

Country Notes for October 2021

October is a month of real transition in the countryside. Not only do the leaves start to turn, delighting us with their vivid colours in the run up to the austerity of winter, but the skies above us become alive with the movement of birds as they travel from one place to another. Only a few days ago I stood in the Meadows watching swallows, house martins and sand martins pouring in from the north. They were at all altitudes; some were flying close to the ground in their urgent search for insects to sustain them on their journey to Africa, whilst others were flying very high up. All of them were whirling around trying to catch any food that they could, the call of their long journey ringing in their ears. A couple of days later there were others flying low and in much smaller numbers, perhaps having already travelled from the very north of their range and keen to return to their winter home.

Then yesterday as I was walking Bracken in the Meadows I heard the distinctive 'peep' of redwings flying into our country from the far north of Russia or Scandinavia. These birds do not rely on insects for their food, so the relatively mild nature of a British winter is so much easier to manage than the deep cold of their summer homes. They were actually quite early in the season and there were only few of them. By the time October ends we will have witnessed many more flooding into the country, joined by their bigger cousins, the fieldfares. It will not be long before we see them feasting greedily on berries in our hedgerows and woodlands.

Only two weeks ago I was in the Highlands of Scotland and there I witnessed another unmistakable sign of autumn, as the sounds of the deer rut echoed around the remote glens that I was visiting! It will not be long before they descend from the tops of the mountains to the relative shelter of lower pastures.

The glories of autumn await for all who wish to enjoy them!

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