

Country Notes for January 2017

There cannot be many of us, as we move into a new year, who are not wondering what the weather will have in store for us over the next month or so. Will it be mild and wet – or will the wind turn to the east and bring frost and snow from the continent? Should the weather decide to bring to life those Christmassy scenes on our recently discarded Christmas cards there is no doubt that for a while at least we will be enjoying seeing our village transformed by its white icy covering of snow. The trees will change shape and form as the snow falls on branches and twigs, and the ground will lose definition as the wind-blown snow eradicates all unevenness to create a smooth carpet of glittering beauty.

Snow can bring us opportunities to encounter animals and birds we would otherwise miss as they leave their footprints in the snow. It suddenly becomes much easier to see if a fox or badger has been nearby. Mice, voles and shrews leave their dainty footprints until the snow begins to melt under the thin sunlight of the all too brief day. Birds leave their prints on the ground and the trees and bushes, sometimes knocking showers of snow off the branches as they move off or land. All of these are tell-tale signs of the vast amount of wildlife that surrounds us in our fields, woods and gardens, so easily passing unnoticed in the summer when leafy growth covers everything.

Many of these creatures will be desperately searching for food at this time of the year and all of their activity will probably be out of desperation to find enough nourishment to keep out the cold. It is easy enough to help the birds by keeping our bird tables stocked up with seeds or nuts but perhaps harder to help mammals out in our fields and woods.

Winter can be very beautiful if you have a nice warm home to retreat to – but it is perhaps not so much fun if you are a small creature struggling to survive a night of temperatures in minus figures.

Miraculously however, when spring eventually arrives, many will have found a way to keep going and they will be ready to enjoy the balmy days ahead.

A very happy new year to you all!

Andrew Snowdon