

A year in Bugbrooke.

2010 has been described as an unusual year as for the first time in many years, it was one of four seasons. It started cold and snowy but this meant that hibernating animals and insects were able to do so without waking and looking for food that was difficult to find. Consequently there was a better than average survival rate so that there was a good breeding season later on. The late spring did not delay the migrating House Martins, Swallows and Swifts from returning. In fact they arrived rather earlier than normal and also left early too. However the late spring did bring a wonderful display of wild flowers, as they all flowered together. Charity Meadow was amazing. Butterflies seem to have been more prolific and we counted 18 different species in Bugbrooke, but the cool summer did prevent the migratory butterflies such as the Painted Lady from arriving. Painted Ladies have become regular visitors in late summer and we do rather expect to see them, but this is a relevantly recent phenomenon as they were considered to be fairly rare until the 1990s. Autumn brought an abundance of hedgerow berries as a result of the magnificent flowering in the spring, and the leaves on the trees were slow to fall giving a marvellous display. Winter came early with the coldest December since records began in some places, and Redwings could be seen feeding on the hawthorn berries and Blackbirds taking advantage of garden berries on cotoneaster and pyracantha. Birds which normally keep away from feeders such as Reed Buntings came into the garden to join the more familiar birds at the bird table.

By February we should be seeing the first signs of spring again. In the churchyard, look out for snowdrops, and the raucous courting and nest-building of the Rooks and Jackdaws in the trees above. If we should have snow, it is a good time to look for tracks of wild mammals, such as foxes, deer and rabbits and when a thaw starts to reveal the grass, Blackbirds quickly start to rummage around to find small invertebrates to eat.

Blackbirds are one of the first birds to be heard proclaiming its territory in preparation for the breeding season, but listen too for the hammering of the Great Spotted Woodpecker. These are fairly common in Bugbrooke, and should be heard often. 2010 was a late and fairly poor season for frogspawn, but normally throughout February there should be a great deal of frog activity in ponds. On fine days, hibernating butterflies such as the Peacock butterfly and Small Tortoiseshell butterfly may be seen, as well as the bright yellow Brimstone butterfly. Queen bumblebees can be seen even on cooler days so long as there is some promise of fine weather. These insects are looking out for flowering plants to feed upon, such as Hazel catkins, Sweet Violet and Coltsfoot, all of which are common in the village.

When you receive this edition of LINK, the Bugbrooke Birdwatch will have happened on the last weekend of January, but if you would like to take part it is not too late, as you have up to the 8th February to do it. Simply watch for 1 hour and count the greatest number you see **at one time** of each species. Do not count how many birds you see in the hour, as they may be birds that have returned to your garden. You would expect to see 1, 2 or 3 at a time, although some species do come in greater numbers. Let me have your results by 12th February telling me your name, address and where in the village you watched. If you have an e-mail address, that would be useful for me to send you the results.

Recent sightings A Little Egret has been seen on the Nene Way between Nether Heyford and Flore. Little Egrets are of the Heron family and have been steadily moving into Britain over the last 20 years. They are to be found on watersides throughout southern and eastern England.