

Winter through to Spring 2010

Just before Christmas came the snow and it became very cold. Mel was busy feeding the birds almost daily, we had a job to keep up with them. The New Year began just as cold and icy though not so much snow; it has gradually disappeared, the little that falls now vanishes during the day until yet another snow shower starts. The birds are getting though the nuts and fat balls in no short order. The blackbirds are especially fond of the chopped up cheese and out of date raisins so I am giving them a treat now and again. We want to see that as many birds as possible get through winter. A falcon has been eying up the hedge lately but has so far not attempted to catch a meal so maybe he is not too hungry yet.

This year the village cricket club is once again putting on a pantomime. They gave the last one in 2008 and decided it would really be the last one they would perform. But due to popular demand and a few new faces they are once more delighting their audiences with merry banter.

Back to wild life; we were watching a grey squirrel from the downstairs lounge window the other day, it ran along the fence towards a full nut hanger but stopped dead three feet from a stone squirrel sitting on top of the fence post. The grey squirrel did not know what to make of the garden ornament, it decided after some deliberation not to pass it and, using discretion as the better part of valor, turned and fled.

Today our old friend the merlin tried to catch a bird from the hedge, we watched as it slipped in and out and through the middle but the sparrows are too wily for it. That's the first time for months that the merlin has appeared, it was right in front of our window so we easily identified it and to make sure we compared it to the one in our bird book.

The days are getting longer now and it is not so cold so soon it will be nesting time, the thing I'm looking forward to is green leaves covering the deciduous trees and hedges. This morning, the last but one day of January, we awoke to fresh snow on the ground; luckily the sun soon shone brightly and by lunchtime most of it had melted away. So it looks like we have more snow showers to come



and definitely more frosts. The hawks are now making visits; they are getting very bold so they must be quite hungry. Hard frosts do not help the larger birds who rely on catching small prey that scamper around the fields and hedges. We were taking our grandchildren to school the other morning and the girls pointed to a heron sat on their bungalow roof, it obviously had its eye on the fish in their back garden pond. Luckily for the fish there is no room for

the heron to land and take off again (or so my son-in-law Peter believes.) I hope he is right because he has some pretty big fish in there. Heron have been seen taking fish out of back garden ponds recently so you can't be too careful.

The second week in January and snow has gone at last, though the weather forecast threatens more to come. What we have had is very foggy, damp and cold mornings that do nobody any good. The heron has been chased out of my son-law's garden by the girls when they came home from school in the week; so I wonder how many fish it has taken, indeed are there any left in the pond? Only time will tell. The water is so dark it is impossible to see if there are any fish hiding at the bottom. A kestrel found our hedge this morning but once again it did not catch a meal. I can't blame the bird for trying.

Well on the way through the month now and still we are getting snow falls, the weather forecast is for more snow this week though it could also rain. By now we are heartily sick of this winter, the garden is in much need of a clear up and the daffodils are slow to show themselves. Who can blame them? The blackbirds seem to be pairing up now and there's lots of noise from the sparrows though they show no sign of looking for nest sites as yet. One good thing about this time of the year is the lengthening of the days; by the beginning of March (next week) it should be still light well past five thirty. That has got to be something to be cheerful about.

The farmer near us has done very little except to go out with his home-made snow shovel and clear the path from his front door right through his farmyard and out of the gate past Bill's bungalow to the road. He seems to enjoy keeping busy. The only other thing he and his son have been busy with is the sugar beet, he now has a huge pile in his yard which he has covered with tarpaulin sheets. Not that long ago he sent load after load to the factory completely clearing what he had harvested. The rest he brought in earlier this year before the land got too bad to work on. He could do with some good drying days (as could we).

March and we at last are having sunshine, looking out of our window today Mel noticed the solar pump in the half water barrel was working so that proves the sun has now changed position and spring is on its way. The nights are still frosty but it is not long before it melts away, on the surface at least. Spring flowers are beginning to grow better now; crocuses are blooming around the trees in the garden. Only problem is the sun might encourage the maintenance gardeners to come and cut grass that really does not need attention yet and maybe mow over our flowering bulbs in the grass. The birds are still being fed and we've been happy to note several Robins in the garden. They had been seen round the other side of the building quite regularly so we thought they had deserted us. So it is nice to welcome them back.

Our son-in-law Trevor kindly came and re-fixed the bird boxes that had fallen from the trees, we are hoping to see at least one of them occupied this spring. Talking of birds, I was walking down Victoria Street in Town the other day when I was approached by a pied wagtail. It was behaving just as the feral pigeons do, almost walking under my feet looking for food. It did not seem in the least bit afraid. Has anyone else noticed this happening?

The sports field has been well used by footballers this winter though it could do with the ground being a little softer, it is frost hardened, only the surface seems to soften when the temperature rises above freezing. The weather does not stop evening players of tennis, we often see the floodlights on over the courts, and the weather only puts them off if it is snowing or raining heavily.

Danny our friend from down the corridor has already been sorting out his garden. Hopefully he will not plant anything out yet. He had been very put out to find some of his plants and garden ornaments being driven over by a fairly new flat dweller, who at times has a problem parking. We are hoping this problem will not turn into a full blown dispute as there are other car owners watching in case their cars get damaged. With any luck our new neighbour will become a model parker and the problem will be solved. (Practice makes perfect so they say.)