



# Bristol Naturalists' Society

Registered Charity No. 235494

## Wildlife News: Week 13 – March 30<sup>th</sup> 2008

### Weather in March.

The average temperature in March was 9.7C, just below the long term average of 9.9C. It was warmer than February, but, unusually, colder than January- that last happened in 1975. The average for the past thirty years- the normal definition of climate- which peaked at 10.63C in 1949 and reached a nadir in 1987 at 9.61C, rose to 10.23C in 2005, but is now 10.19C. The coldest March ever was 1916 at 6.1C, the hottest 1948 at 14.2C

The average temperature for the year is now 9.63C, and has hardly changed throughout the three months. In January this was a warm temperature, and this year has so far rivalled 2007, but it is now beginning to fall behind. One measure of this is the total accumulated temperature. This year reached a total of 900 degrees 18 days ahead of the last cold Spring, in 2006.

Rainfall in March totalled 118mm, almost double the long term average of 60. There have been 13 wetter Marches since 1853, the wettest 1981 with 163mm. Rainfall for the year is 324mm so far, over 100mm above average for this date.

### The weeks weather

The cold N wind, that brought snow at the end of the previous week gave way to westerlies around low pressure systems, with rather gusty conditions.

### Onset of Spring.

New events this week were Norway Maple in flower, Field Maple and Hornbeam budbreak; Bristol Rock Cress and Thale Cress both in flower. Water Skater arrived on my pond. I have recorded 72 events on the Downs, and their average date in 2008 is day 51, five days earlier than 2007, 13 days earlier than the average of the past decade, and 28 days earlier than the cold spring of 2006.

There were 39 species in flower on the Downs, compared with the average of the last five years of 29.

### Garden birds.

My pair of Blackcaps have stayed around until the very end of March. I usually hear singing at some point, but it has not been warm or sunny enough. They will leave any day for the journey back to Germany. Siskins were a nice surprise this winter. They were with me daily from the start of February to March 13<sup>th</sup>. Garden bird numbers fall off very rapidly in April, as migrants slip back to their breeding places, and residents start to nest. However food should still be put out, because there are only Ivy berries left from the autumn harvest, and insects and other invertebrates can be hard to find. A fat ball offers of the readily assimilated protein, and this can be important as females build up their reserves for egg laying. Each egg can be a surprisingly large proportion of a bird's body weight. Females in many species also bear much of the burden of incubation, leaving little time for feeding, so that the availability of food can be crucial to success. It may be argued that by providing food birds can become too dependent on

humans; the counter is that humans have messed up the natural environment by putting buildings all over it, and putting out a little food is the least they can do as recompense. Birds have been around for 200 million years; they are essentially dinosaurs in modern dress, and are pretty good at survival as they way they have adapted to humanities activities demonstrates.

## **Migrants.**

The cold blustery north winds put a stop to migration, but it will resume rapidly as soon as it gets warmer.

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