

## Country Notes for December 2017

‘On the first day of Christmas my true love sent to me  
a partridge in a pear tree’.

These are lines from one of the most popular Christmas carols - as I'm sure you don't need to be told! I'm certain that we will all hear it sung or played in one form or another many times over the Christmas period. In fact these lines really do not make any sense at all, as the last place you might expect to see a partridge would be in a tree - let alone a pear tree! These are ground birds. They nest and live on the ground and are not particularly strong on the wing.

A few weeks ago Bracken and I were walking on the downs above the village when we disturbed several partridge, exhibiting the chestnut coloured tail that clearly defined them as grey partridge. These are our native partridge and are few and far between these days - so it was especially good to see them. A group, such as we saw, is referred to as a covey.

The more common partridge is the red legged partridge or french partridge. This is an introduced species and has fared much better than the grey partridge, probably owing to the fact that it is bred as a game bird. It is identified by the heavy striping on its sides, a white lower face and - of course - red legs! It is altogether a more colourful and striking bird than its scarcer counterpart.

Both species of partridge often leave it until the last moment as you approach them, which makes them relatively easy to spot and identify.

I'm sure that many of you will be out and about over the Christmas period, perhaps for a Boxing Day walk. Whatever you see on your walks I wish you a very happy Christmas!

Andrew Snowdon