

Country Notes for September 2017

September is the month when we eventually shift from summer into autumn, which this year begins on 22nd September. September can often be a very warm and 'summery' month but the days are starting to draw in and there is often dew on the grass in the early mornings. The harvest is well underway - traditionally started at Lammas Tide on 1st August when the church bells would be rung to signal the start of harvest, to be rung again amidst much celebration when the harvest was all in later this month.

September is also the month when life returns to normal after the holiday season. As I write this in mid-August I have just come in from a wet, windy and rather cold day on the island of Guernsey. Walking along the cliff path in the south of the island yesterday with Bracken and his friend Bonnie it was interesting to reflect on the differences in these wonderfully varied British Isles. On recent walks in Hollingbourne one of the real treats has been to pick a few blackberries from the hedgerows. This year they seem wonderfully juicy! However on Guernsey there are very few ripe blackberries, perhaps owing to the exposed conditions on a small island in the middle of the English Channel, even though winters are so much milder. These mild conditions mean that plants grow on Guernsey which would have no chance surviving a Kentish winter. Many plants considered to be Mediterranean can survive on an island where frost and snow are a rarity, and if they do arrive, seldom last for long. Palm trees abound and delicate succulents grow on cliff sides where the wind makes frost almost unknown. Butterflies and birds are virtually the same as in Kent but you are much more likely to see butterflies on a sunny winters' day feeding on the many flowers in bloom!

Soon I shall be off to the Highlands of Scotland where the high peaks are officially classified as arctic tundra! Here small plants hug the ground to keep out of mighty winds, which together with snow and frost can occur in any month of the year!

What a difference from Hollingbourne, where the pastoral landscape and gently rolling downs support rich pastures and wide variety of wildlife and plants.

I wonder how many countries can offer such a variety and such varied interest for the countryman. Let's hope that we all enjoy the last few weeks of summer, and when autumn arrives that we are able to enjoy a benign and colourful season of slowly colouring leaves with the reassuring smell of wood smoke as we wander the paths and fields of our beautiful village, snug in the heartland of Kent.

Andrew Snowdon