

Country Notes for February 2016

After the mildest December for decades and an unusually warm start to January, I am writing this on a morning in mid-January when Hollingbourne sits under the first dusting of snow of the winter. So far this winter we have frequently had torrential rain and strong winds, and now we have a light layer of snow sitting on the geraniums and daffodils that are all in flower in our gardens! Temperatures are hovering around zero and ice sits on the water in places.

Surprisingly, despite the very early showing of daffodils, the snowdrops seem to be right on target and there should be a wonderful display of them to welcome in February. The ones in my garden are generally *Galanthus nivalis*, medium in size and probably the most commonly seen of all them. There are plenty of others however, including *Galanthus elwesii*, one of the earlier ones, and *Galanthus flore pleno* which has double flowers. There are also some much larger ones and even some that flower in the autumn!

Perhaps due to the mild weather, one of the sights of this winter so far have been the number of Winter Moths in evidence. The other day I returned home to find one on my front door. The males range in colour from grey through to brown and like most moths rest with their forewings visible and spread. The females are flightless and virtually wingless. They are found throughout Europe and have recently colonised North America where they are considered to be a pest. It seems odd to see moths flying around at this time of year, perhaps in the lights of our cars as we drive along - but they are a regular feature of our winters, cold or mild.

What perhaps has been less common is the number of reports of butterflies on warmer days - and even some over wintering swallows in Norfolk!

I wonder what the last part of winter has in store for us!

Andrew Snowdon