

## September 2011 Nature Notes

September, Harvest-Home, hops, apples and An Sultuine, the month of plenty. If September 1st (Feast of St Giles) is fair then it is fair for the month!

Much of the harvest is now in and some fields have already been ploughed, harrowed and made ready for the next planting. The harvest from trees and bushes looks good this year with abundant hips, nuts, elderberries and of course, it has been and remains, a great year for blackberries. However, remember to pick your blackberries before the Devil does unspeakable things to them around the 25th! On the subject of hazel nuts. The People's Trust for Endangered Species is running its "Great Nut Hunt" again in order to gather more information about that adorable little creature the dormouse (*Muscardinus Avellanarius*), we can all join in and details can be found at [www.greatnuthunt.co.uk](http://www.greatnuthunt.co.uk). We have two native oak trees in the UK, the Common or Pendunculate and the Sessile or Durmast. If you want to tell the difference the Common has stalked acorns and short stalked leaves whilst the Sessile has stalkless acorns and long stalked leaves. Unfortunately the acorn does not feature well as a food source for humans although it does have, or has had, a few uses. Elderberries however are a very different proposition. Although mildly poisonous when raw they should be fine when cooked. They can, of course, be used for wine making but also make an excellent stuffing for baked apples (especially with some local honey on top) and make excellent vinegar. However one of the best uses is to make a superb fruit drink. Cook the berries, strain through a sieve, add sugar and/or honey to taste and enjoy.

September brings us the start of the real fungi season and this may be a good time to mention a few points about gathering them. The first point is if you really don't know what you have picked then DO NOT EAT IT! A while back I was fortunate enough to spend a day fungi hunting with John Wright of River Cottage fame. He took a group of us out on a Dorset hill and the day was memorable for the appalling weather and the variety of fungi picked. We spent the morning collecting and then John sorted our collection into basic groups of very good to eat, ok but boring, best to avoid and call the undertaker (or thereabouts). There are a surprising number of poisonous/deadly fungi and some have no known antidote. So, if you are going to hunt fungi this autumn then please arm yourself with a top field guide and do go on a course to learn how to pick and what to avoid.

If home is truly where the heart is then I own two homes: one in West Penwith the other in Dartmoor. We didn't manage to get to Cornwall this year (yet) but did manage Dartmoor. We have found a very comfortable and exceedingly dog friendly inn on the high moor. Adjacent to the lane above the inn there is the most wonderful wild flower meadow. The colours are fabulous, even on a dull day, the scent glorious and it is an absolute delight to stand and watch the countless insects and bees all at work amongst the flowers and the heather in the next field (an advantage of having a part trained sheep dog is that she can happily watch sheep whilst I am watching elsewhere). It got me wondering if such a wild flower meadow would be possible in Croxley Green. Could we find a field or an area of the Green to turn into a real wild flower meadow? Could we employ part of Stone's Orchard, the banks of Scott's Hill or the river bank by the Chess? All places of varying suitability. If so, would we be beset with "Conservation" issues regarding non local species, would there be H&S

objections (might get stung by a foraging bee), or would we be allowed, perhaps even encouraged, to create and nurture such a wonderful addition to our “village” and its wildlife? If you have any thoughts on this, and the recent issues of the TRDC early cutting of the nectar oasis and meadow land please let the Residents’ Association know.

Enjoy September by getting out and about in our countryside.