

Country Notes for March 2020

As I sit in my cottage writing these Country Notes, with Storm Ciara battering the village outside, it might seem very tempting to light a fire and stay indoors for the day. However, I have just come back from a walk with Bracken to the Meadows Trust and taking my own advice from Country Notes last month I tried, as much as possible, to walk on the leeward side of the hedges. This made my walk much easier! As I did so I noticed that the newest visitors to the area were still standing in the cattle field adjoining the trust.

Not so long ago the appearance of little egrets would have attracted birdwatchers from far and wide. Now, however, they are a regular sight in most parts of the country and regular breeders too. For the past few weeks there have been three, flying in and around the trust land, and what a pleasure they are to see. They look like small herons, but are pure white with tell-tale dark legs and yellow feet. The bill is black and slender.

When I first saw these birds, I rather hoped that, as they were in a field with cattle, they would turn out to be cattle egrets. However, cattle egrets are slightly smaller and have yellow on their bills. They too have recently started to colonise our country but they are still quite a rare sight and breeding numbers are very limited. Our visitors are definitely little egrets!

They are not the first little egrets to visit our village, visiting other ponds in the area from time to time. However, they are the first to my knowledge that have stayed so long in one place. I imagine that our wet winter has made open fields seem more appealing, as they normally favour marshland.

I doubt that they will stay to breed – but they are welcome visitors for as long as they stay!

Andrew G Snowdon