



Bristol Naturalists' Society

Registered Charity No. 235494

Wildlife News: Week 11 – March 17th 2008

Weather

A warmer week, but average 10.1C, with a fierce four day storm starting in 9th and continuing to 12th, as a series of small fierce depressions swept across the country. Damage was slight, and the worst rain came later. The year to date remains stubbornly fixed at 9.6C, which, after weeks of being higher than 2007, is now exactly the same. The past twelve months has fallen to 14.5C. A year ago it was 15.3C.

Rainfall totalled 55mm, 33 mm falling overnight on 15th/16th, making that day the second wettest of the year (Jan 11th had 35mm). Days with more than an inch (26mm) of rain are exceptional; there were five in 2007 but only two in 2006. Weeks with more than 50mm are also exceptional; 2004 had three, 2005 two, 2006 four, 2007 five, and 2008 has had three already. We are at the top of the fifty year rainfall cycle at present. As a result total rainfall for 2008 has reached 296mm (110 mm above average for the date), and for the last twelve months 1088mm.

Spring events.

Two Swallows were reported- wisely flying south and a Chiffchaff flitted through my garden, and Wheatears were reported from Chew and Dundry, but otherwise there has been little movement, as birds are deterred by stormy conditions, and also by strong northerly winds. However Ash flower buds have opened, some nine days ahead of the average over the past decade, and three weeks earlier than last year, when Ash behave in a most unusual manner following the exceptional harvest of the previous year (2006). One result was that there was no ash seed last year. New flowers have appeared on Yellow Corydalis after an eight week gap. I was surprised to find a new plant of Hedge Mustard in flower. Old plants from last year had managed to linger on in flower until Feb 11th

It is interesting to look back to the New Year's Day count on the Downs, when there were 23 species in flower. Of those sixteen are still in flower, and have thus effectively over-wintered. The total in flower this week was 32 species, well ahead of the six year average of 22, though below last year's total of 36. Making a calculation of the overall onset of spring by calculating the average date on which events that have occurred this year occurred in past years, and on average, shows that so far this spring is eight days ahead of 2007, 31 days ahead of 2006, seven days ahead of 2005 and 13 days ahead of the average of the past decade.

To look out for this week.

Corn Salad; Charlock; Laurel; Bulbous Buttercup; Forget-me-not; Thale Cress; Hybrid Black Poplar catkins; Hornbeam catkins; Yellow Archangel; Wood Anemone; Bay; Norway Maple.

Richard Bland
richardbland@blueyonder.co.uk