

## Parrot Crossbill *Loxia pytyopsittacus* - a First for the Wyre

CRAIG REED

The autumn of 2013 brought a large influx of Common Crossbills *Loxia curvirostra* into the country. Mirroring this influx, it also brought with it significant numbers of two much rarer Crossbills species, Two-Barred *L. leucoptera* and Parrot Crossbills *L. pytyopsittacus*, driving them much further south and west than their typical winter range.

Large numbers of Common Crossbill had accumulated in the woodland around Postensplain, Shropshire, and with the discovery of a small flock of Two-Barred Crossbills, significant numbers of birders came to admire them. With the increased numbers of observers, it was perhaps no surprise that reports of 'possible Parrot Crossbill' emerged, as a female was seen/heard on the 2nd, and 8th of December. Due to the nomadic nature of Crossbills however, the bird was not seen again for over two months, but it is entirely within reason that the bird would have remained in the area undetected.

Identification of *L. pytyopsittacus* is difficult and often tentative at best, with significant variation among Common Crossbill confusing the matter further. The plumage is considered almost identical to that of *L. curvirostra*, and Parrot Crossbills are therefore best identified by structure, being an altogether larger, chunky and more robust bird. On average, *L. pytyopsittacus* are 1cm. larger than Common but significantly more stocky. The body is more rounded, with a much stronger head and neck, compared to the sleeker Common Crossbill. Again though, this impression varies among Common Crossbill due to their activity or feather position.

The bill 'generally' can be used to separate the species (but again the boundaries between the species are often blurred by variation). In *L. pytyopsittacus* the bill is much more significant in size, deeper, and often 'blunter' than on Common as a result of stronger curvature of both the upper and lower mandible, creating an almost 'stub nosed' effect. The lower



Conifers in Wyre

Rosemary Winnall

mandible in particular is heavy, where in Common it is fairly shallow and weak.

A female bird observed on the 18th February 2014 at SO74615 79187 (presumably the bird responsible for the December reports) showed all the features to secure the identification of a Parrot Crossbill. Photo evidence was taken (see photos 1 and 2) and following a lengthy discussion between the Shropshire rare bird committee members, the bird was accepted as a first for Shropshire this autumn. Despite this acceptance, the two December reports were considered not proven and so the 18th February bird becomes the sole record for the Wyre Forest, and a first confirmed for the wider West Midlands region. To have these 3 species of Crossbill within a few hundred metres of each other on the same date in the UK is a highly unusual occurrence, and a feat that only a tiny fraction of sites can claim.



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