

Country Notes for January 2019

With Christmas and the New Year behind us, one of the most encouraging thoughts is that the days will now be getting longer and, although the worst of winter is probably still to come, there are already signs of new growth. Snowdrops are appearing above ground, as are some of the daffodils which will herald the real start of the new season. Before we know it there will be the first summer migrants, such as swallows, flying around our village.

Although all this may seem a long way off, some birds considered to be summer migrants may already be seen from time to time. Blackcaps now over-winter in small numbers and may even visit garden bird tables, although most will remain in southern Europe for two or three more months. Chiffchaffs, once strictly summer migrants, may also be seen in some parts of Kent.

However should you happen to see a wagtail in the village with some yellow in its plumage, now or in the months to come, we can be fairly certain that they are not Yellow Wagtails, whatever the name suggests. Yellow Wagtails are not only summer visitors, but they are also birds of marshland and should one be seen in our village it will simply be passing through. Rather oddly, the wagtails which we see in our villages which have some yellow on them are Grey Wagtails. Grey Wagtails enjoy being near running water and I saw only just the other day beside the stream in Hollingbourne. Like all the wagtails they are easy to identify with their long tails and constantly wagging tail.

In fact the only other wagtail you will see in our village is the Pied Wagtail which is white, grey and black and a subspecies of the White Wagtail which is found on the continent. Like the Grey Wagtail it is a year round resident.

Apart from these birds the only other small birds with long tails that you are likely to see are Long Tailed Tits, which are black, white and pink, which makes them fairly distinctive! At this time of year they tend to travel around in small flocks and may even visit the bird table from time to time.

Whenever the weather allows it I hope that you enjoy your winter walks in the beauty of our villages.

A happy new year to you all!

Andrew Snowdon