

## December 2011 Nature Notes

December, in Gaelic, An mios marbh, the dead month in Anglo Saxon, Giuli, the month of Yule. The north has had its first snow and the wind has reached Croxley Green! Will we have snow this year? The Winter Solstice falls on the 22nd December and we have the Feast of St Thomas on the 21st. For those of a superstitious mind it is worth noting that ghosts are said to freely roam from St Thomas's Eve until Christmas Eve.

Despite lowering temperatures this is still an excellent time to get out and about around Croxley. The canal path makes for a good brisk walk and you will see a number of gulls and invariably a heron hunting on the edge. Elsewhere, the hedgerows have a profusion of berries and the holly berries seem to be particularly scarlet this year but perhaps that is because there is more sun than is usual. In the fields, next year's crops are beginning to show and so winter snow to keep them warm will do no harm at all. Over at the farm the tup is out having done his job (we hope) and we look forward to spring lambs.

There are a good number of birds about and some rather strange behaviour. I have observed mating displays and nest building over the last week or so and there seems to be something of a hic-cup in the bird's calendar. Although there are plentiful berries on the trees and bushes please do feed your garden birds as they need to build their reserves to get them through the winter. High fat foods may not be good for us but they are for our feathered friends.

Some of you may still bring in decorations from the field and hedge for Christmas and holly and ivy always brightens up the house but, traditionally, it should not be brought in before Christmas Eve or fear the consequences!

The Christmas period is always a good time for a walk and there are some really good walks around Croxley, short, long or in-between. Perhaps a walk across the fields to Sarratt, lunch in the pub and then back again. A walk through the woods to The Clarendon and back another way. Follow the Chess Valley walk as far as you feel you can go. A gentle stroll through Croxley Hall Woods or perhaps through the woods to Rickmansworth and back along the canal path. A walk across Croxley Moor or perhaps a circular walk through the fields and woods at the back of York house School.

I was out late afternoon recently and on the path at the top of the field looking down to the Chess Valley and over to the Masonic School. The Western sky was alight with a deepening red as the sun set, a gentle wind was blowing up the valley and there was a stillness and quietness so rare in this increasingly urban environment. For a few minutes the M25 was not there, nor the aircraft going to and from Heathrow and Luton and the only noise I could hear was a cock pheasant and a robin singing in the tree behind me. The magic was broken by a police car siren (these seem to be increasing) but for a few brief minutes I could have been on my beloved Dartmoor or West Penwith Moors.

If, like me, you are fortunate enough to have an open fire don't forget to bring in your Yule Log on Christmas Eve. However, also don't forget that it must never be bought but has to be found or taken from your own land. I expect few of us will be able to keep it alight throughout the twelve days of Christmas and there is probably a Health & Safety diktat (Elf and Safety?).

Usually there is Morris Dancing outside of the pubs on the Green on Boxing Day and unless the rules have changed us dog owners are still allowed into "The Coach" to get our pint (as should happen in very proper pub! Dan please note ☺). Go along and be generous with your contributions to the hat to ensure your Luck of the Morris for 2012. Don't forget the performance by The Croxley Mummers at various parts of Croxley.

Don't forget the Fireworks on the Green on New Year's Eve (courtesy of your kindly Parish Council).

May I wish you all a very enjoyable and gentle Christmas and Yule.