

No. 17

Issued for Members and Friends of the

LONG EATON NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

SPRING 1988

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SECRETARY : MARION SMITH

MEETINGS ORG. : KAREN BIDGOOD

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CHAIRMAN'S FOREWORD

Like so many of you, natural history has been an obsession with me, like a chronic disease but for which I seek no cure. Natural history is so vast a subject that one cannot hope to cover it all and some degree of specialisation becomes necessary. My 'specialisation' was ruled by a desire to see miniature animals and plants, a microcosm which requires optical aid to reveal their true glory.

Having 'gone it alone' for some thirty years, I made a valuable discovery, that of the local Natural History Society and the joy of sharing experiences with its members.

I now have the honour to be Chairman of LENS, a daunting task following the fine examples of leadership and guidance given previously by George Smith, but I will do my best for all the members and, with your help, will try to be worthy of the position the society has given to me.

Alan Heath

The following items are related to Autumn 1987:-

NOTES ON FUNGI by Marion Smith

This is supposed to be a good year for fungi, it has certainly been wet enough! Edible species abound but there are also plenty of poisonous ones. The BBC wildlife programme on safari in North Wales found that fungi have concentrated the radioactive caesium from the Chernobyl accident and show levels almost ten times higher than the surrounding soil.

Grange Park (Long Eaton) Meadowland October 1987

Coprinus atramentarius - common ink cap
C. comatus - shaggy ink cap
Hygrocybe conica - conical waxcap
H nivea - snowy waxcap
Lacrymaria velutina - weeping widow
Lycoperdon perlatum - common puffball

West Park

Pholiota squarrosa - shaggy pholiota

Long Eaton Library

Coprinus micaceus - glistening inkcap

Forbes Hole - frondose wood October 1987

Collybia peronata - wood woolly foot,
Coriolus versicolor - many zoned polypore,
Daedaleopsis confragosa - blusing bracket
Lactarius piperatus - peppery milk cap
Lycoperdon perlatum - common puffball
Melanoleuca melaleuca
Pluteus salicinus - willow pluteus
Scleroderma citrinum - earthball

Elvaston - 20.10.87 - Mixed Woods & Parklands

Amanita muscaria - fly agaric
Calocera viscosa - branched stagshorn
Coriolus versicolor - many zoned polypore
Hirneola auricula - judae - jews ear
Hygrophoropsis aurantiaca - false chanterelle
Hypholoma fasiculare - sulphur tuft
Lactarius rufus - red milk cap
L.turpis - ugly milk cap
Lycoperdonpyriforme - pear shaped puffball
Merculius tremellosus
Mycena galericulata - bonnet mycena
Phallus impudicus - stinkhorn
Blackish purple russula - Russula atropurpurea
Yellow Russula - R. ochroleuca

Ratcliffe on Soar - next to busy road - 10.11.87

Tricholoma sudum - closely related to the mouse tricholoma Agaricus caunesmic - field mushroom Hygrocybe nivea - snowy waxcap

Tree stumps by the Erewash Canal - presumably beech - 3.1.88

Oyster fungus - Pleurotus ostreatus Glistening inkcap - Coprinus micaceus Dead mans fingers - Xylaria polymorpha Tripe fungus - Auricularia mesenterica Many zoned polypore - Coriolus versicolor

The oyster fungus is a much esteemed edible species in the South of England, attempts are being made to cultivate it in natural deciduous woods with a view to commercial production.

THE LARGE BLUE BUTTERFLY (Maculinea arion) by Stan Eggleshaw

Eight years ago, the Large Blue butterfly was declared extinct at its last site in Britain, in the West Country. However, following a programme jointly run by the Nature Conservancy Council, the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology and the World Wildlife Fund, this rarest of British butterflies is now alive and kicking on a National Trust property in the West Country, the exact location being a closely guarded secret for abviouss reasons.

The life cycleof the Large Blue is remarkable in as much that the caterpilla feeds first of all on wild thyme, but then depends on a particular species of ant to complete the cycle. The caterpillar secretes a sweet liquid to attract the ants, which carry it off to their nest where it feeds on the ants' larvae. After a winter hibernation, the caterpillar then changes to the chrysalis stage, before emerging as a butterfly in late June, when it leaves the ants' nest.

The scarcity of this butterfly is largely due to changes in land management. It has become uneconomic to graze rough hillsides and so neither the wild thyme or the vital species of ant, which both need close grazed turf, could flourish. The decimation of the rabbit population by myxomatosis was also a factor, as they helped to keep the turf short.

The new site is carefully grazed and at the appropriate times wardened, with the result that last year about 500 egss were laid and hopefully up to 120 Large Blues may be expected to emerge in the summer.

One can't help wondering whether Derbyshire would be a suitable area for this butterfly as there is no shortage of wild thyme and close cropped turf in the Dales, but the right species of Ant might be a problem.

TOADS & ROADS by Stan Eggleshaw

The Common Toad (Bufo bufo) is probably the most maligned of man's allies. A resident toad in your garden will eat many species which gardeners regard as pests such as grubs, slugs and insects etc. and will live happily under a rock for instance until it reaches maturity at three or four years of age, when it will make an annual migration to breed at the pond where it was a tadpole.

Inevitably, these days many thousands of migrating toads fall victim to the motor car each Spring at the point where their well established migration paths cross roads, the Wildlife Hospitals Trust of Aylesbury, Bucks. have issued a Green Cross Toad Fact Sheet giving details of action that can be taken to reduce this annual slaughter.

It is suggested that anyone knowing of a crossing point should inform their local council highways department and press them to erect warning signs - there is a standard Dept. of Transport designed sign. As toads tend to travel only at night, if there are any public evening activities in the immediate vicinity of the crossing, posters warning drivers of the problem could be provided at the venues of such events.

The most likely period of migration is late March through April on mild wet evenings and some groups organise toad lifts at this time. Armed with buckets, powerful torches and wearing fluorescent jackets for their own safety they collect the toads into the buckets and from the general direction of the toads' movement and their own local knowledge of the area, establish the pond towards which the toads are heading and deliver them to their destination.

On the Continent, many roads crossing toad migration paths are built with fences to direct the toads through tunnels under the road surface, Unfortunately this is not likely to be the case in this country, but it is possible to head the toads to a collection point at the side of the road by erecting a temporary fence of 20" high polythene, tucking the base into the soil, to prevent them crawling underneath.

By far the majority of amphibians you are likely to come across will be toads. There will be less of the larger females than the smaller males, who are likely to give out a low croak when picked up. Occasionally frogs will cross roads but these tend to do it in great leaps and consequently are extremely difficult to hold, but if placed in a deep bucket may be safely deposited in a nearby pond. Likewise, newts can sometimes be found crossing roads and should also be taken to the nearest pond.

All these amphibians are quite unsuitable as pets and even if put into garden ponds, will often escape, in order to head back to their home territory.

Further information can be obtained from the leaflet printed by Portman Building Society for the Wildlife Hospitals Trust, 1 Pemberton Close, Aylesbury, Bucks.

NATIVE TREES by Stan Eggleshaw

In the last ice-age, about 10,000 years ago, most of Britain was covered in glaciers and was part of the Continental land mass. A climatic change then started to take place, the temperature warmed up and the ice began to melt. As this change gathered pace, trees and other plants from the warmer climes to the South were slowly able to colonise the land behind the retreating ice until the point was reached after approximately 3-4,000 years, when the melting ice had raised the surrounding sea level to the point where the land bridge connecting Britain with the Continent was finally submerged, thus creating a barrier to further colonisation by additional species. Those species which had become established by this time are the ones we know today as native and make up what we call natural woodland.

Unfortunately, all our native trees have become mush less abundant over the centuries mainly due to man's activities and this decline has accelerated at an alarming pace in more recent years. Since 1940, about 40% of our natural woodland and 125,000 miles of hedgerows have disappeared. Disease epidemics have also played their part, a case in point being the loss of virtually all the Elm trees in under 20 years, due to Dutch Elm Disease. The latest catastrophe was of course, the great storm of October last, the effects of which will be seen for probably a couple of hundred years.

Why, you may ask, are native species so important? As long as there are plenty of other trees about, does it really matter? The answer is, of course, yes.

Over millions of years of evolution, creatures developed to fill all the niches in the environment, each species with its own peculiar feeding requirements, needing its own sources of food. So, as our native vegetation established itself, our native animal, insect and bird populations (both resident and migratory) became established. Native trees therefore, are the foundations of the food chain, the insects and other creatures which feed upon them being in turn a food source for birds and animals higher up the chain.

Exotic trees and shrubs, possibly from the other side of the world, beautiful as many of them undoubtedly are in our gardens, do not usually provide food for our native species and it may take many years of further evolution for them ever to do so.

As more and more people become aware of what has happened, there is a strong build up of protest against for example, the large mono-culture forestry plantations of alien species that we are all familiar with, but there is something which we could all do personally to help to overcome some of the loss of native species.

In Britain, there are approximately a million acres of private gardens which potentionally are a huge resource for conservation. If we each planted just one native tree or shrub in our garden, this would be a most valuable contribution to preserving our native wild life. The size of your garden will obviously determine what can be planted. Large trees may not be suitable if allowed to grow unchecked, but remember many species can be 'coppiced' i.e. severely pruned every 5-10 years which will eventually produce a thicket. Crab apple or Silver Birch are medium sized trees which would suit many gardens, but if not a tree choose or plant a hedge. A list of species is given overleaf:-

Native Trees.

Oak (Quercus robur)

Large. The best wildlife tree

Beech (Fagus sylvatica)

Large, dense foliage but can be pruned. Good hedge plant.

Seed for birds.

Small Leaved Lime

Medium size. Uncommon now in the wild.

(Tilia cordata)

Silver Birch (Betula pendula)

Médium size. Seed for birds.

Wild Cherry (Prunus Avium)

Medium size. Good blossom.

Bird Cherry (Prunus padus)

Small. Fruit for birds.

Rowan (Sorbus aucuparia) Small. Berries for birds.

Crab Apple (Malus sylvestris)

Small. Fruit for birds

Field Maple (Acer campestre)

Small. Good Autumn colour.

Alder (Alnus glutinosa)

Medium. Damp/wet ground. Seed for birds.

White Willow (Salix

Large. Damp/wet ground.

Native Shrubs.

Hawthorn (Crataegus, monogyna)

Berries for birds

Hazel (Corylus avellana)

Good for coppice. Nuts for small mammals.

Guelder Rose (Viburnham opulus)

Lovely blossom. Berries for birds

Dog Rose (Rosa. canina)

Attractive flowers. Fruit for birds.

Blackthorn (Prunus spinosa)

Dense growth. White flowers in Spring. Sloes for birds (or gin!)

DISAPPEARING WILD FLOWERS by Stan Eggleshaw

An article appeared in the Autumn issue of 'Natural World', the magazine of the Royal Society for Nature Conservation, highlighting some disturbing statistics on the loss of our wild plants. Apparently, at least 24 species of our higher plant species have vanished from the United Kingdom altogether, 40 are now confined to just one site and 140 are only surviving because of special conservation measures. The Conservation Association of Botanical Societies (CABS) reckons that one species is lost from Britain every year.

At a local level the situation is even worse, many individual counties have lost approximately 10% of their wild flora. In Staffordshire, 130 species have gone since recording began around 1800, while intensively farmed Lincolnshire has lost 50 species during the last 40 years.

It is disappointing that these disturbing trends show little sign of slowing down, let alone being reversed, despite the work of both conservation bodies and individuals.

Examples of losses caused by ignorance and carelessness weree quoted, such as the case of White Helleborine being destroyed in Monmouth when the Council dumped rocks on the site and Wild Chives in Co. Durham vanishing from over-use of the site by climbers walkers and regrettably, botanists. Some losses are also caused by deliberate acts of vandalism, for example, last summer four instances of theft of wild orchids occured in Gloucestershire

The article included a plea for a higher level of public awareness of the situation, plus more statutory and financial back-up to ensure that conservation bodies can be more effective in this important area.

Alan Heath has forwarded a summary for samples taken during 1987 at the following ponds:-

Forbe's Hole, Long Eaton, Attenborough Nature Reserve, Ticknall, Melbourne Pool, Wollaton Park Lake, Dockholme Pond, Long Eaton One Acre Pond, Long Eaton, Trenton Drive, Long Eaton Shiningcliff Woods, Ambergate, Ash Tip, Long Eaton.

Anyone wishing to obtain a full report of samples and species please contact me on Long Eaton 732710.

Fay Blackburn

SUMMARY OF THE WEATHER 1987 as recorded at 136 Trowell Grove,

JANUARY There were 10 ½ inches of snow in the second week with the greatest amount on the 13th. The lowest temperature of the year occured on the 13th which was 10° F (-14C). Three days later, the temperature had risen by 24 degrees Fahrenheit.

FEBRUARY A mixed month with snow in the third week.

MARCH Wet and cold with snow in the first week. Very windy on the 26th and there was a westerly gale on the 27th.

APRIL Cold and wet in the first half of the month. Much warmer and drier in the last week, despite a thunderstorm on the 29th.

MAY Driest month of the year. Beginning the second week was quite nice, otherwise rather cool. A pollution cloud occured over the midlands on the 7th. The source of this was not confirmed but it did not cause any problems in Long Eaton.

JUNE A very wet month and one of the wettest on record.

Two thuderstorms occured on the 16th. Total of
23 wet days in the month including every day for the
first 11 days. A cool month until final week.

JULY Dry in the first half and very warm in first week.

The warmest day of the year was on the 6th. Second half of the month was wet and cooler.

AUGUST Another mixed month. Often cool, especially on the 7th when the temperature did not reach 60° F. There were however, 15 days with a temperature of more than 70 and 3 days with over 80. Following rain on the 17th., deposits of Sahara sand were found locally caused by a high southerly airstream across Spain.

SEPTEMBER

A fair amount of rain in middle two weeks with a thunderstorm early evening of 23rd. Some frost in the last week.

OCTOBER

The wettest month of the year. A similar situation to June but with a greater amount of rainfall.

Over twice the average fell this month. There was a gale on the 16th which was associated with a hurricane in the south of England with winds of over 100 mph. Considerable structural damage occured there but there was no real damage locally.

NOVEMBER

Cloudy and rather cool. Strong wind on the 12th and freezing fog on the 28th. Dry in the first week but rather wet for the rest of the month.

DECEMBER

Rather wet in the second half of the month when it also became much milder. The maximum temperature was 50° F on Christmas Day and had risen to 58° F by the 28th.

COMMENTS

Comparisons with 1986 show that in 1987 we had 5 inches more snow. The rainfall was actually a quarter on an inch less than in 1986. The average maximum temperature in 1987 was 2 degrees higher than in 1986 but the average minimum temperature was a degree lower.

WARMEST DAY 89°F 6th July
COLDEST DAY 10°F 13th January
WETTEST DAY 15th-16th October
WETTEST MONTH October
DRIEST MONTH May

NOTES: A marked rise of 24°F occured in three days in January between the al3th and 16th. Second half of January was the driest period of the year.

Alan Heath

A TWITCH IN TIME by John Blackburn

It took an entertaining talk at one of the LENS meetings to finally convince Fay and myself that the Isles of Scilly was a location long overdue for a visit.

It was a decision that rewarded us with one of our most enjoyable holidays.

The flight from St. Just (Land's End) airport by Skybus Airways Islander aircraft takes just twenty minutes and flying at 1500' the traveller can enjoy impressive views of Land's End, an endless sea-scape and, finally, the beauty of the islands themselves as the aircraft approaches to touch down on St. Mary's, the largest of the island group.

A short time before take-off we had been alerted to the possibility that something was 'on' when an animated group of 'twitchers' burst into the departure lounge desperately attempting to find seats on the already booked flight and harass the airline staff to find a spare pilot for a special charter trip. They were still hard at it as we walked out to board our plane

The October weather was overcast but mild as we set out after lunch on our first tour of exploration. In the main street, to our surprise, we encountered our 'twitcher' friends from the airport who had somehow managed to make the journey. In fact their ranks had swelled considerably with the arrival of several dozen more green camouflaged kinsmen all excitedly heading for the harbour. What was happening? An amiable Bill Oddie look-alike informed us that a 'first' for the British Isles had been sighted on neighbouring Gugh. It was, he disclosed, a two-barred, greenish warbler from Thailand blown away from its customary migratory flight to North Africa by unusually violent gales in Central Europe. Fittingly, perhaps, there was a marked deterioration in the day's weather as we set out

Squashed into the scuppers of an elderly craft little larger than a Titanic lifeboat we pitched and rolled through buffeting seas and frequent spray drenchings to St. Agnes. After disembarking, we followed a small army plodding across the narrow shingle causeway, passable only at low tide, linking St. Agnes to neighbouring Gugh, an island bearing marked similarity to tracts of remote Scottish moorland.

Tiptoeing into a tiny tree-encircled glade we claimed a spot between rows of tripod-mounted telescopes and tensed bodies as an unnatural silence settled over the area.

Suddenly an arm pointed excitedly to a lower branch of a dense shrub. Focussing our binoculars in the murky light we caught our first glimpse of this rare migrant, a tiny sparrow-sized bird proudly displaying its olive and buff plumage with the distinctive white wing bars. For half an hour we watched it flitting tantalisingly from branch to branch of the surrounding trees as confusion spread amongst the 'twitchers' when one expert remarked that it had only one and a half wing bars on one side! As the weather took a turn for the worse, this seemed an appropriate time to return to the boat!

Although there were sightings of two other rare species on the islands, during our stay, we did not feel inclined to join the 'twitchers' again, preferring to explore the islands and bird spot at leisure. However, we must admit to a certain satisfaction at our good fortune in being privileged to glimpse this most unexpected visitor from a distant continent. Among the birds we saw, were, black red starts, a hawfinch and red rumped swallows. The red rumped swallows being recorded in the 'Daily Telegraph' as follows:-

Hard to swallow

Experts are puzzled by the invasion of 30 rare red-rumped swallows. They nest in the Mediterranean and, until now, fewer than 100 had been seen in Britain. Disorientation of the birds' migratory instinct, causing them to fly north instead of south, is suspected.

NOW THAT SPRING IS HERE by Alan Heath

March is not the type of Month to tempt us into the field for the sodden ground makes walking difficult, but the true nature lover does not mind. He is eager to be afield and note with interest the many signs of reawakening nature.

We may not be able to see the roots at work but they have begun to function, buds begin to swell and the pussy willows are commencing to show their furry coat. Ponds and streams respond to the warm influence of the spring sun and activity of frogs is noticed and the presence of their spawn. Whirligig beetles are lured from the mud and they can be seen to frequently dive. When they do they carry down with them a bubble of air. It is not entirely dependent on the supply of oxygen that it takes down, but can replenish the supply from the water, up to a point. To replace the oxygen used, more oxygen from the water passes into the bubble and the nitrogen is forced out. Since oxygen diffuses into the bubble three times as fast as nitrogen is expelled, the net result is that the available supply of oxygen becomes thirteen times that originally taken down.

April is not simply the month of early spring flowers and blossoming poplars and elms but is also the month when many insects emerge from their winter retreats. Ladybird beetles come out of retirement and search for food and the bumblebees we see in April are queens, the only survivors of last year's colonies. Most of the moths and butterflies that appear in early spring are small and dull coloured but there are exceptions such as the Large White. As worms, insects, snails and other small aquatic animals become abundant in ponds and streams, the fish, which were on short rations through the winter, feast and will begin to spawn. The female newt will lay her eggs one at a time under the stem or leaf of a water plant. Under the lens the eggs are found to be brown at one end, creamy or light green at the other.

Before the month is out, horsetails will shoot up in sandy and gravelly places, such as road sides and railway embankments. Although these plants do not seem to bare any resemblance to a horse's tail, the green vegetative shoots that follow later do so if we use a little imagination. Horsetails are of no economic value today but if we judge from fossil remains, they probably were at one time an important element of the flora of the earth. Like ferns and club mosses, they seem to have contributed their vegetative parts and spores to the formation of coal during the Carboniferous period. Since the grasses have not yet grown too high, we may see wolf spiders running over the ground. They may be seen dragging a tiny globular parchment-like affair covered with silken threads. This is the egg sac.

The official first day of spring is around the 21st March but it can be the day before of the day after at the time of the Vernal Equinox. The weather may not seem very spring like and we may have to wait quite some time to feel that the season is really on its way. Probably one of our first indicators of spring is the appearance of the cellandines and the violets. Violets are somewhat unusual in their floral structure and there are two kinds of flowers. The conspicuous flowers have five sepals, five petals and five stamens. The other less conspicuous flowers are produced lower down among the leaves. They bear rudimentary petals and are fertilized in the bud without the flowers opening and it is from these that the seeds are produced.

"When wake the violets, Winter dies; When sprout the elm-buds, Spring is near."

(Oliver Wendell Holmes)

DETAILS OF THE FOLLOWING NATURAL HISTORY SITES CAME INTO ALAN HEATH'S POSSESSION THROUGH SCHOOL AND HE THOUGHT THEY WOULD BE OF INTEREST TO MEMBERS

BREADSALL PRIORY, MOOR ROAD, BREADSALL, DERBY.

CONTACT:- DAVID COX TEL DERBY 832235
WITHIN THE STRUCTURE OF THE GOLF COURSE AND APPROACHED BY A DELIGHTFUL PATH
THAT FOLLOWS THE STREAM DOWN THROUGH WOODLAND, A LARGE POND, CURRENTLY HOLDING
MALLARD, MOORHEN AND DABCHICK, PROVIDES EXCELLLENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR BIRDWATCHING
AND POND DIPPING.

G.I.C., BROOK ROAD, BORROWASH, DERBY.

CONTACT:- N. PEPPER TEL DERBY 662451

AN INTERESTING SITE WITHIN INDUSTRIAL PREMISES AND ADJOINING THE OLD CANAL,
FEATURING A POND AND CONSERVATION AREA WHICH I FOUND ALIVE WITH GRASSHOPPERS AND
BUTTERFLIES AND A GOOD VARIETY OF BIRDS.

COTTAGE FARM, BREASTON, DERBY

CONTACT:- MR. M. SAIL TEL DRAYCOTT 4613/2368

IN AN AREA OF OTHERWISE RELATIVELY INTENSIVE AGRICULTURE THIS POND AND ASSOCIATED SHRUBBY CONSERVATION AREA, PROVIDES EXCELLENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR POND DIPPING AND BIRD WATCHING . ACCESS IS ACROSS A FIELD FROM FARM YARD.

BANKFIELDS FARM, DRAYCOTT, DERBYSHIRE.

CONTACT:- T.C. BARKER TEL DRAYCOTT 2154

CLOSE BY THE RIVER DERWENT AND NEAR TO A TYPICAL OX BOW LAKE, THIS POND SITED ALONG A BUSHY BROOK COURSE PROVIDES A HAVEN FOR A GOOD RANGE OF SPECIES IN THE MIDDLE OF INTENSIVE AGRICULTURAL LAND.

KINGS MILLS NATURE TRAIL, CASTLE DONINGTON, DERBY

CONTACT:- MR. J. SHIELDS TEL DERBY 810649

NEAR TO HISTORIC KINGS MILLS WITH ITS WATER WHEELS AND VIEWS OF THE TRENT A

FIRM FOOTPATH, OPEN TO THE PUBLIC AT ALL TIMES, PROVIDES A NATURE TRAIL THROUGH
52 ACRES OF MIXES WOODLAND, SOME OF IT OVERLOOKING THE RIVER. THERE ARE AMPLE
OPPORTUNITIES FOR BIRDWATCHING AND INTERESTING VARIETIES OF FUNGI ON THE FALLEN
TREES.

WINTER BIRD RECORDS

I am pleased to report that since my appeal at the AGM, records of bird sightings are now being handed in on a regular basis. All these are entered onto the master record and below is a summary of the more interesting ones.

Stan Eggleshaw

CORMORANT large numbers at Attenborough, as high as 143

in November and 160 on 24.12.87

BEWICK SWAN 2 on 2nd January at Attenborough

BARNACLE GOOSE 3/4 at Attenborough from Oct-Jan

MANDARIN DUCK l at Attenborough Nov-Dec

SMEW 2 drakes on 13.12.87 at Attenborough

SPARROWHAWK 1 Aston on Trent - Sept

BUZZARD 1 Attenborough - Oct

MERLIN 1 Male 14.10.87 1 Female 1.11.87 Attenborough

WATER RAIL 1 31.10.87, 3 Nov Attenborough

COMMON SANDPIPER 1 24.12.87

WOODCOCK 1 7.11.87

COMMON GULL 70 22.11.87 "

KINGFISHER 2 sightings in Jan in Breaston

BLACKCAP Male & Female sighted several times in January

at Bramcote garden.

