



Bristol Naturalists' Society

Registered Charity No. 235494

Wildlife News: Week 49 – December 09th 2007

Weather.

Wet and warm and stormy. Average temperature was 12.3C, compared with the recent average for the week of 9.1C. Annual year to date is 15.0C, and last twelve months still 14.6C, but it has ceased falling as this week was warmer than the same week last year. The winds were from the west, and frequently strong. Low pressure systems zipped across the Atlantic in rapid succession.

57mm of rain fell, beating the 56mm of the previous week, to make this the third wettest week of the year, and we have now had 25% more rain in December, at 110mm, than normal for the whole month. The wettest December ever was 1965 with 220mm.

The rainfall to date, and for the last twelve months is 1068 mm, 190mm above average. In 2000 we had 1250mm, the third wettest year since 1853.

Plants.

Leaves are off all the trees, even the Turkey Oaks and Hazels, and most Elder have lost all their leaves, whereas usually they cling on to the end ones until the new buds break. But there is still an exceptional number of species in flower. I found 29 species in flower on the Downs this week, the average for the week being 19. Very surprisingly there were several new ones- not spring plants, but autumn plants having a second go, stimulated by the warmth. They included Oxford Ragwort, Golden Rod, Ox-eye Daisy and most surprisingly Thyme. Most of these were on the Suspension Bridge garden, and Rock Rose and Scabius were out there as well. Creeping Buttercup, Clary, Black Horehound, Fennel, Feverfew and Pellitory are still hanging on in flower.

Some Daffodils were out in flower in front of Clifton Hill House, garden plants obviously, and probably an early flowering variety, but still surprising. Winter Heliotrope I have at last found in flower and the leaves of Lords and Ladies are also through. Some Cow Parsley plants are well developed.

Berries.

Food is vanishing quite fast. The Wood Pigeons have taken the last of the Bay berries, Yew berries have all been stripped, and Ivy is beginning to be taken as it ripens. There is still Hawthorn and Hips and Pyracantha and a little Rowan. Tree Cotoneaster berries are still thick and bright, but they are usually the last to go. There is little Holly left. One measure of this is the number of birds taking food from gardens, and that is soaring upwards in my garden, and the amount of food put out is rising fast. But it is still very early winter, even if the days are short, and the toughest times may well lie ahead.

BTO Atlas.

This continues to go well. Nationally over 6 million birds have been recorded of 312 species, and 5800 tetrads surveyed. Locally of the 400 local tetrads we intend to cover 272 are already booked, and at least 121 have received their first visit.

The purpose of the Atlas is to describe national distribution and density and to compare it with the Winter Atlas of 1980 and the breeding Atlas of 1990. All records are valuable, and to find out how to help if you are not yet involved go to www.birdatlas.net and follow instructions.

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