



Bristol Naturalists' Society

Registered Charity No. 235494

Wildlife News: Week 05 – February 05th 2008

Weather in January.

In the end the January average was 9.81C, warmer than 2007, and the same as 1990. There have been seven warmer Januaries since 1881, and three with the same temperature. The warmest ever was 12.5C in 1915, the next 10.4C in 1921. The long term average since 1881 is 7.3C, but the range of January temperatures is the largest for any month at 12.4C. The January climate, ie the 30 year average, is 7.6C. The 30 year maximum came in 1939 at 8.0C, and the minimum was in 1968 at 6.8C. The twenty year average is 8.2C and the ten year 8.4C. There were just three frost nights.

The average year to date has now fallen to 9.5C, and the twelve month average is unchanged at 14.56.. Rainfall total for January was 164mm, just below the 175mm record set in 1995, and that makes it the fourth wettest January since 1853. It was double the average which is 84mm. The January rainfall climate, the 30 year average, is 95mm, close to its 2000 peak. The previous peak was in 1941, and before that in 1890 at a lower level. Troughs were 1909 at 65mm and 1969 at 77mm. Both the twenty and ten year averages are very similar.

In sum, we are at the top of a roughly sixty year rainfall cycle, and recovering from a long down swing in the temperature cycle.

Spring.

The Purple Plum, a common street tree, and its close relative the shrubby Cherry Plum that is widespread in hedges, have both come into bloom. Cherry Plum is often mistaken for Blackthorn which it closely resembles, but usually the leaves of Cherry Plum are out at the same time as the flowers, but not this year. I have frogspawn in my pond, the earliest I have recorded, and I have reports from two other gardens. Please send me all first frogspawn dates, and counts of maximum numbers in your pond. Yew has also come into flower this week, the earliest record I have and 18 days ahead of last year. Please keep your eyes open for the successive changes and let me know of first dates in your area. So far events this spring, though different from last year, are very much in line with last year, and, having started colder, this year is now just warmer than last.

National Nest Box week

The BTO's annual nest box week starts Feb 14th. Many people registered their nest boxes with the BTO last year, and this helped give a national picture of breeding dates and success for common species. Birds are already visiting sites, so make sure your nest boxes are clean, buy new ones, and register them with the BTO. Go to WWW.bto.org and follow the links. The usual advice is that if you have three boxes one will be used.

Atlas

Improved weather has enabled many people to get out again and do their second counts. Locally 197 tetrads (of 400) have had their first winter survey submitted online, and 74 have had their second. There are about 60 tetrads being done on paper, and some of those results have come in. It is too early to reach any conclusions, but in 15 tetrads for which I have both counts, there are only 15 species that are present in every tetrad. Compared with figures from last year, the numbers of Blue Tits and Great Tits, which had a poor breeding season, are down by 17% and 45% respectively, and Greenfinch, that were affected by a parasitic disease in the autumn of 2006, are down by 65%. In sharp contrast Starlings are up by 217% and House Sparrows by 180, and Blackbird by 100%.

Richard Bland
richardbland@blueyonder.co.uk