

Sedlescombe and District Garden Society

Newsletter No. 67 – August (2) 2020

Look out for...**Blackcaps**

Or **Browncaps**...!

These birds belong to the Warbler family; however, they are fairly chunky, and about the size of Chaffinch. They used to be known as the March Nightingale as they have a beautiful fluty song and the male will sing loudly from March. He starts to sing as soon as he arrives in the UK, after spending the winter in places like Southern Spain or North Africa and will sing for several months. This is a common breeding bird around Sedlescombe and many of you reading this article will have heard this bird singing earlier in the year from your gardens or on walks, even if you didn't recognise it. Blackcaps like dense bushes / scrub for breeding and can be found nesting in large gardens, scrubby woodland, patches of bramble etc.



Males are very smart looking birds with a pure black head, olive-brown back and creamy underparts.

Females also look smart; however, their heads are a lovely chestnut brown. Juveniles when first out of the nest, also have a brown head, but this appears rather dull, their underparts are greyer and they tend to have a 'scruffy' appearance.



At this time of year, most of these juveniles are moulting into their adult plumage and starting to look like the adults. The adults have been hiding away for a few weeks but as they are now coming to the end of their yearly moult (where they change all of their feathers) they are ready to migrate south for the winter. Virtually all our breeding birds will have left by the end of September.

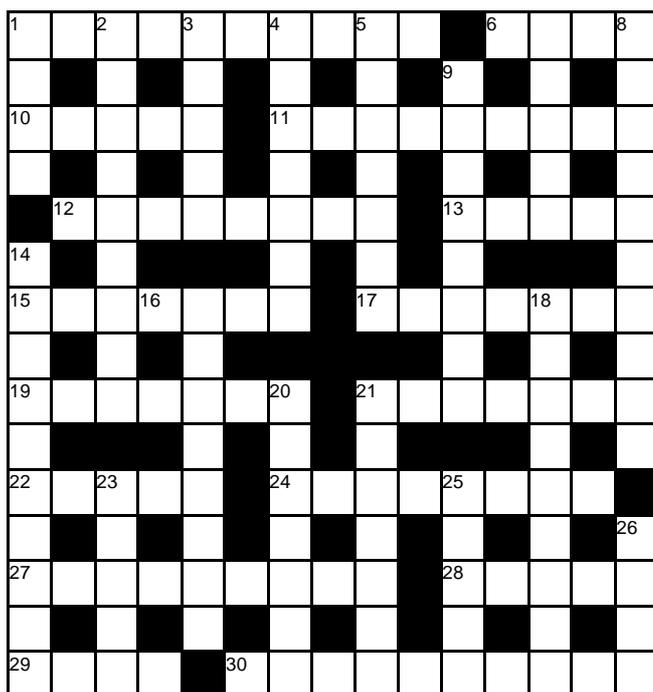
Before these Blackcaps can migrate, they need to lay down fat and this means eating and more eating. In late summer and autumn, they love sugar-rich berries. If you have an elderberry tree or bramble bush with ripe fruit, keep an eye on it for these and other migrating birds guzzling on the ripe fruit. They can end up looking like messy toddlers with the red juice all around their mouth and dribbled down their fronts!



They are also partial to various other berries and will continue to take their summer diet of insects, largely from trees. Check out your Willow, Oak or Sycamore tree now, or from September onwards a tree with ivy which is flowering and attracting insects.

However.... come mid – late September just as our breeding birds are flying away, we start to get Blackcaps arriving from Central Europe, these are birds who are going to spend the winter with us. More about these birds in a winter newsletter, however, bear in mind for any autumn planting, their favourite natural food centres around winter fruits, particularly mistletoe and honeysuckle berries and any remaining apples left on your trees, but also whatever other soft fruit they can find. Blackcaps are also very fond of taking nectar from winter flowering Mahonia and eating insects that are attracted by the flowers.

Christine George



Across

- 1 Reaping machines (10)
- 6 Trees of *Ulmus* genus (4)
- 10 Tosca is off to the racecourse! (5)
- 11 Osculatory hemi-parasite? (9)
- 12 Bee-keeper (8)
- 13 Confusion (3-2)
- 15 Edible clam (7)
- 17 Both town and country lands (7)
- 19 Wrings out (7)
- 21 Muddle hands (7)
- 22 Cottons on to little branches! (5)
- 24 Corinthian leaf and Bear's breeches (8)
- 27 Vote in and introduced (9)
- 28 MS leaves 21 ac. And remains perfect! (5)
- 29 Usual value (4)
- 30 Interbreeder (10)

Down

- 1 See 18 dn.
- 2 An alpine (9)
- 3 Plus (5)
- 4 Ramming soil (7)
- 5 Gymkhana prize (7)
- 7 Rubbery juice (5)
- 8 In an ovine way (10)
- 9 'Queen of the climbers' (8)
- 14 Rider (10)
- 16 Annoying like sandpaper (8)
- 18 & 1 dn. Local watering hole! (3, 6, 4)
- 20 In a spruce way (7)
- 21 Wander about (7)
- 23 May relate to circle, tube or city (5)
- 25 Runner-up to the runner-up! (5)
- 26 Of the wing (4)

Crossword 3 answer next time

As promised last time, articles from the RHS magazine that may be useful at this time of year.



Pruning trained apples and pears

Late summer is the main annual pruning time for restricted forms of apples and pears (those that have been grown trained as cordons, espaliers or stepovers). From mid-August the growth rate slows and the shoots start to form buds at their tips that will not grow further this season – these are called terminal buds. If you prune earlier in the year, trees would regrow vigorously so you would have to prune again. This could affect fruiting in the following year as the trees produce vegetative growth at the expense of flower-bud development.

Pruning cordon, espalier or stepover trees

- 1 Remove any shoots that are growing towards the wall or fence.
- 2 First, look for brand new stems that are growing directly from the horizontal espalier arms or from the main stems of cordons. At the base of these new shoots, you will see a cluster of typically two to four leaves growing close together; this is called the basal cluster. Prune back new shoots to three leaves above this basal cluster, leaving about a 7.5cm (3in) long piece of the shoot.
- 3 Now look for the new shoots that are coming from those that were pruned last year. Prune these back to one leaf from the basal cluster, leaving a stub about 2.5cm (1in) long.
- 4 Late-summer pruning can still result in more growth. If any new shoots develop, cut them back in September to one leaf above the last cut.

Additional pruning needs for trained trees

Cordons

Until the main stem of cordons reaches the desired height/length, leave it unpruned. Then prune the tip to one leaf, in the same way as the side branches.

Espaliers

Remove any strong-growing shoots from the main vertical stem. If the top tier of espaliers has formed (typically you will have three to four tiers), remove any strong-growing shoots originating from around the top of the central stem, too. If left to develop, they can become dominant and the espalier loses shape.

Stepovers

On short stepover trees, which are essentially one-tier espaliers or 'bent' cordons, remove vigorous shoots growing around the top of the short leg or stem.



Plum Fruit Problems

1. Plum moth caterpillars cause most caterpillar damage by feeding and excreting in ripening plums. They can be managed by pheromone traps and timely applications of pesticide.
2. Other caterpillars such as winter moth feed mostly on foliage with occasional damage to flowers and fruit. A grease band will during winter will help avoid this problem.
3. The larvae of plum sawfly also attack fruits which usually fall from the tree at an early stage in June. Fruit loss is minor and can be tolerated.
4. Fungal infections such as Brown Rot, most commonly caused by a fungus *Moilinia fructigena*, cause fruit to decay rapidly. When the infection level is high, fruit can shrivel and stay on the tree providing an extra source of infection. In Spring these fungi also cause blossom to wilt and brown so they fail to develop and produce fruit. Remove and dispose of any affected fruit promptly to minimise carryover to next year.
5. Pocket Plum, also caused by a fungus (*Taphrina pruni*) affects developing fruitlets which become distorted. Resulting plums are elongated, shrivelled and stoneless. Remove infected branches and fruit before spores are produced.



What to do in August

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1. Take cuttings of alpines which have outgrown their vigour and insert in prepared soil in a frame or under a cloche. Spray daily in hot weather and shade from hot sun and draughts. Take cuttings of regal pelargoniums, sow cyclamen seeds.
2. Oxygenate ponds by adding fresh water, from a spray, as necessary. Cut off large waterlily leaves that are hiding the flowers. Thin heavy growth of oxygenating plants and weed the bog garden.
3. Repair and paint greenhouses and overhaul any heating systems. This is a good time to clean your water butt especially if it is empty.
4. Take cuttings of and root heathers, hydrangeas, geraniums and fuchsias
5. Take cuttings of herbs – bay, hyssop, lavender, mint, rosemary, rue, sage etc. Every 4 years chives need dividing.
6. Turn compost heaps to mix contents and air, vital for the composting process. The heap should be slightly moist, if not covered by a lid use cardboard to retain heat and moisture and limit weed seeds blowing in.
7. Use grey water when you can for watering but not on edible crops if it contains soap or detergent.
8. For those of you who are very keen to be green, try sowing green manures such as clover, trefoil, buckwheat, phacelia, grazing rye and winter tares. They reduce weed growth help prevent soil erosion and when dug into the ground, return valuable nutrients and improve structure of the soil.
9. Lawns. Fertilise sites for new lawns and sow seed a week later. Inspect established lawns, renovate as necessary.