

## Country Notes for February 2017

Once February arrives there can be no doubt that winter is really upon us. Days and nights can be bitterly cold, with the ground frozen for days on end. Of course it can also be mild with sunny days having a hint of spring about them and a little warmth in the sun's rays.

This can be a great month for birdwatching. One of the pleasures and excitements of birdwatching is the mobility of birds. Plants stay where they are and mammals, although they do move from place to place, are generally to be found in the same area, especially in this country.

Without doubt one of my winter favourites is the Waxwing. These elegant birds migrate from the frozen north in the winter but are very eruptive. Some years we see hardly any – and yet other years there can be quite regular sightings, especially down the east coast. If they do appear, they are normally in a flock. Last time I saw these beautiful birds locally it was a few years ago – but there were about twenty of them in the same tree! They love fruit trees such as apple trees and will search out any leftover fruit.

They are incredibly neat birds and although they are essentially light brown they have a patch of white, red and yellow in their wing and an elegant crest which can be raised when alarmed. They have a stunning broad black stripe on their heads and a bright yellow bar at the end of their tails.

At the first real signs of spring they will head back north to Scandinavia and Russia, but in the meantime if you see one you are unlikely to wonder what you are looking at! They really are quite unique in appearance – and consequently one of my favourite birds.

Andrew Snowdon