



Bristol Naturalists' Society

Registered Charity No. 235494

Wildlife News: Week 15 – April 14th 2008

Weather

Another cool week, average 11.0C, and a very sharp contrast with this time last year when the average was 18.1C! The year to date average is 9.83C, which is the same as it was on February 14th! However 2008, though it is now colder than in 2007 and 2003, is still warmer than it was in 2004, 5 and 6. The year to date figure is falling fast because last April was so warm and is now 14.3C, colder than at any point since July 2006. The root cause of this is a high pressure sitting over Greenland, and directing a bitterly cold NW airstream down across the Atlantic. Though our wind has been westerly, its origin lies by the north pole, and we have had three sharp frosts during the week.

There has been just 17mm of rain, bringing the annual total to 345mm, still over 100 mm above average, and the last twelve months to 1127mm.

Spring Events.

Spring Cinquefoil, which creeps along the ground and suddenly burst out with golden flowers, has just come into flower. The first Oaks have broken their buds, and there was one in Leigh Woods where all the leaves were a striking bright yellow-green. Very unusually this winter all the Fulham Oaks lost all their leaves- they are normally more or less evergreen, and the old leaves usually fall in May or June. It is odd that a warm winter should have led to this. The first Ribwort Plantain have opened, and Ash trees everywhere are in flower, though there is no sign of their leaf buds bursting yet. Last year their flowers failed completely and there was no seed. Field buttercup has come into flower, rather early. Usually the Bulbous Buttercup, which stores starch in its tuber, is the only buttercup in flower for several weeks. Pendulous Sedge, the tall drooping sedge that can be a menace in gardens, has its lovely yellow flowers open, and Ox-eye Daisy is in flower by the Suspension Bridge. All in all there were 56 species in flower on the Downs this Sunday, compared with an average over the past seven years of 46.

Danish Scurvy Grass is now at its peak, turning the central reservation of motorways white for mile after mile, and finding a niche on the edge of many major roads. This month's frosts have led to widespread use of salt, which, because it is salt tolerant, will give it a better chance than usual to dominate its surroundings.

The average date of 82 spring events so far this year is day 60; the same events averaged day 63 last year and day 70 over the past decade, so this spring is still earlier than any other I have recorded.

Tree seedlings are bursting forth- Beech, Ash and Norway Maple have joined the throng of Sycamore seeds that have been up for some time, and I have seen hosts of Field Maple seedlings. Millions of new trees are set every year without any human help.

Bird Migrants

Though the cold northerlies have checked migrant flow, a number of early Swallows have been seen, and a first Whitethroat reported. An Osprey was seen in the Avon Gorge and a Hoopoe in Dyrham Park- this

was an overshoot which occasionally happens. There seem to be very few Blackcap yet, and Willow Warbler passage seems to have halted.

New Flowers To look out for this coming week.

Garlic Mustard, Horse Chestnut, Lilac, Sycamore, Wayfaring Tree, Hawthorn, Bugle, Dames Violet, Meadow Buttercup, Salad Burnet, Holly, Elder, Common Poppy, Ragwort, Laburnum, Beech, Leopards Bane, and Red Campion.

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