

## Country Notes for January 2025

The countryside in January can appear dank and somewhat forlorn. On a wet day, when the skies are grey and there is mud everywhere, it can be quite difficult to persuade oneself that venturing out is a good idea! However, with two springer spaniels there is little choice, and I am always glad of it for there is always something to see and the fresh air is a real tonic. Then along comes a day when there is a hard frost or snowfall and the whole scene brightens up. The landscape suddenly changes and the debris of autumn and winter is smoothed and covered and seen in a new and brighter light.

In our hedgerows and woods ivy is so much more obvious than in summer. The dark purple and black berries are often still in evidence until late in winter, as the birds are initially drawn to those that are red. However at the beginning of January there are usually plenty of red berries left too. There are the fat and juicy hips brightening up the prickly branches of dog roses and the haws on the branches of hawthorns are still there to provide food for our hungry wildlife. Even the dead fronds of bracken can take on a whole new appearance when touched by a heavy frost or snowfall.

By January the oak trees have shed the last of their leaves and stand skeletal to reveal the winter beauty of their shapes, silhouetted against the winter sky. Somehow there is something quite majestic about the shape of an old oak tree, although trees of many other species also take on a new appearance at this time of year.

The hardest days of winter are often still to come at the beginning of January and as the New Year turns we must wait and see. There is no doubting however that it is worth getting out and about in the countryside in January if at all possible. You will be glad you did!

A very happy New Year to you all.

Andrew G Snowdon