

A close-up photograph of a red fox sleeping. The fox is curled up, facing towards the left of the frame. Its fur is a rich reddish-brown color, with white markings on its face, chest, and paws. The background is dark and out of focus, showing some foliage and possibly a path or road.

Locked down in Milngavie
- Springwatch 2020

John and Judith Chapman



It would not have happened without the Covid-19 pandemic. We would have been travelling further afield, having outings to interesting places in Scotland and beyond, spending time with friends, family and fellow hobbyists. Restricted to local walks from home, we watched the development of one of the most gloriously sunny Springs we can remember. We spent hours with the 'RSPB Guide to Birdsong' (book and CD) and steadily our competence in identifying birds from their songs and calls improved.

We created a bird list. Judith had already been trying to establish a habit of noting down the names of birds we saw on walks and, after a faltering start on 23 March (the first day of lockdown), most days she remembered to take the notebook. The bird list grew to an astonishing (to us) 68 species, seen, heard, or (mostly) both between 23 March and 28 May.

It wasn't just birds of course. Green growth and flowers, mammals and insects made the walks even more delightful and varied. All walks were on foot from our home. We walked upstream by the Allander Water to ramble around Drumclog Woods, we went downstream on the Allander walkway to and beyond the confluence with the Kelvin. We tramped through Lennox Park, over and around Dougalston golf course, round Milngavie reservoirs and the woodlands beside them. We walked all around Mugdock Country Park and across to Dumbrock Loch. We followed the West Highland Way to Craigallion Loch and we made a few trips to Kilmardinny Loch to check on a Tawny Owl nest.

The more we walked, the more we saw. We got to know where some bird species could nearly always be found and we noticed when the different migrants arrived. Perhaps the biggest thrill was finding where pairs nested and being able to follow the progress through brooding to feeding the young. John carried his camera on nearly all the walks and all the photographs that follow were taken during the lockdown period.

The following slides are of birds, arranged in a similar order to that encountered in most field guides, and then mammals. The images do not form a comprehensive set. Rather we have chosen the birds we watched most closely and where our observations led to a short story emerging. Despite then many omissions, we hope you do get a feel for some of the wildlife that can be seen around Milngavie in Spring and that you enjoy looking at some of what we saw during lockdown.

Birds





Grey Heron

While we saw grey heron quite often, the two great crested grebes were the only ones we saw during lockdown. They were on Milngavie Reservoirs, where we had never seen such birds before. We saw little grebes a few times and were able to watch them constructing a nest platform on the pond by Mugdock visitor centre.

Great Crested Grebe



Little Grebe





Mallard



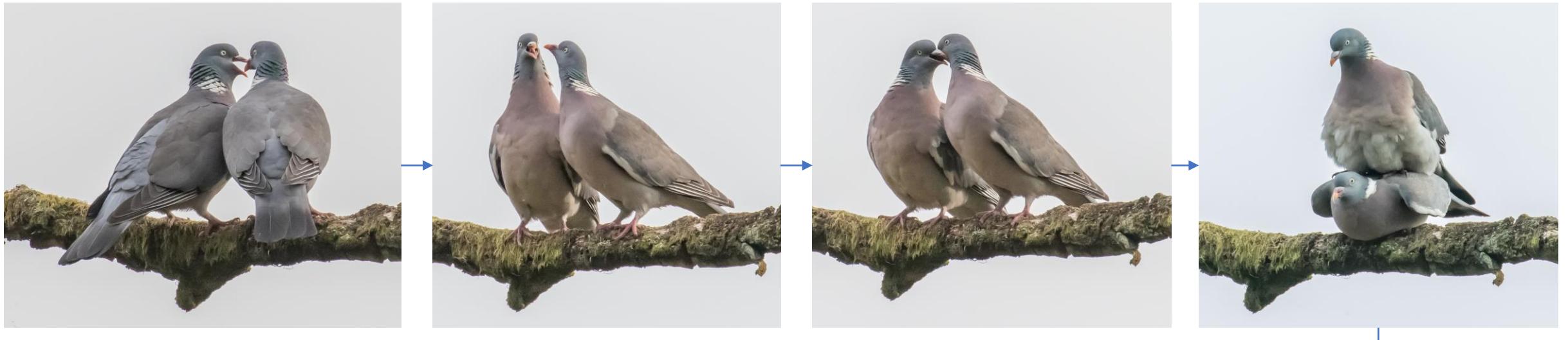
Buzzard

The perching buzzard was remarkably unperturbed to be watched and photographed at close range. Throughout lockdown, we saw many buzzards flying but the one shown left was particularly exciting as we could see it had made a successful catch.

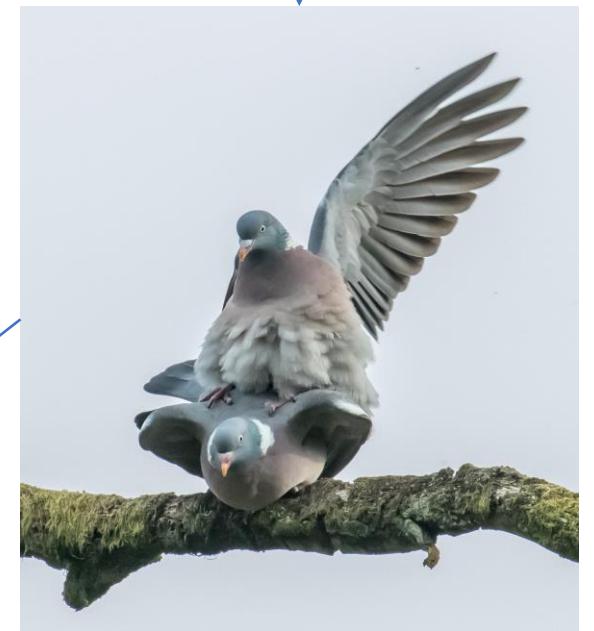


Kestrels were more elusive than buzzards, but we had several sightings in the vicinity of the Mugdock quarry pool.





Walking home through Mugdock woods one day, we noticed this pair of pigeons intently billing and cooing. The foreplay went on for many minutes before triumphant consummation.



Wood Pigeon



Tawny Owl

We would never have taken the path overlooking an old ash tree above Kilmardinny Loch if a passer by (also sporting binoculars) had not told us tawny owlets could be seen in a hole in the tree there. These two pictures were taken in the early morning a week apart. On the first occasion we could only see two young but, as the picture on the right shows, there were at least three. Ten days after our second visit the owlets were gone from the hole, hopefully hiding in local branches and still being fed by the adults.



Great Spotted Woodpecker



Woodpeckers were often to be seen in the woods we visited. This pair were busily feeding nestlings. We heard the chicks calling as we walked along the West Highland Way, quickly identified the nest hole high in a tree trunk, and stopped to watch proceedings from a safe distance.



Barn Swallow



From mid-May onwards, many swallows could be seen flying around the ruined WW2 defence buildings in Mugdock Country Park. The low height clearance did not appear to be a problem for them!



Grey Wagtail

We saw pied wagtails in many locations and grey wagtails at several points along the Allander Water, either side of Milngavie. We identified at least two pairs of the latter and could watch the young ones being fed, though we never identified a nesting site.



Pied Wagtail





Dunnock

Treecreeper

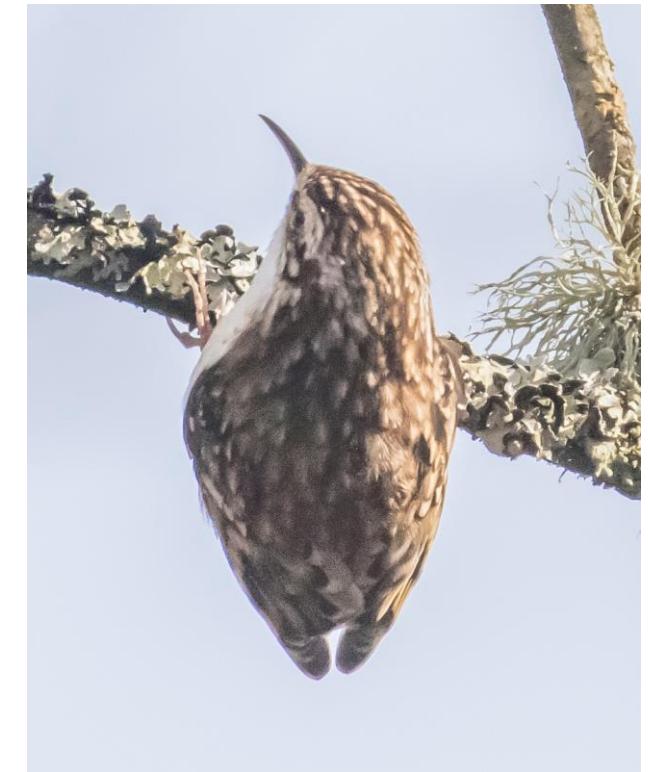
We were almost guaranteed to hear the songs of wren and dunnock every day. Both birds were encountered in our garden and out on walks. Dipper and treecreeper were much trickier to find, and tended to take us by surprise even though we were looking constantly in appropriate habitats.



Wren



Dipper





Having always found the warblers hard to tell apart visually, learning their calls and songs this year really boosted our ability to identify them. Indeed, we almost always heard these arriving migrants before we saw them.



Chiffchaff and willow warbler arrived first. Soon after, the melodious blackcaps, whitethroats and garden warblers added their songs, and finally the jazz-drumming sedge warblers put in an appearance. Clockwise from top left: willow warbler, chiffchaff, sedge warbler (in flight and, below, singing), garden warbler, whitethroat.





Having heard and seen our first blackcap of the year by Milngavie Library, we were delighted a few days later to realise that one was singing just outside our bedroom window. Careful watching revealed a female too, and for some days we hoped they were going to nest in the hedge. Then a good week or so past without a sighting, before they made another appearance in the same area.





We came across a bush full of long-tailed tits in Mugdock one day. There were at least seven birds, several obvious recent fledglings (bottom left) with attendant adults. The bird on the right was also seen at Mugdock and must just have been for a wash and brush up in the loch.



Long-tailed Tit

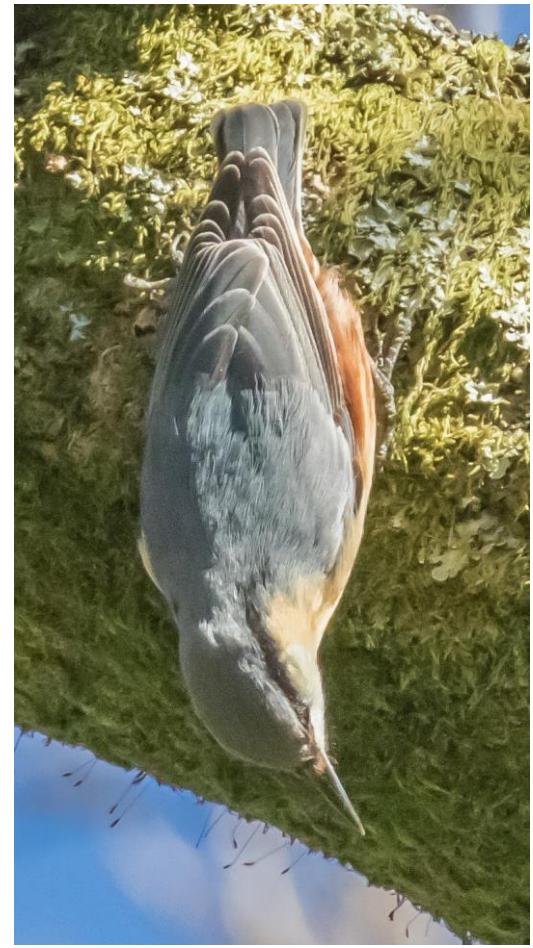




Nuthatch



Early in lockdown we were excited to spot a nuthatch, having recognised its “car alarm” call in Mugdock Woods. After that we heard them in several places, and gradually built up a picture of where we were most likely to see them, often gathering nesting materials. We ended up watching birds at two nesting sites, one a nest box in Gallows Hill, Mugdock Country Park and the other a hole in a tree literally overhanging the West Highland Way. The following pages show how the stories evolved.



Judith's nuthatches preparing to
nest, based on several of John's
photographs from mid-May.
(pastel)





16/05/20: Both parents out and about, busily feeding young and clearing out faecal sacks.

25/05/20: Nestlings so big the adults could feed them without necessarily entering the box.





28/05/20: Nestlings easily seen peering from the nest box entrance waiting for food. When friends went up to see the nestbox two days later it appeared to be empty, so we hope the birds have fledged successfully.





We never saw the young at the West Highland Way site but watched similar parental activity to that observed at the nest box.



Carrion Crow

We saw crows, jackdaws and magpies pretty much every day, but were pleasantly surprised to have several good sightings of jays around the woods.



Jay



Magpie



Jackdaw



Mammals



Roe Deer - Always cautiously aware of us in the woodlands, they would sometimes stand for a few moments before bounding off. The one buck we saw in the open was trotting across a field by the Allander walkway in the early morning.



Fox – We never saw foxes out on our walks, but at least two were (and still are) regular visitors to our garden. We often saw them lazing or grooming on the back lawns, and as the road was quieter than usual they also made forays down the front path and into the street.



The Complete Bird List

Little Grebe	Oystercatcher	Dunnock	Nuthatch
Great Crested Grebe	Common Sandpiper	Grasshopper Warbler	Treecreeper
Grey Heron	Lapwing	Whitethroat	Wren
Whooper Swan	Greater Black-backed Gull	Blackcap	Dipper
Mute Swan	Lesser Black-backed Gull	Willow Warbler	Yellowhammer
Greylag Goose	Feral Pigeon	Chiffchaff	Chaffinch
Canada Goose	Woodpigeon	Sedge Warbler	Goldfinch
Mallard	Cuckoo	Garden Warbler	Greenfinch
Tufted Duck	Kingfisher	Goldcrest	Bullfinch
Goldeneye	Great Spotted Woodpecker	Robin	Reed Bunting
Goosander	Tawny Owl	Blackbird	House Sparrow
Osprey	Swallow	Song Thrush	Starling
Buzzard	House Martin	Mistle Thrush	Magpie
Kestrel	Meadow Pipit	Long-tailed Tit	Rook
Pheasant	Tree Pipit	Coal Tit	Carrion Crow
Water Rail	Pied Wagtail	Great Tit	Jackdaw
Moorhen	Grey Wagtail	Blue Tit	Jay

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Milngavie, June 2020

