

Country Notes for December 2024

When I am working in my garden I am frequently assisted by my two spaniels who just love being outside. Whether the help they provide is of much practical use is debatable, but I very much enjoy their company. Their assistance also frequently ends up in a play fight on the lawn! Just recently I have been joined by a third helper who has the particular benefit of singing to me as the work progresses – and the singing is very fine indeed. My new little helper is a robin and he, or she, often gets within a foot or two of me as it searches for anything tasty that I might have dug up. At first I couldn't believe that the song I was listening to was coming from my new little friend but by carefully watching the beak movements it was clear that it really was my robin. The sound is beautiful and it carries on and on, giving a cheerful backdrop to my work.

Robins have for many years been associated with Christmas and the postmen who delivered the first Christmas cards in mid Victorian times were known as 'Robins' as they wore a red coat. There were even some Victorian Christmas cards that depicted an actual robin delivering a Christmas card in its beak! However, there are many other stories which connect robins to Christmas. One such story is that a robin arrived at the stable where Jesus was born and that it fanned the embers of the fire with its wings as Joseph collected more wood to feed the fire. The Virgin Mary awarded the robin with its red breast as a thank you. Another story is that at the winter solstice on 21st December the Oak King of Summer, the robin, killed the Holly King of Winter, the wren. At the summer solstice the wren exacted his revenge! There is also another story associated with Easter which says that the robin tried to remove the crown of thorns from Jesus on the cross and pierced itself in the process, thus causing its red breast.

All of which reminds me, to remind you, not to forget to give the wild birds the present of some food on the bird table over the Christmas period!

A very Merry Christmas to you all!

Andrew G Snowdon