

**January 2008**

Weather-wise January was a wet and warm month. A succession of vigorous depressions swept across the country bringing large amounts of rain and also above average temperatures. Sunshine however was above average.

Early lambs have been kept indoors because of the wet weather

Nature sitings

The snowdrops are looking wonderful and bees have been seen around them. Crocus, daffodils, winter aconites are also putting in an appearance

Pheasants, looking rather splendid, have been seen in village gardens.

Bob O'Donnell disturbed a toad in his garden. The feelings of the toad were not reported.

Buzzards, now a common site flying over Willoughby, have been observed in a hedgerow near Barby.

Doug and Jill Dodds of Station House reported finding a dead Greenfinch in their sheep shed. It had a ring on its leg and out of interest they sent the ring back to the BTO for identification. In due course they received a reply from the BTO stating that the 3-year-old Greenfinch had the ring put on its leg on 12/06/2007 in Market Rasen. It was found dead in the shed on 29/10/2007, so it had travelled approximately 135Km to Willoughby since having the ring put on.

Doug and Jill Dodds also have two swans on water at the back of their property.

Plans are in hand to organise a working party to tidy up Hayward's Lodge.



## February 2008

February has really been a lovely month. Unprecedented quantities of sunshine have been recorded over large parts of England and Wales and I'm glad to say the Midland region was one of those lucky areas. The papers say that temperatures have been up to 16 degrees warmer than average. We have enjoyed cloudless skies during the day and frequent frosty nights. It was a dry February.

People out walking the village lanes could have been forgiven for thinking it was summer rather than mid-February.

### Nature Notes

Joyce Jackson reported seeing a male Brimstone butterfly in her garden on 13<sup>th</sup> February although there had been a frost overnight.

The ducks on the pond are having a whale of a time. Activity is frenetic.

In fact all the garden birds are pairing off and noisily defending their territories.

A Robin is showing great interest in a nest box recently put up in our garden.

It has been observed that frogs in our village pond seem to be looking rather red in colour. We hope that this does not indicate symptoms of a disease that is reducing the frog population in some areas.

A badger was seen walking along the Sawbridge Road.

A walk and litter pick is to be organised round the village as soon as possible. People passing through the village frequently dump litter in the hedgerow and at the side of the road.

A tidy up at Hayward's Lodge has been organised for 16<sup>th</sup> March at 10.30am

Spring blooms early this month and everything is coming into bud. As well as the spring flowers, the Hawthorn and Blackthorn look ready to burst into leaf.

### Earthquake

On Wednesday 27 February 2008 at 00.56 the British Geological Survey recorded an earthquake with a magnitude of 5.2 on the Richter Scale near Market Rasen in Lincolnshire. Many villagers were woken up by the tremor. The report of the event in The Rugby Advertiser is included below.

**Rugby shakes, rattles and rolls in earthquake**

HOUSES in Rugby were shaken to the foundations following Britain's biggest earthquake in 24 years. The quake measured 5.2 magnitude on the Richter Scale and its effects were felt across the country. It was reported to be the most severe in the UK since 1984. Although its epicentre was in Market Rasen, many Advertiser readers rang and emailed us to say that they were woken up to discover their walls moving. Rugby fire crews said they only had one call-out to a shop alarm going off, triggered by the tremors. Warwickshire Police received more than 250 calls - 23 of them being 999 calls. Ian Carr of Cawston emailed us minutes after the earthquake. He said: "I was watching a movie when I heard rumbling and then the whole of my house rocked. "I was sitting on the sofa and it was shaking. It woke my wife from the bed moving so much." ● Did the earth move for you? If so, email us your experiences to [philip.hibble@rugbyadvertiser.co.uk](mailto:philip.hibble@rugbyadvertiser.co.uk)

## March 2008

### Weather

Low pressure has dominated the weather this month and the winds have been mostly from the north and very cold. The Easter weekend was very disappointing weather wise - cold, windy, and rather wintry.

The old country saying 'March winds April showers bring forth May flowers' has gone right out of the window this year as the spring flowers are appearing in many parts of the country.

### Nature Sightings

Rather thin on the ground this month.

Betty and Norman Oates reported seeing a large Heron in their back garden.

The tidy up in Hayward's Lodge was cancelled this month because of the weather. Another date will be arranged as soon as possible.

## April 2008

### Weather

The month began rather wet and showery and on the 5<sup>th</sup> April there was a drop in temperature and much colder conditions prevailed. On Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> we awoke to find a white landscape. There had been quite a substantial fall of snow. It obviously wasn't going to be with us long as the morning was sunny with a wonderful blue sky and a thaw soon set in. While the snow lasted Willoughby looked beautiful, and those members who went to Haywood's Lodge to do a spring tidy up that morning, saw the Nature Reserve at its best. If only we had taken cameras with us. The slow thaw of the snow dripping from trees and bushes against the bright blue sky and spring sunshine

The rest of the month gave us some pleasant days as well as periods of rain and showers.

### Nature Notes

The cuckoo was heard on April 8<sup>th</sup> It was singing somewhere near the village pond.

Long tailed tits, chiffchaffs, and goldfinches were observed.

Three Yellow Hammers were spotted.

There was also a report of a Heron being chased by a cow!

There was a Willoughby Spring Clean on 5 & 6 April ( see newspaper cutting) when about ten members of the Willoughby Society set out to clean up our village. I must add that some members were lucky enough to get their picture in the local paper. There were others, however, working VERY hard in other areas of the village, who were NOT so lucky!

We intend to do this again at regular intervals and keep the village as rubbish free as possible.

A tidy up took place at Hayward's Lodge on 6 April, as already reported. Members checked nest boxes and removed rubbish from the area.

Keith Skinner added armour plating to our nest boxes (see newspaper cutting) as woodpeckers had been trying to gain access to some of our boxes, in an attempt to eat the chicks inside.



The woodpecker's attempts to eat the blue tit chicks (above) are thwarted by a £2.50 nest box plate (below)

## Armour plating foils woodpecker

A BIRD lover has been forced to add makeshift armour plating to a nesting box in his garden to save a family of blue tits from a hungry woodpecker.

Dave Jones took these pictures of the Greater Spotted Woodpecker's attempts to force entry into the tits' home in Great Barr, West Midlands.

The professional photographer was forced into action to protect the bird box, which has been in use for 12 years, because he feared the "ferocious" woodpecker was about to succeed in its efforts to eat the chicks inside.

"It really looked like it was going to get through,"



Mr Jones said. The 58-year-old bought a £2.50 nest box plate from an RSPB shop in Sandwell, West Midlands, to prevent the woodpecker from gaining access to the box, although the bird does not appear to be giving up without a fight.

"After I put a plate on the front of the box, the woodpecker then started attacking the side - so I had to screw a metal sheet to the side as well," Mr Jones added.

A spokesman for the RSPB said the nest box plates were available with holes measuring 1in and 1¼in, catering for both blue tits and great tits.



## Village spick and span after clean-up

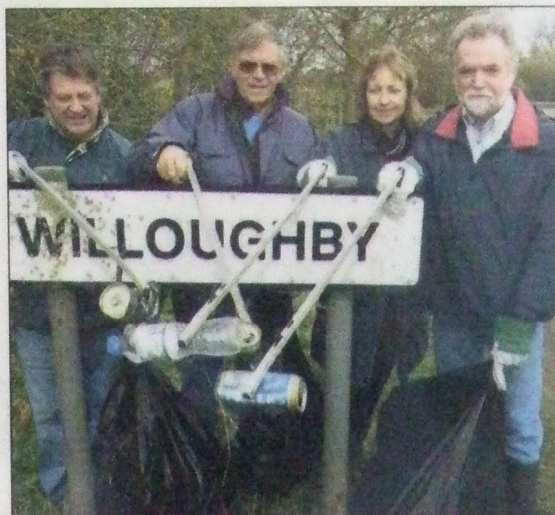
BAGS of rubbish along with old car doors, traffic cones and bits of plastic were collected by volunteers who set out to clean up their community at the weekend.

The Willoughby Spring Clean, organised by Willoughby Society, saw around ten people on both Saturday and Sunday head out and about in the village to pick up litter.

Society chairman Bob O'Donnell said: "There was a quite a haul of stuff, around 20 big bags, and everything from rusty old car doors to a lot of traffic cones.

"I thought the village was fairly clean before, but there was still a lot of rubbish. Now it is spick and span."

The Willoughby Society was set up more than 40 years ago and looks after Willoughby's archives as well as having a responsibility to 'beautify' the village.



Spick and span: Chairman of the Willoughby Society Bob O'Donnell with Bert Ogle, Linda Belgrove, and Alan Belgrove, at the Willoughby Spring Clean. (clean up\_041703)

## May 2008

### Weather Wisdom

St Urban's Day - 15 May. 'St Urban gives the summer' This day will give a fair indication of what the summer will be like.

The first part of the month was warm, dry and sunny but from the middle of the month much cloudier conditions prevailed. There was also a threat of ground frosts on several occasions, which had all the gardeners rather worried.

### Nature Notes

It is a busy time for our birds. Territorial pursuits are regularly taking place as nesting sites are sought. Our garden Robin is particularly aggressive and vocal.

The village pond is well stocked with Mallards and Moor Hens. There are reports of the ducks laying eggs in unusual places.

The number of gold fish in the pond seems to be increasing.

Hare seen in Woolscott Road

## June 2008

### Weather wisdom

**15<sup>th</sup> June St Vitus Day**

**If St Vitus Day be rainy weather**

**T'will rain for forty days together (It was showery)**

**Apart from a brief warm spell around the 8<sup>th</sup> and the 10<sup>th</sup> - June was rather cool and disappointing weather wise. Temperatures were below the seasonal average. 12<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> chilly nights with a possibility of rural ground frosts.**

**There were three very wet episodes during the third and fourth weeks as depressions crossed the country. It was very windy on 22 June, unusually so, and winds at times reached gale force. Many trees had branches broken.**

### Nature Notes

**Buzzards flying over Willoughby**

**Baby hare hiding in the garden at The Leys, Woolscott Road**

**The cypress aphid is attacking Leylandii trees. The insects known as *Cinara Cupressi*, suck the sap from Leylandiis, whose leaves turn brown before eventually dying and falling off. Climate change has seen the 4mm long creatures survive the unusually mild winter and thrive this summer. Many Leylandiis in the village are showing signs of attack with brown patches clearly visible.**



## July 2008

### Weather

July was mostly unsettled although there was a fine hot spell towards the end of the month. On the whole the month was a disappointment. We had thunderstorms, rain, some of it very heavy and wind. Where has our summer gone?

I hope August gives us some hot sunny weather before autumn sets in. We all need it badly!

### Nature Notes

Thin on the ground this month, as there is no Willoughby Society meeting in July.

We did find a beautiful grass snake caught in some plastic wire in our garden. He was tangled, but with judicious use of nail scissors I cut him free.

Not knowing anything about grass snakes I looked for details in a book. It appears the snake is harmless and once was very common. Since the 1950s however numbers have dwindled and it is becoming increasingly rare. It often lives near water and is a strong swimmer eating tadpoles, newts and small fish. I feel very privileged to have seen this beautiful reptile.

Keith Skinner took the photograph below before the snake scurried away.

**GRASS SNAKE** (*Natrix natrix*)

**SIZE** 70 –150 cm

**IDENTIFICATION** Vertical bar marks the sides of the greenish body and a yellow collar behind the head.





## August 2008

### **Weather Wisdom**

August 24<sup>th</sup> St Bartholomews Day

‘All the tears that St Swithin can cry  
St Bartholomews mantle will wipe dry’

### Weather

The August weather was disappointing. It was very unsettled with heavy rain or showers for much of the month and it also was exceptionally dull. According to the Met Office it was the greyest since records began in 1914

We really could have done with some sunny days to raise our spirits before autumn sets in.

I really hope we are in line for an Indian summer.

### Nature Notes

A bit thin on the ground this month as there is no meeting of the Society in August

Saw the Green Woodpecker on our drive. I think he had found some ants to eat.



September 2008

Weather Wisdom

As the wind is on St Michael's Day so t'will be for three months.

It has been the seventh wettest summer since records began but the Met.Office predicted a warm and dry autumn. So after the August washout I was quietly confident the weather would improve. How wrong could I be? It has proved to be a very wet month across the Midland area and a gloomy one too. The newspapers say that this dismal summer was the fault of fast moving winds high over Britain that blocked warm weather from southern Europe  
That's no excuse!

Nature Notes

1. On our return from holiday we found the sad remains of our baby hare. He/ she had been living in our garden for some time and we had got used to seeing him/her around. Something had eaten half of him and left the remains on our patio.
2. Reports of a large heron seen near the village pond. I wonder how many goldfish (of which there are or should I say were - many) have been eaten?
3. Keith Skinner took this photograph of a Dragonfly seen on our garden pond this month.



Southern Hawke  
Sept 08

## October 2008

### Weather wisdom

*“If during leaf fall in October many leaves remain hanging, a frosty winter with much snow will follow.”*

This October has been memorable for giving us one of the most spectacular shows of seasonal colour on our trees. We have seen dramatic shows of reds and yellows, despite this summer being one of the greyest and wettest on record.

Apparently this display was all down to a mild frost on September 28<sup>th</sup>, which was followed by a period of dry autumn weather. This is the perfect antidote to an autumn of economic gloom!

But nature is full of surprises and on October 28<sup>th</sup> snow was falling in Willoughby. To see snow falling in October is unusual. Very cold air of Antarctic origin was covering the UK and gave us this unseasonable weather.

Wednesday October 29<sup>th</sup> was a bitterly cold day

### Nature Notes

They are a bit thin on the ground this month.

The birds are visiting our garden again looking for food. I keep the bird feeders well topped up.

A family of four grey squirrels has moved into our front garden and they are wreaking havoc digging holes in my flowerbeds and eating the bird nuts.

Tawny Owl and Little Owl have have been heard nearby.

A working party will go to Haywards Lodge in November to clear up a few areas.



AFTER THE SNOW - October 28<sup>th</sup> - WILLoughBY - The keys Woolscott Rd

## November 2008

### Weather Wisdom

November is called the Black Month by many people, though John Clare the Northamptonshire poet wrote about it: -

*'Sybil of months and worshipper of winds,  
I love thee, rude and boisterous as though art.'*

November began with substantial rainfall, but in the first half of the month there were no extremes of temperature.

However temperatures fell around the 22<sup>nd</sup> when an Arctic weather system arrived. We turned up the central heating as much as we dared, bearing in mind the recent dramatic increases in gas and electricity prices. Much colder conditions prevailed and this was not helped by the northerly winds bringing in wintry showers.

The rest of the month was very cold with sleety rain, snow showers, freezing fog and sharp frosts.

We have not had cold weather like this for many years.

### Nature Notes

- Volunteers from the Willoughby Society met at Haywood's Lodge this month for a general tidy up. They spent the time clearing paths and emptying nest boxes.
- A cat was seen carrying a goldfish. Perhaps the goldfish was one of many now successfully living in our village pond.
- Birds are coming to the many bird feeders villagers provide for them. They need constant filling in this cold weather.
- The following birds have been spotted in the village. A Buzzard, Sparrowhawk, GreenWoodpecker and Fieldfares.
- Two Kingfishers were seen in Main Street.

## December 2008

### Weather Wisdom

An old saying dating from the 18<sup>th</sup> century: -

*'In December, keep yourself warm and sleep'*

If only that were possible!

December was a very cold month . After the mild wet winters of the past few years these sub zero temperatures take a bit of getting used to.

However, we have had some beautiful cold sunny days and overall it was drier than average.

Over the Christmas period it was cold and dry with no snow. This made travelling easy for those of us who were making journeys to friends and relatives

New Years Eve was bitterly cold.

The newspapers report that the cold spell is beginning to resemble the big freeze of 1963 which began about the same time.

### Nature Notes

We have seen Fieldfares and Redwings in the fields. There were also some Lapwings. We don't see many of them these days. Their numbers are declining as farming methods change.

Goldfinches and Long-tailed Tits are coming to feeders in our garden.

They look beautiful with the sun on them these cold bright mornings.

They are such lively little birds.