

Country Notes for February 2019

Although it is never very tempting to take a walk after dark at this time of the year, there are compensations. With a cold wind and the promise of rain or snow in the air it can seem much more enticing to stay huddled in the warmth of our homes in the bleaker days of February. However there is much to be seen and heard if you do. For the last couple of months I have regularly heard the 'twit twoo' of Tawny Owls as I have been out walking with Bracken. Sometimes these have also been joined by the rising 'keek' of a Little Owl, probably the commonest of the owls in our villages.

The Tawny Owl is medium sized, with plumage in various hues of brown. The Little Owl is considerably smaller - so much so that its eyes really do seem out of proportion with the rest of its body! They are more often heard than seen, although it is possible to see both as the light fails at the end of the day. Little Owls can also occasionally be seen in broad daylight.

These are the two owls most likely to be seen in our villages. To my delight however they have been joined in recent months by regular sightings of a Barn Owl. This beautiful bird is often described as 'crepuscular', meaning that it is to be seen as dusk falls. This is exactly when I have had all my sightings. It has found an open clearing in our villages where there are trees nearby, but enough open ground for it to hunt in. At first sight, in the failing light, Barn Owls can appear to be totally white. This is actually not the case, as they are various shades of cream and very light brown. Their flight is absolutely silent, giving them an advantage over their prey. I suspect this bird may be over-wintering, but wouldn't it be wonderful if it found a mate and set up home in our villages!

Here's hoping!

Andrew Snowdon