

Country Notes for March 2018

One of my many favourite walks to enjoy with Bracken in our villages is to go to the top of Hollingbourne Hill and take one of the many delightful tracks through the Hucking Estate. The combination of woodland, woodland rides and open fields means that there is always such a variety of wildlife and plant life to see. Just yesterday, as we battled through a sudden, brief snowstorm, Bracken came to a complete halt and it was clear that he was watching something with great interest. I, too, stopped in my tracks as a fox with his beautiful chestnut coat cautiously crossed our path. Not a favourite of us chicken keepers - but impressive to look at nonetheless.

The woodland holds a rich variety of birds, including great spotted woodpeckers, nuthatches, several varieties of tit and, at this time of the year, flocks of finches foraging for food. In more open areas buzzards, kestrels and sparrowhawks may be seen hunting for their unsuspecting prey. The close proximity of the sea means that many varieties of gulls fly overhead, including the increasingly frequent Mediterranean gull.

In March many plants are starting to stir - and how good it is to see banks of the creamy-yellow primroses braving the weather, which can so easily revert from a brief look forward to spring to the full force of winter. If sheep are in the fields there will be lambs to see this month — and what can be more encouraging to see than lambs gambolling in the fields while looking at the first primroses!

Whether it is still wintry or spring-like there can be no better time to get out and enjoy the glories of our beautiful countryside. Who could not come back full of optimism and hope as the door to spring begins to open!

Andrew Snowdon