

Country Notes for November 2017

As autumn slips gently into November and the clocks go back there can be no doubt that summer has long gone and winter is not far away. In many ways this can be a sad time, as we ponder on what the coming winter will hold for us. However a walk in the Kent countryside will soon demonstrate that there is still a lot to be seen and enjoyed. The summer migrant birds have long gone, but they have now been replaced by redwings and fieldfares from more northerly countries. These beautiful birds will be with us until the lengthening days of spring call them to return north.

The leaves are now falling from the trees in earnest and one of the delights they reveal is the sight of old man's beard. What we see at this time of the year are the seed heads. The less conspicuous small white flowers were to be seen in August and September, but there is no doubt that their true glory is the wonderful seed heads entwining our trees and hedgerows. Old man's beard is a member of the clematis family and it climbs in exactly the same way as the clematis varieties in our gardens, which can flower from early spring until mid-autumn. Like the garden varieties of clematis their stems can become quite woody over the years. Old man's beard can also reach heights of 40 feet and more provided it gets enough support.

Surprisingly all the clematis family are also members of the buttercup family, although I think that any likeness is very hard to spot in reality!

Their French name is 'herbe aux gueux' which means 'beggars' or 'rascals herb', which is a reference to the fact that their sap was used to irritate the skin of beggars so that passers by would feel sorry for them and give them some money!

We certainly have nothing to feel sorry about as we observe the wonderful displays of old man's beard in our countryside this November!

Andrew Snowdon