

## February Nature Notes 2012

February: named from Februa the great Roman feast of purification; in Welsh, Chwefror, in Gaelic, Faoilleach (the month of raving wolves) and in Anglo Saxon, Solmonath (the month of cakes).

February, the month when Spring comes knocking at the door.

February fill dyke, be it black or be it white, but if it be white, it's the better to like!

The Celtic festival of Imbolc is celebrated on February 1st celebrating Brigit, the Goddess of fire, healing and fertility and it was the start of the farming year. Candlemas is the Christian adaptation and is celebrated on February 2nd. If Candlemas Day bring snow and rain, winter is gone and won't come again, but if Candlemas be clear and bright, winter will have another flight! Well there was a weather warning and temperatures fell and then we had snow!

February 24th is St Matthias's Day, the 13th apostle he was, by tradition, beheaded with an axe and thus became the patron saint of carpenters and woodcutters. The days are now getting longer but if it freezes on St Matthias Day, then it will freeze for two months together!

February, as one may expect, is not a great month for foraging but John's book tells me that common chickweed, common sorrel, crow garlic, hairy bittercress, wintercress and wood sorrel are available.

There is a lot of bird activity at the moment as the garden is alive with birds raiding the berries on the holly, the seed and nuts in the containers and the fat balls hanging from the pear trees. Blue, great and long tailed tit have been joined by blackbird, thrush and fieldfare. I have noticed herons overhead and wonder if they have been driven away from the frozen canal in search of an easier meal from garden ponds and the like. Down by the Chess last week the egret was busy as were the moorhens. On February 1st I heard an owl in Dickinson Square. Was it real or someone with a call whistle? I don't know but it sounded real enough to me.

The cold weather enhances the smell of the foxes that visit Dickinson Square and my dogs are busy sniffing on their last walk of the day. The snow is a welcome opportunity to see what is about and the interested naturalist can spend an enjoyable time, early morning, looking at the various tracks in the Cherry Orchard and trying to identify them from a field guide.

At the risk of a "wiggins" from our Hon Secretary I will give a quick update on our sheep. The wet then cold weather is not good for the feet and a few of them have needed attention. The grass is low so hay and haylage is being bought and is disappearing at a rapid rate! On this subject, if anyone knows of a field in Croxley Green that would benefit from grazing by a few sheep please let me know as I am looking for a field to keep sheep to help train my two (yes two) sheep dogs!

This is an excellent time to go for a walk and look at the framework of the trees without their leaves and to see what is happening in the fields and the hedgerows. A brisk walk may be needed to keep warm but don't forget to stop, look and listen. You may be lucky enough to see a deer, a pheasant, partridges, foxes and a good variety of birds. Look out for the red kite that is moving into the area.

For the adventurous a walk across the fields from Croxley to Sarrat is well worth the

effort especially if a visit to one of the Sarrat pubs is on the agenda! Then, of course you will need a swift revive having walked back to Croxley and there are some cracking beers on at the Sportsman. A couple of days back it had two Cornish beers on: what more can you ask for?