

## Country Notes for October 2018

One of the great pleasures of October in Kent has to be gathering sweet chestnuts whilst out in the woods or wandering along our pathways and lanes. Collecting them and roasting them on an open fire or wood burning stove in the cosy comfort of our homes lifts the spirits as the days shorten and the temperatures drop. What a lovely way to spend an autumn evening! There is no better places for this than Kent, with its abundance of sweet chestnut trees.

The sweet chestnut is not a native plant to these shores. They originate from the southern Mediterranean and North Africa. However they have colonised vast tracts of Kent where they were, and still are, planted for coppicing to make fence poles, fencing and for use in various forms of carpentry. In many places the trees are treated as a crop, to be harvested every few year by being cut close to the ground and then allowed to sprout long thin poles upwards for a few years.

Chestnut trees are wonderful for wildlife. The flowers, which appear in spring, are a good source of nectar for bees and other insects and the nuts are also enjoyed by numerous animals. The nuts come wrapped in prickly shells, which often split as they fall to the ground. Collecting them can sometimes be a rather uncomfortable experience for the hands! Those trees which are coppiced tend not to produce many nuts as they only start to appear when the trees are at least twenty years old.

In summer the trees are easy to identify by their long toothed leaves. Trees which are left to grow have been known to live for up to seven hundred years! The Kent landscape would be all the poorer without them!

Enjoy your autumn foraging!

Andrew Snowdon