

## 2010 International Year of Biodiversity December 2010



*A celebration of life on earth and of the value of biodiversity; the last in our series of nature articles, here there is still plenty on offer in winter ...*

### Winter a Nature Wonderland



River Itchen in Winter

As December gets under way and the run up to Christmas begins, nature brings a new season of wildlife and magical landscapes all of its own.

Birds may have migrated, wildflowers and butterflies disappeared, but winter is by no means a dismal time of year.

Even as the temperatures plummet, and the wind, rain, ice and snow all cause havoc, there are still many reasons to go outdoors and plenty to observe.

Twelve wildlife species to spot this winter in The Worthys:

- 1. Bats**, waking from hibernation some bats may be seen taking a short flight before returning to slumber. See the new bat shelter created from an old pillbox at Worthy Down.
- 2. Birds**, my favourite time of year for birds with so many winter visitors to our gardens, such as brambling, bullfinch, fieldfare, goldfinch, redwing, ..., and of course not forgetting the much-loved red-breasted Christmas robin.
- 3. Common Shrew**, has a pointed snout and tiny eyes, this cute little brown mammal (2-3in long) is active all year, although will mostly spend winter underground.
- 4. Deer**, fallow and roe deer are found in the area; shy animals they mostly live in woodlands, the males (bucks) have antlers (much broader on fallow).
- 5. Fox**, with its new winter red coat and bushy tail (or brush), the fox is a great scavenger of food, found both in the countryside and urban areas.
- 6. Holly & Ivy**, loved by birds and insects, and a favourite Christmas decoration too! Found in hedgerows and wooded areas; the red berries and prickly evergreen leaves of



Fruit of Ivy

holly are unmistakable.

- 7. Mistletoe**, another favourite decoration at Christmas, clearly visible hanging high up on tree branches. See mistletoe on the lime at Avington Park.
- 8. Mute Swan**, this large elegant bird with its orange-reddish bill and wholly white plumage is iconic on the river Itchen, although tends to fly to estuaries in winter.
- 9. Pheasant**, a long-tailed gamebird, popping out from long grass or scrub when you least expect, the male has beautiful iridescent copper-coloured plumage.
- 10. Tawny Owl**, our most common woodland owl, is particularly vocal in winter with a very distinctive "ke-wick" (female) and "hoo-hoo-oooo" (male), and often seen or heard in the garden.
- 11. Trees**, with no more leaves, trees take on a different beauty standing tall on the landscape. Fruit from trees such as Hawthorn, Blackthorn (sloe berry) and Hazel provides a banquet of berries and nuts for birds and animals to feed on in winter.

**12. Water Vole**, this flat nosed, short eared, chestnut-brown, furry creature is a great rummager amongst the vegetation of the river banks. Numbers are growing along the Itchen.

And, although it may seem quieter in winter, there are still plenty of things to do ...

As well as spotting birds and other creatures, you could try identify some of the various trees in the area. Why not keep a record of, or even photograph, what you find, and compare to future years?



Water Vole © HWT

Keeping your birdfeeders topped up will ensure plenty of visitors to the garden. Don't forget that birds need water too, so keep your bird baths topped up and ice-free.

And if the weather is too atrocious, you could build nest boxes ready for the spring.

By joining a local conservation group you can get involved in all sorts of winter activities - improving habitats, learning new skills, and gaining knowledge - through which you will directly help our local biodiversity.

So remember, wildlife needs all our help, especially in long and hard winters!

### Bruce Graham

*Please help WCV create a nature picture of our local parishes by recording your sightings at [www.worthysconservationvolunteers.org.uk/naturewatch](http://www.worthysconservationvolunteers.org.uk/naturewatch)*