

Country Notes for January 2026

Janus, the god whom January is named after, is depicted looking both forwards and backwards, and it is good as we enter the new year to do both. The weather in 2025 certainly put us through it. Although there was very little snow in the winter, spring delivered a torrent of rain, which was then followed by a very dry summer resulting in a hosepipe ban. This certainly had an impact on our flora and fauna. Butterflies started off well with good numbers of spring butterflies such as brimstones and orange tips, and then the rains arrived and it looked as if we would see very few butterflies, which is what happened for a while. However, the long dry spell in summer proved to be just what the butterflies needed. There were especially large numbers of commas, meadow browns and gatekeepers and many others did well too. My lavenders in the garden were seething with white butterflies at one point, so much so that I videoed the spectacle! The beautiful jersey tiger moths were also a feature yet again and I saw good numbers of the day flying hummingbird hawk moths in my garden.

Birds of particular note during the year included nightingales, with one patch of woodland in our villages holding at least nine singing males. It was truly astonishing to hear so many singing together when the species as a whole has been doing so badly in recent years. I also heard a cuckoo for the first time in years. Earlier in the year a barn owl had graced the fields in another part of our villages, much to the delight of those who witnessed it!

Red kite numbers continued to increase and I am sure that it will not be long before we have them breeding in our area. On the down side there were far fewer swallows and house martins than in the past, although there were the usual large gatherings of them on the Meadows, together with sand martins, at autumn migration time.

As we begin the new year there are good numbers of redwings from the north enjoying the large berry harvest this winter and they will, we hope, eventually be joined by fieldfares and perhaps even a few waxwings. Let's hope that the weather this year will be rather more predictable so that our flora and fauna is not thrown off balance once again.

A very happy new year to you all as you enjoy our beautiful countryside!

Andrew G Snowdon