

Sedge Warblers

By the time you read this, the frantic month of May will be nearly finished. Frantic, that is, if you are a bird, and especially if you are a summer migrant. After a long flight from Africa, you have to find a territory, defend it, find a mate, then between you, you build a nest, lay eggs, incubate for a fortnight or so, then feed a brood of ever-hungry mouths. And most of this happens during May.

So on arrival here, our migrants need to urgently find and defend a territory and attract a mate. Much of this is achieved by singing and with no bird is this more evident than with the Sedge Warbler. The male bird sits in bushes or willows somewhere near water and belts out his extraordinary medley of “song” at breakneck speed and seemingly non-stop. Zer-zer-zer-zzz-zzz-zzz-zzz-pew-pew-zer-zer-zer-diddley-diddley-zzz-zzz-zzz-bizeek-bizeek-bizeek-bizeek - and on and on and on. These last “bizeeks” in our local Sedge Warbler’s repertoire are just like a Swallow’s flight call, and he sometimes incorporates bits of Song Thrush and Curlew as well. They are not difficult to see with a bit of patience and one of the delightful things about a Sedge Warbler is that when it is singing you can see the inside of its beak and mouth, which is bright orange. And for a “dull brown bird” it is quite smart – a chestnut rump, a pale buff front and a very smart cream eyebrow.

However this extravaganza of sound will soon diminish – as birds pair up they reduce their singing and often stop altogether. They may start singing again if they lose their mate or the nest fails and they start another nest attempt, or if they are having a territorial battle with the chap next door. But generally speaking, song is much reduced by early June, and by the end of July it’s all over again for another year!

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