

## Country Notes for January 2022

One of the joys of a walk in the countryside is that the unexpected might happen, and our New Year's Day walk this year was no exception. It was, as I am sure you can all remember, a very warm day for the time of year. In fact it was the warmest New Year's Day on record with the temperature in our parishes around 16c. It would have been the perfect day for a walk, with coats an unnecessary burden, had it not been for the fact that the wet weather of recent weeks made paths and fields almost bog like!

However, the highlight awaited us all towards the end of the walk, when we encountered a silent predator flying low over the hedges in search of prey. Its flight was silent as it coursed up and down one hedge in particular, hoping that it might find a small mammal for its supper. It was pure cream in colour, with wide wings, enabling sudden changes of direction when required. So intent was it on its search that it seemed almost oblivious to us, as we stood not very far away.

It was, of course, a barn owl and the first time that I had ever seen one in Hollingbourne. I had seen one in Hucking a few years previously but I was very excited to find one so close to home. Little owls and tawny owls are not uncommon in our parishes, but a barn owl certainly is! It would be lovely to think that this owl might find a mate and settle down in Hollingbourne, to delight us in years to come. However, realistically, this lone bird was probably a visitor from the continent and when spring approaches it will mostly likely return from whence it came.

What a wonderful New Years Day gift this very welcome visitor was!

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