

Acton Park Nature Report Winter 2018/19

As we enter the second month of what has been to date a mild Winter I for one am counting down the days to Spring which each year heralds new birth in the trees, plants and birds that make Acton Park their home.

Trees: The leaves finally left the trees at the beginning of October during the second storm of the season leaving only the evergreen pine trees with foliage. However there is another 'evergreen' tree in Acton Park near the Acton Gardens entrance – the Lucombe Oak which at first glance looks like a common Oak.

The Lucombe Oak is a natural hybrid and was first spotted in 1762 when horticulturalist William Lucombe noticed that one of the saplings produced from a Turkey Oak acorn he had planted kept its leaves in winter. He later observed that these features occurred where both parent species grew, the Turkey Oak and Cork Oak. It is likely that this tree, along with many others in the park, were imported into Acton Park to show the wealth of the then owners in the 17th and 18th century.

The first blossom of the year will, as always, appear on one of the Cherry Plum trees near Jeffreys Road. Last year the first flower was on 11th March – I have a strong feeling that it may be earlier this year.

Lucombe Oak



Cherry Plum



Woodland Birds: Late Winter is always a very exciting time in Acton park for the ornithologists. The finches, tits, blackbirds and others are busily looking for accommodation and partners for what is their busy season. Early morning walks in Acton Park at this time of the year reveal the start of the dawn chorus – a sure sign that Spring is on the way.

Listen carefully and you'll hear that the Great-spotted Woodpeckers have returned to the park with their unmistakable, almost industrial drilling into the bark of the trees.



And then you may see a smaller bird, sometimes confused with a woodpecker, walking up and down the trunk of a tree with what seems little or no effort – the Nuthatch is the only British bird who can do this.



A relatively new resident in the park is a young Buzzard who spends its time, certainly during the early mornings, around the Gorsedd area. Take some binoculars, get there early and have a really good view of this common, yet magnificent bird.

Shrubs and Plants: The shrubs are sleeping soundly at this time of the year with very little sign of life. By the middle of March, however I predict that the Rhododendrons will be in flower and the dog roses will be close behind.

There is, as I write no sign of flowering from the numerous snowdrops around the Gorsedd stones - when they do flower during the next couple of weeks it will be well worth a walk around the path to look down onto the blanket of white. The crocus will soon follow suit – look out for the numerous colours particularly in sheltered spots.

The daffodils will be early this year – the ones around the outside of the bowling club are showing a faint yellow and will flower by the end of the month – if they do, this will be one of the earliest I have seen in Acton Park. Regardless they will be ready for St.David’s Day on 1st March.

Look carefully around the edges of the path around the Lucombe Oak and you’ll see the dark green shoots of bluebells poking their heads up – we’ll have to wait until May, however, for my favourite wildflower to bloom.



Lake Birds: There are as many Mallards on the lake at this time of the year as I’ve ever seen – around 70. This is due in no small part to ‘Peter the duckman’ who comes at least twice a day to feed them with top quality food. I have seen, whilst near the angler’s pier Peter’s car arriving at the Herbert Jennings car park and watched dozens of Mallard flying across the lake to the notice board area before he gets out – do they recognise the car? Or do they recognise the sound? - an amazing sight.

There are plenty of Moorhens but strangely only 2 pairs of Coots. There’s a possibility they’ve migrated to the Flash – we will know in March.

One of the most interesting sights this winter is the large group of Goosanders that has taken up residence on the lake – there are up to 20 – a mixture of males and females. In previous years there have been small groups who’ve roosted on the lake but flown off towards Borrás pools in the morning. This year, however, they remain throughout. I’m hopeful they may breed in the Spring.

Goosander male on left, female on right.

