



It was turning out to be a lazy Sunday but Bruno needed a walk. In the valley the rain had stopped and now was as good a time as any. Just yesterday, despite the persistent drizzle, it was noticeable that spring was on the way; the first leaves were starting to appear and there seemed to be more birds around. Assuming that the rain would hold off for long enough, I set off for 'Spade' with a pair of old binoculars, a pocket guide to British birds and, of course, Bruno.



**Kestrel: Courtesy  
Jill Pakenham/BTO**

For many years, Mr Monty Banks has been bird watching at Spadeadam and is an invaluable source of avian information. In November 2007 Monty and me carried out an on-base survey in support of the [British Trust for Ornithology](#). Back then we had set off expecting to see a rich variety of birds and were disappointed to only spot: [Kestrel](#), [Buzzard](#) and [Crossbill](#).

This time, with the increase in avian activity in the valley and spring on its way, I had high hopes and I was not to be disappointed. My planned destination on Spade was a pond that Monty had shown me from afar and I was determined to get to it.

The first spot was too easy - just past the Guardroom on the grass was a bold [Wheatear](#). I always thought that Wheatears were shy birds but this one was very close to civilisation. He was not only bold in character but in colour too, particularly with the black and white striped face, grey back and black wings. For many years I had a passion for falcons, raptors and owls and so a flash of crescent wings forced me to stop the car again (much to Bruno's displeasure). Expecting [Merlin](#), I was surprised that the 'falcon' was actually a [Cuckoo](#). This was the first time that I had ever seen one - it perched right at the top of a fir tree, made a few 'cuckoo' calls before flying to the next fir. It was obviously looking for a mate. Spring had definitely arrived!



**Wheatear: Courtesy  
Jill Pakenham/BTO**



**Blackbird: Courtesy  
John Harding/BTO**

Eventually, Bruno was released and off we set to the Spadeadam pond. By this time, with Wheatear and Cuckoo under my belt (and the common [Blackbird](#) and [Song Thrush](#)).

I looked forward to what the pond had on offer. The first unmistakable sign of activity was the swooping aerial acrobatics of [Swallows](#). They were obviously back for the breeding season and it amazes me that they travelled all the way from their wintering grounds in southern Africa just to

be at Spadeadam. I was soon to find out why because the closer I got to the pond, the midges were forming up in squadrons, if not wings. Food on tap for the summer visitors. On the pond was the unmistakable [Moorhen](#) and a pair of [Mallard](#) but on the far side was a solitary duck that I guessed at first glance as a [Pochard](#).

But there are many ducks in the inventory and the light was not good - time for a closer look and to get the Brooke Bond Book of Birds out. The Pochard turned out to be [Teal](#) of which, it turned out, there were six and not only was there one pond but three. What do I know, I've only been Station Commander for two years.

I remembered these wise words from Monty, 'Don't go looking for birds, they will come to you'. How true he was. Although the midges were starting to irritate, and Bruno was happy pottering about, I stayed put and the birds came to me. Most notable were the [Reed Buntings](#) that went about their business close to the Bull Rushes. The males were not yet sporting their full summer plumage, but they were unmistakable nonetheless. Then there was the ornithologists' nightmare – the warblers. Perhaps I need to speak to Monty again but the book suggested [Sedge Warbler](#), with that distinctive stripe across the eye.

All in all, it was a great couple of hours and proved to me that Spadeadam has a rich variety of bird life and that if the habitats continue to be undisturbed the birds should have a successful breeding season. Finally, Bruno had a great time too and needs a bath having rolled in something unpleasant!



Sedge Warbler Courtesy  
Tommy Holden/BTO

Credit:

Banner compilation courtesy of Tommy Holden, John Harding & Derek Belsey of the BTO.

Many thanks.