



Bristol Naturalists' Society

Registered Charity No. 235494

Wildlife News: Week 52 – December 31st 2007

Weather

A warmer week, average 9.6C, but with one frost night. Low pressure and westerly winds were dominant. Year to date has fallen to 14.5C exactly, just 0.1C below last year. This was the year to date temperature on August 3rd, an early date compared with Aug 17th the date in 2006 when the average temperature for the year was reached, and reflecting the fact that this exceptional year was dominated by the wonderful month of April. December temperature at 8.2C was a fraction warmer than the long term average of 8.0C and cooler than last year.

A wet week, with 39mm of rain falling, mostly on the night of the 25th. The monthly total reached 149mm, 71% above the long term average of 87mm, and making December the third wettest month in the year after May (163mm) and July (153mm), and making it the 14th equal wettest December since 1853, but below the Decembers of 1992, 1993 and 1999. The annual total reached 1107mm, making it one of fifteen years since 1853 to top the 1100mm mark. The ten year average annual rainfall reached the 1000mm mark, last reached in 1884, and the thirty year average reached 946mm, the highest since 1853.

Spring.

I have a report of Hazel catkins extended from Montpelier, and found them myself at Hanham Lock, and the evergreen garden shrub *Garrya elliptica*, whose catkins have been steadily elongating, has finally opened in the Mall gardens in Clifton. However other signs of spring have largely been put on hold. I have not heard a Song Thrush singing, and only occasional bursts from Great Tits, though Robin song is reaching a new crescendo. There are no signs of Snowdrops yet, and I looked for Green Hellebore in Leigh Woods and found no signs. As December temperature was normal the advent of spring will depend upon the weather in January.

Survivors.

22 Species were in flower on the Downs on the new year count, as against 24 last year, and an average of 17 over the past eight years. There is a rough relationship between the temperature in the last four months of the year and the number of species, but what is more surprising is that in the past eight years no fewer than 40 species have been in flower, but only four have been in flower every year. This year there were five new species to add to the list, including Golden Rod and Nipplewort. Of the 40 species 17 have only been seen once. The conclusion must be that there is a substantial random element to whether a species survives or not, and that the number of species that could survive is substantial. 40 species is 20% of all the species monitored on the Downs.

Atlas

Nationally the first two months have seen 10million birds counted, and 9591 tetrads surveyed that have put their results in on line. Locally 20% of the surveys are being done on paper. Of those doing them on line, 80% had done their first surveys at the most recent count.

New year.

A happy new year to all my readers. Please keep your eyes alert to the onset of spring, especially the first frogspawn in your pond (last year the first was January 12th) and let me know when plants first come into flower. We are unlikely to see an April like that in 2007 in many a long year, but to monitor the changing climate we need accurate information.

Richard Bland
richardbland@blueyonder.co.uk