

Countrycare's Catch-up



Winter 2020-2021

As the season draws to a close, we welcome Spring and take the opportunity to reflect on Winter. Although this Winter has been a very different one with the additional Covid-19 challenges, nature has prevailed, and Spring is just around the corner.

Winter is generally considered the hardest season for wildlife so much so that some species opt out of the season altogether, be it by migration (leaving for warmer climates) or hibernation (a state of dormancy).

Throughout the season Countrycare has been kept busy: checking in on the array of nature reserves, taking on habitat management where possible and doing lots of planning optimistically for an exciting year ahead!

We hope you enjoy hearing a little of what we, and nature, have been up to this Winter, as well as some of the first signs of Spring to keep an eye out for!

What's about? – Fantastic Fungi

During the darker months of the year, fungi can be a colourful relief!

Fungi were once thought to be a type of plant; however, we now know that fungi is in a group of its own. They have complex cells like animals, they cannot make their own food from sunlight like plants can, and they usually cannot move. Fungi has many vital roles including: being used to kill bacteria in medicines, a type of food (yeast and mushrooms) and a key component in decomposition of organic matter.

Fun fact: There are over 100,000 known species of fungi!

Jelly Ear Fungus: Mainly spotted in Winter growing on deadwood. The fungus has a jelly-like consistency and holds the ability to rebuild itself following desiccation.

Witches Butter Fungus: This fungus is gelatinous and becomes harder once it dries, again most commonly found on deadwood. This is a parasitic fungi, feeding on other fungi which eat deadwood.



Jelly Ear Fungus



Witches Butter Fungus



Seasonal Highlights - Winter

Here are some snaps taken this Winter from our nature reserves.

- Norton Heath is usually a beautiful heath with some ponds. Although, after the heavy rain many of the ponds were overflowing and interconnecting with the paths. However, come Summer-time these ponds are likely to be completely dried up.
- We assure you that we have not imprisoned this little Bloom of Ladybirds. They have actually taken refuge under this wire; preparing for the cold by huddling together and hibernating for the winter, usually waking up in March.
- Our sites were looking magical following the snowfall this winter. Unfortunately this Daffodil had flowered just before the frost which often happens in February due to the fluctuation from mild to frost. Elsewhere in the district, Foster Street Burial ground looked particularly peaceful in the snow framed by the Yew tree avenue.



Volunteer update

This winter saw the end of a tricky year for us all. Despite these challenges the Countrycare Volunteers' efforts were not dampened. Many volunteer days were lost or restricted due to Covid-19 regulations. However, 21 volunteer days were still able to take place which totalled up to 1260 volunteer hours!



This Winter there was a focus on the heathland at Chigwell Row Wood Local Nature Reserve. The volunteers were tasked with removal of tree saplings (including Aspen and Turkey Oak) which would have grown to compete with heather species. Gorse was reduced to maintain its health and limit its extent across the heathland. Work was also completed at Linder's Field Local Nature reserve, removing some Holly- a fast growing woodland plant which can become dominant and "choke out" other valuable woodland species therefore reducing the woodland's diversity.



Looking for the first signs of Spring

Hearing the first gentle buzz of a Bumble Bee is a sure sign of Spring being just round the corner! With the first glimpse of warmer weather the hibernating bees emerge and the queens will begin the quest of finding a suitable nest.



Snowdrops are one of the earliest to make an appearance, hence often being a symbol of hope. These white flowers can be found throughout the UK although they are not native. They generally grow up to 15cm tall, preferring damp soil, often in woodlands or by rivers. Snowdrops emerge much earlier than many other flowers and they don't rely on pollination- instead they reproduce by bulb division.

We invite you to visit our social media pages to keep in touch and learn about our other nature reserves – there might be one closer than you think!

Facebook: www.facebook.com/EFCountrycare

Twitter: www.twitter.com/efcountrycare