

January 2010

Weather wisdom

“Janivier freezes the pot upon the fire”

We have had a very cold January and as the newspaper headline said: -
“There’s Snow Escape from the Wintry Weather”

They have also reported that Britain is facing one of the coldest winters in 100 years.

We have certainly had our share of snow but have not had as much as other parts of the country. Satellite images have shown the whole of the UK blanketed in snow.

This freezing spell of weather has been brought to us by our old friend the Jet Stream. This year we have found ourselves on the cold side of one of its meanderings. This has left us exposed to winds blowing straight from the Arctic, bringing severe frosts and heavy snow.

Driving has been difficult and shortage of road salt & grit nationwide hasn’t helped. Walking on icy pavements has been very tricky. Schools have been closed. Willoughby Children have been having a great time however, sledging, snowballing and building snowmen.

The countryside has looked wonderful. Photographers have been out capturing the wonderful scenery.

A slow thaw began in the middle of January, but it took a while for the snow to go completely because days were short and temperatures remained very low overnight.

The freeze did bring some brightness but overall January has been a dark depressing month.

Nature Notes

Not much to report. There has been no meeting of the Willoughby Society this month as the Village Hall has been closed. A burst pipe in the roof space caused damage to ceiling panels and walls. Repairs are underway.

Out early one morning Mrs Di Weaver came across an excited group of “Twitchers” looking through large telescopes and binoculars. They told her that a Great Grey Shrike had been seen on Russell’s land in Grandborough. An exciting observation as this bird is a rare visitor to the UK. It is like a Thrush in shape, with a stout, sharp hooked bill and amazingly every bit as predatory as a small Falcon. It feeds on large insects, small lizards and rodents. It watches from a perch and drops to the ground to catch its prey. This is brought back up and impaled on a thorn for easy eating.

Bird enthusiasts reported the observation of the Shrike in Grandborough on their web site. It was first seen on 17 January 2010.

Snowdrops are in flower in my garden. A welcome sign that Spring is on its way.



SHRIKE



Icy: Narrow boats are stuck in the frozen canal at Braunston Marina. (mhde-snow-07-01-10-jan09-006)

February 2010

Weather wisdom

“Much February snow
April summer doth show.”

The wintry weather continues with a vengeance. Snow and ice is still causing many problems in our area. On the 19 February the snow began to fall about midday. Large snowflakes fell for much of the afternoon and this continued well into the evening. By the time the snow stopped falling in the Coventry/ Northampton area a 10cm (4 inch) cover was reported.

Britain is on course for its coldest February for 24 years. Colder temperatures are being recorded here than at the Winter Olympics in Vancouver.

Nature Notes

Mad March Hares are boxing early the Flecknoe area.

Buzzards have been seen again.

The Poplar Beetle has been observed in Ryton Woods again after an absence of many years. It is a round beetle, red in colour and is similar to a Ladybird.

The only spring flowers in our gardens at the moment are Snowdrops. They look splendid. The Daffodils are in bud but refuse to open in this cold weather. The Crocuses also are biding their time. When finally this cold winter gives way to warmer weather, all the spring flowers will be in bloom together. It should be quite a show.



The Poplar Beetle



March 2010

Weather Wisdom

‘A dry March and a rainy April makes a beautiful May’

March 2010 was a month of two halves. The first 2 weeks were dry and fine, the second half more changeable weather, with rain arrived culminating in strong winds and snow in the north of the country, which caused much travel disruption. We saw plenty of sun in our area however, which was very welcome.

Nature Notes

The very cold winter and a cold first half of March resulted in a late start to the growth of plants and trees. The Daffodils at last began to flower, several weeks later than in recent years. Also on a positive note the clocks went forward on 28th March. We hope for a lovely spring and summer so we can enjoy the light evenings that are to come.

Many members have been bird spotting this month.

I saw a Yellow Hammer near my bird table. He didn't stay long.



A Red-Legged Partridge was observed in Woolscott Road.

Owls are heard regularly by several members.

A Red Kite was seen at Draycote Water

Apparently we have a strange bird in the Village. Several Villagers report seeing it but no one is quite sure what it is. There have been 3 possible suggestions. A Black Cap. A Reed Warbler. A Willow Warbler. Maybe in April we will know its true identity! Watch this space.

Badgers have been seen in Longdown Lane.

The farmers' fields are full of baby lambs and calves.

April 2010

Weather Wisdom

“April weather, rain and sunshine together” An old Norfolk saying.

The month began rather changeable and cold. We then had a twenty-day period of dry and sunny weather, which was rather nice. The days were generally warm. The nights were cold and we woke up to morning frosts. After our prolonged winter April made a pleasant change.

Nature Notes (rather thin on the ground this month)

Keith Skinner heard the Curlew.

They say the Cuckoo sings in April but he has not been heard in Willoughby yet.

I saw a Stoat in the garden.

Mrs Di McKnight had quite a surprise when a Jackdaw fell down her chimney.

Garden birds are getting that “spring feeling.”

May 2010

Just in case you think summer has come remember: -

“Ne’er cast a clout till May is out
Button to chin till June be in...”

Our forebears were nothing if not pessimistic.

Once again the weather was unpredictable and left us either shivering or sizzling.

Although high pressure was never far away the first half of the month brought us cold northerly winds and overnight temperatures were close to freezing. On May 12 we awoke to an unseasonably frosty morning. In the second half of the month when the high pressure moved slightly, it became very warm indeed. But what was unusual about May was how dry it was. We had very little rain except for the Bank Holiday, which was as usual a washout!

Nature Notes

While driving to Dunchurch I saw a Red Kite hovering over the grassy verges on the A45. My passengers verified my observation as they often see these lovely birds while driving along the M40.

Garden birds are busy nesting and raising young. Territorial pursuits are regularly taking place in my garden.

We have a hedgehog in the garden. Keith noticed him one night by our backdoor. We are very pleased to see him and hope he will stay. The only time I usually see a hedgehog is as a casualty on our busy roads. Bees and butterflies are plentiful at the moment. Orange Tip and Little Blue have been spotted in the village..

The spring blossom on trees and hedgerows has been amazing this year. The same can be said for the spring flowers. They all seem to have come out together and village gardens look wonderful.



June 2010

Weather Wisdom

‘Calm weather in June sets all in tune’

We always hope June will be a fine month and we are very often disappointed. However I am glad to say that June 2010 has proved to be one of the best of recent years. It was sunny, warm and dry. Just what we needed after our bitterly cold winter. Even during the ‘Wimbledon Fortnight’ rain didn’t once stop play!

However, we always have to have some thing to worry about. This month it is the lack of rain. Hosepipe bans are just around the corner.

Nature Notes

Two visitors were seen on our driveway this month. A hedgehog, always a welcome visitor and a toad, who is also very welcome.

Goldfinch, Thrush, Blackbird and Robin have all nested successfully in our garden this month. The Robin and the Blackbird have become very tame. They come to our backdoor for food regularly. They are feeding young and I expect they are finding it difficult catching worms, as the ground is so dry.

A White Throat nested in our garden this month. We had never seen one before and had some difficulty identifying it.

According to our bird books it is one of our most common warblers. It is a summer visitor of open spaces with low bushes and scrub. In September or October they fly back to Africa.

We hope they have a safe journey and return next year.

Three Buzzards seen circling over Hazeldene.

July 2010

Weather Wisdom

A saying from Germany this month.

'What is to thrive in September must be baked in July'.

Weather

The weather this July was rather mixed. Temperatures were close to the seasonal average. Rainfall varied. Rather a lot of rain in the north. Very little rain in the south. There were plenty of showers in Willoughby but the ground is so dry the water doesn't soak in. The water shortage is still a problem countrywide. Rainfall from January to June was just 69% of average. (Met Office figures). Hosepipe bans are in force in some areas, but not here.

Nature Notes

There has been no meeting of the Willoughby Society this month so nature reports are thin on the ground.

Three Green Woodpeckers were seen in the garden at Hazeldene.

We have never seen so many rabbits in the garden. They must be having a good year. The trouble is they do a lot of damage.

August 2010

Weather Wisdom

The Germans have an apt saying for the month of August: -

What is not cooked in August will be spoilt in September.

August weather has been disappointing. Cool, damp, cloudy conditions prevailed. This was definitely not the holiday weather we were looking for.

Nature Notes

No meeting of the Willoughby Society this month so nature notes are rather thin on the ground.

This dramatic headline news was reported in the Daily Telegraph: -

“Rainy August Leads to Conker Shortage”

This reported some worrying news. Willoughby boys will find many conkers have fallen from trees before they are ripe enough to be used in games. If you whack a conker before it is ripe it will crumble to bits!

Article from the Daily Telegraph August 2010

KEEP CALM AND CONKER We interrupt this episode of *Journey into Space* to bring you a broadcast on behalf of the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Following a dry spring and a wet August, the horse-chestnut harvest is reported to be well below average. In the interests of public order, strict rationing is to be introduced from midnight GMT. All horse-chestnut trees are to be put under the authority of Horse Chestnut Precaution (HCP) wardens. Any child found throwing sticks or similar missiles at a tree bearing horse-chestnuts will be subject to a clip round the ear from the friendly neighbourhood bobby. Boys of school age, on production of a length of string with a knot tied in it, will be eligible for the issue of one (1) nut-like seed of the *Aesculus hippocastanum* from Department depots to be set up in church halls and the like. Panic is to be avoided at all costs. God save the Queen.

September 2010

Weather Wisdom

'The summer goes with the Swallows whether they fly away early or late'

The weather this September can best be described as variable, with contrasting weather types. None of them however lasted for very long. It was a changeable month and there was plenty of rain. Temperatures were close to normal and there were some very nice warm days. We also had some cold nights and some of them were frosty. A taste of things to come.

Nature Notes

One sunny evening a fine male Peacock was seen walking down the lane from Woolscott to Willoughby. Where had he come from?

Mrs Betty Oates has a resident Kestrel in her garden. Not good news for her small garden birds.

Buzzards are often seen soaring over Willoughby. I was watching one while gardening but he was soon mobbed by crows and beat a hasty retreat.

Baby Swallows in a barn at Flecknoe are causing one of our members some concern. What will happen to these baby birds when they are fully grown? Most of the adults are migrating now and we like to think these young birds will survive.

A flight of Canada Geese was seen flying over the village.

A family of Green Woodpeckers, two adults and a baby, was seen feeding in a garden in Magdalen Road.

There seems to be an epidemic of Grey Squirrels in the village.



October 2010

Weather Wisdom

“If in October the leaves still hold
The coming winter will be cold”

October has once again given us spectacular displays of autumn colour and if the weather stays kind and conditions quiet the weather men say the leaves could stay on some trees well into November.

The month started wet but this was followed by a spell of Indian Summer weather. We did experience some night frosts towards the end of the month but there was plenty of sunshine by day.

Unfortunately we put the clocks back at the end of the month and British Summer Time ends.

Nature Notes

Linda Belgrove reported seeing a Green Woodpecker.

Green Parakeet seen in Mr Brian Hawkins garden.

Three Swans were observed flying over Willoughby.

A Heron seen on Mr Bert Ogle's garage roof.

Buzzards seen in Willoughby again.

A Jay was seen briefly in my garden.

November 2010

Weather Wisdom

*“If ice in November will bear a duck,
The rest of the winter is slush and muck.”*

The first week in November 2010 was unusually warm. Temperatures were around 15C. It was very pleasant. We began to think this winter was not going to be too bad.

However, a cold north-easterly air stream became established over the country on 24th November and snow spread into Scotland. From then on severe snow spread to all parts of the country. We were lucky in Willoughby to only have a sprinkling of snow on 26th November, but it was so cold.

The overnight temperature on 28th November at The Leys, Woolscott Road Willoughby was –10C.

By the 29th November severe conditions were causing widespread disruption country wide. Schools were closed and there were major delays to road, rail and air traffic. Temperatures were very low by day and night and frosts were very severe.

Remembering last years bad winter it seems we are having more of the same. Once again we are living in “Deep freeze Britain”.

The newspapers say that this is the most significant spell of snow in November since that of late November 1965.

Nature Notes

The birds are coming to our feeders in large numbers during this cold spell. The feeders have to be filled on a daily basis.

The Great Spotted Woodpecker comes to the garden everyday to top up on peanuts.

Long-tail Tits and Kingfisher have also been seen

December 2010

Weather Wisdom

*“When The Robin sings in the bush
Expect the weather to be coarse.
But when the Robin sings in the barn
Then the weather will be warm”*

Our local Robin has definitely been singing in the bush.

The snow showers continue across the country bringing traffic chaos. We are in the grip of an Arctic spell and it will not let go.

We did experience a brief milder spell on 3 December and hoped this was the end of the cold weather. By 6 December the Arctic blast was back again and so starts the second phase of exceptionally cold weather. Moderate snow showers in Willoughby on 16, 17, 18 December. On December 22 at least 15cms of snow fell across the Midlands briefly closing the A45 road until the gritting lorry arrived.

All this snow has caused disruption to Christmas travellers. Not only were roads dangerous, but trains were cancelled and airports closed.

On December 25 the overnight temperature in Willoughby had fallen as low as -14C .

December 26 saw a marked change to milder weather and by December 27 a thaw had set in.

The countryside, covered in frost and snow, has looked amazing. It has been a wonderful time for taking photographs.

The Daily Telegraph (6 January 2011) has reported that this December has been the coldest for nearly 25 years.

Nature Notes

A Bullfinch was spotted in our garden. We don't often see them here. He was obviously looking for food.

A group of Long-tailed tits seen on our bird feeders.

Every evening at around 4pm about 9 wrens fly into the ivy on our garage wall. We watch them from the kitchen window and there is much coming and going for several minutes. They then disappear into the ivy and presumably huddle together to keep warm during these freezing nights

On December 21 2010 a total lunar eclipse took place. This occurs when the sun, earth and moon are almost exactly in line, with the moon and sun on opposite sides of our home planet. The earth casts its shadow on the lunar surface.

December 21 happens to be the shortest day of the year – the Winter Solstice.

