



BEESTON WILDLIFE GROUP

Blackbirds: Common bird, uncommon behaviour

by Sean Browne

Along one side of my pond is a tall hedge of dead *Leylandii* smothered in Ivy. It is dense in parts and open in others, and although it looks untidy, the birds love it. They love it so much that this year there are four species nesting in it, all within fifteen feet of each other. Woodpigeon, Dunnock, Robin and Blackbird. Common garden birds, but one of them is doing something very uncommon, as I can find no mention of it online. Male Blackbirds are very territorial and will defend their patch against all other Blackbirds from early Spring until the last young have fledged. They can have several broods if conditions are favourable. There are two pairs in my garden and fights are a daily occurrence. A few weeks ago, a female started nest building just under the canopy of the Ivy. I watched her most days collecting twigs and dead leaves, then moss from the pond, whilst the male fought with the other pair. A few days ago the nest building stopped and an all out battle ensued. It got quite violent with one female pinning the other behind some flower pots.

The next day, what I assumed to be the female victor, started building a new nest just three feet under the first. She was busy all day long and I thought that the second pair had successfully seen off the first couple. How wrong was I! As I watched her going back and forth with beaks full of material, a male suddenly appeared on the garage roof with a worm in his bill. Where's he going, I wondered. Maybe another nest in a nearby garden? No, he went straight into the original nest whilst below, the female was busy building. He was either feeding his partner, or their chicks had just hatched. Either way, there are two pairs of Blackbirds nesting within three feet of each other. As previously mentioned, I can't find anything about this online. It would be interesting to hear if anyone else has experienced it.

Last year just one pair of Blackbirds nested in the Ivy. One day when I was sat on the bench, watching them bringing all sorts of food items in for their young, the female came down to the pond. Probably thirsty from all the foraging I thought. She began peering into the water, then like a Heron, made a stab at something and pulled out a Smooth Newt. Now I don't mind them taking tadpoles, there are plenty to go round, but they're not having my Newts, so I chased her down the drive hoping she'd drop it, but she just ran off and pecked it to death. Thinking it was just a one off, I couldn't believe my eyes, when a few minutes later the male flew down and grabbed another Newt immediately. I was off the bench like Usain Bolt and he dropped it in his hurry to escape. I spent the next hour rigging up some netting to keep the Newts safe. Looking online, this behaviour is known, but is uncommon. Needless to say, with two pairs this year, the netting is already up.

