

Country Notes for December 2016

As we move into December and the final month of the year it can all seem rather dull and gloomy. The shortest day, which is 21st December, is not far away and many of us are up and out in the mornings before it is light. The thought of Christmas with all its festivities and merry making is certainly cheering on a gloomy day, and a log fire and lots to eat and drink can be a very welcome relief from cold and damp days outside.

I imagine that many of you will have been Christmas shopping before you read this article and hopefully you visited the Hollingbourne Christmas Market to stock up with some useful presents. Food shopping will also feature as we approach the big day, ensuring that the festivities of Christmas are as good as can be. The wildlife of our village also has to deal with the shorter days and it will often be a challenge for our birds and mammals to find enough to keep them going in the few short hours available. As we walk through the lingering gloom of an early December evening we will notice that the foxes have become noisier as their breeding season begins. The trees have lost the very last of their leaves, blown off by the winds which gather so much more frequently at this time of the year. In the hedgerows holly and ivy berries may be seen, providing welcome food for the birds and decoration for our Christmas homes. On our two village greens the Christmas Trees will shine brightly to remind us of the season.

Deep in the hedgerows and at the base of our woodland trees orange peel fungus appears on dead wood, looking just as if the peel of an orange had been discarded by a passing hiker. Birds, such as goldfinches and long tailed tits, which in the summer travelled around on their own or in pairs, are now to be seen in groups as they forage for whatever treats they can discover. Chaffinches are also to be found in groups, often searching among beech mast. Just occasionally you might be lucky enough to see a brambling among them, similar to a chaffinch but more orange than pink. In our gardens a well stocked bird table will be a welcome Christmas treat for the birds and a joy to watch for those kind enough to provide the feast.

Christmas is a time of gathering, eating and ensuring a full larder – and not just for us humans!

A very merry Christmas to you all!

Andrew Snowdon