

Country Notes for January 2015

I imagine that many of us will have been out and about over the Christmas and New Year period for a walk through the village to work off all that food and drink! I wonder what you noticed in particular as you did so. You cannot have failed to notice the downs, the fields, the hedgerows and the woods. However, in a village like Hollingbourne, water can easily be overlooked - but of course we do have the River Bourne and several ponds and stretches of open water.

Within these areas of water there will be the inevitable frogs and newts, but as interesting as they are, they are often very difficult to see without close examination. The birdlife however is much easier to see as you walk past. Moorhens and coots are certainly always possible. The coot is the easiest to identify. Apart from its blue black colouration the only other distinguishing feature is the white surrounding its beak. Moorhens look fairly similar but have a yellow and red beak and a small amount of white on the wing, as well as two quite large white tail flashes.

The most likely duck to see is the mallard. The female is largely brown with a blue wing flash but the male is much more colourful, with its green head and neck and white neck ring.

Grey herons may also be seen, often flying over, with their steel grey plumage and their sharp bark like call, long legs and beak. At this time of the year it has also been possible in recent years to see little egrets flying overhead and using our open water in the village. These are really easy to spot as they are pure white and look like small herons, also with long legs and beaks. Until fairly recently these birds were a rarity in this country but have quickly become a familiar sight in wetland and sea areas.

Finally there is the kingfisher, with its vibrant blue plumage complimented by patches of red. Their sharp call is often made as they call whilst flying in a fast and straight line from one perch to another.

It is certainly worth looking out for some of these as you explore the winter beauty of Hollingbourne this January.

A Happy New Year to you all!

Andrew Snowdon