near Coach & Horses Lane. A second pair was still hanging on to breed around Beaconsfield Road. Before Smithy's Field was purchased by the parish council and converted into Jubilee Green playing field, the "field" comprised a mixture of gorse, heather and short grass grazed by deer and rabbits. A male Turtle Dove could often be seen in the early morning perched on top of one of old oaks close to the road, purring contentedly from May onwards to August.

I was even lucky enough to have a pair of Turtle Doves visit my garden, soon after 2006, perch on our fence and then drink from our birdbath! The last record in the parish appears to have been on 3 May 2014 when my attention was drawn one early morning to a male Turtle Dove purring (the sound is like a contented cat's!!) from the top of a dead pine above birch and gorse scrub just east of the Old Airstrip.

COLLARED DOVE



Why should we draw attention to a bird which, in 2022, is a familiar sight around our village, particularly in the vicinity of our houses and gardens?

The reason is because of its phenomenally rapid colonisation of Europe. Not many people will be

aware that before 1955 *there were no Collared Doves in England*. This dove is non-migratory and in the early 1900s it was called the "Eastern Collared Dove". Its westernmost European range was a toehold in Thrace. It has since spread rapidly north-west through Europe, crossing the North Sea in 1955 to reach Norfolk. Paul Marten thinks that the first Collared Doves arrived to breed in the Danehill area in the early 1970s. Now they are a charming addition to our village garden birds.

Clive Poole, Ashdown Forest Voluntary Ranger