



# Odiham Biodiversity Group Newsletter

November 2011

## **Autumn, or second spring?**

A long and peculiar autumn is finally drawing to a close. We don't need the Met Office to tell us that this has been an unusually warm November – the evidence is written in the gardens and countryside all around us.

You may have noticed that many flowers have popped up for a second spring. Dog roses, dandelions and brambles re-flowered along hedgerows, while *Kerria*, *Magnolia* and *Viburnum* bloomed in gardens, all continuing well into the second half of November. The scarcity of rain also meant that wooded areas like Odiham Common were practically devoid of fungi throughout October – the time of year when they are usually at their most abundant.



Newly hatched ducklings on the canal near the castle were another anomaly reported by OBG readers in mid-October (normally expected April–June). There were also unseasonably late sightings of many insect species, including bees, butterflies, moths and dragonflies. Large numbers of ladybirds, of many different species, were observed soaking up warmth together, on sunny walls and fence posts in late October. Normally, ladybirds have entered a dormant state by this time, overwintering in large groups under tree bark, in leaf litter or in outbuildings.

The good news is that the insect bounty means great feeding conditions for bats, prior to their hibernation period. It's also been a great autumn for mice, dormice and voles, due to the abundance of autumn fruits and seeds – the result of the warm spring earlier in the year.

*Photo: a dog rose flowering in Odiham in the last days of October, courtesy Val Gabriel*

## **Wildlife gardening: preparing for winter**

*By Natalie Rogers, Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust*

Winter can be a tough time for local wildlife, especially with the extreme cold and snow that we have experienced in the past few years. There are some simple steps that you can take to ensure wildlife can thrive in your garden, and the good news is, it means there's less tidying to do! Cuttings, fallen leaves and trimmed branches can all provide excellent habitats for local wildlife, so before you rake it all away, why not create a sheltered corner for wildlife in your garden this winter?

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## Protect frogs and newts that visit your pond

Most amphibians leave the pond during the winter and find a terrestrial hibernation site, but some stay in the pond and survive the winter fully submerged. If however, the surface is allowed to freeze completely, there can be a depletion of the oxygen in the water and a build-up of noxious gases. To avoid this happening, place a ball on the pond surface so that a hole is left in the ice in the event of it freezing. If your pond has already frozen over, place a pan of hot water on the surface to gently melt a hole in the ice.

## Feed your local hedgehog

Winter can be a difficult period for mammals, as there is less natural food available. Some mammal species have overcome this problem by hibernating through the winter. The hedgehog hibernation period is from November to March, but is dependent on weather conditions and food availability. You can help the hedgehog by providing a suitable hibernation site in your garden, such as a log pile covered in leaves, in a shady, quiet corner. Also remember to check bonfires for hedgehogs and other wildlife before they are lit.

## Encourage birds to nest and feed in your garden



Our gardens are extremely important for birds, often providing suitable nesting sites and food throughout the winter months. Putting up a nest box, hanging bird feeders and providing bird seed and suet balls are all good ways to encourage birds to your garden. On top of that, certain garden plants are important sources of food in winter. For instance, spindle, fruit trees, holly and bramble are good sources of berries, while clematis, sunflower and teasel are good for seeds, and buddleia, honeysuckle and herbs attract insects for the birds to feed on.

*Photo: Redwing feeding on winter berries, courtesy Caroline French. For more ideas, visit the Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust website at [www.hwt.org.uk](http://www.hwt.org.uk) or contact [Wildline@hwt.org.uk](mailto:Wildline@hwt.org.uk).*



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## Events

### *Christmas Trees for Free (Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust)*

Sat 3 Dec, 10am–2.30pm. Come along and fell your own Scots Pine at Hawley and help us to keep the scrub encroachment in check. Hand tools will be provided and you are welcome to take a fine non-drop tree home with you. Wellies or stout footwear recommended. Park at Hawley Sail Training Area Parking, off the Minley Road (A327), near M3 J4a. For further details contact Keith Blackmore on 01256 381190, mobile 07770 918372. This event may be cancelled in the event of Military Training so please ring in the week before to check that it is to take place. Suggested donation £3.

### *Birds at Fleet Pond (Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust)*

Sun 4 Dec, 10am–12pm. Ruth Cairns will lead you round the Pond pointing out the many different birds. Meet and park in the Pond's Official Car park. For further details, phone Ruth on 01256 326364. Suggested donation £2.

### *Festive Woodland Fun (Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust)*

Mon 19 Dec and Tue 20 Dec, 10am–1pm. Want to spend time learning new skills in beautiful woodland? Make seasonal decorations from the woodland. Come along, light the fire and discover introductory woodland skills. Meet and park near Lord Derby pub, just south of M3 J5. For further details, please contact Adrian Goodhand on 01256 381103. Parents and children welcome. All children must be accompanied by adults. Numbers are limited so booking is essential. Please note there are no toilet facilities in the woodland. Suggested donation £6 per person per day.