

Country Notes for February 2020

February can often be the bleakest and cruellest month of the year. Some years temperatures fail to rise above zero for days on end and snowfall can be a regular event. On such days it can seem easiest to stay at home by a warm fire and survey the world from behind a window. However a brisk walk will keep the worst of the cold at bay, and there is still much to see in the countryside.

On such days it might seem advisable to keep moving and not linger too long in any one spot. However, if you stop for a while on the leeward side of a hedge, shielding yourself from the icy blast of the wind, it can be several degrees warmer. In such a place one gets the opportunity to observe, if somewhat briefly, what nature is up to round about us.

Jack Hargreaves, the TV broadcaster and countryman, once said that if you stay reasonably still for an hour you will see something you have never seen before, or see something do something you have never seen it do before. Wise words! In the depths of February staying still for an hour might be rather a tall order, but even if you stop for just a few minutes there will be rewards to be had.

Perhaps you might see a kestrel, unaware of your presence and searching in an open space nearby for its prey. On a rare warm day you might even see an early butterfly; perhaps a small tortoiseshell or peacock. At the base of the hedge there may be the first primroses tucked away for shelter, or perhaps a snowdrop carelessly dropped by a passing bird. Within the hedge there may be catkins, and if the sun chooses to show itself, even briefly, you might be greeted by the sound of a robin or blackbird preparing for the new season.

The countryside is never dull and it is there for us all to enjoy - even in the depths of the winter.

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