



Winter Wildlife Newsletter

Birds

Migrant birds from the north will now join us for our relatively mild winters. Three whooper swans and four common scoters were seen on Tatton Mere in October signalling bird passage. The whooper swans pictured below, were photographed by a local Knutsford Ornithological Society member. Winter sees the increase of the number and species of wildfowl on the meres at Tatton with species such as goldeneye, wigeon and pochard seen regularly, they may be joined by the rarer smew or even a diver species.

Stonechats and meadow pipits overwinter with us and can be seen on the margins of the meres too.

Woodland birds now flock together to take advantage of food sources. Various tit species are joined by goldcrests, treecreepers, woodpeckers or even a possible overwintering warbler. The lack of leaves makes them easier to spot as they travel through the woodland in a noisy group. Now is the time to look for bramblings: this finch, closely related to the chaffinch, favours beech trees and beech avenue is a good place to look for them.

Over the winter months the Ranger team will clean out and repair our numerous bird boxes located around the estate, they are monitored annually and even though we are well blessed with natural nesting sites here at Tatton, most are used each year.

Special points of interest:

- Whooper Swans on Tatton Mere
- Deer rutting comes to an end
- Hazel coppice underway
- Annual Butterfly transect results
- Bat Box success



Winter Woodlands

Woodlands hold great value in winter, insects and amphibians hibernate over winter in leaf litter, under bark or in rotting logs. Berries, seeds, nuts, lichens and fungi are an available food source, critical for sustaining birds and small mammals through the leaner winter months. Fallen leaves and dead wood decompose slowly, releasing nutrients into the soil that will fuel spring growth.

During the winter months, the Ranger team and our volunteer team will undertake hazel coppicing in both Millenium Wood and Dog Wood – it is best done in winter when the trees are in their dormant phase. Coppicing is an ancient woodland management technique that was once used to provide a regular supply of timber and firewood. It involves felling trees at their base to create a ‘stool’ where new shoots will grow.

This is done on a 5/6 year rotation. New shoots will sprout up, providing manageable straight poles. We use these within Tatton primarily for hedging stakes, bean/pea sticks, hurdles and fencing materials.



Deer

As the mating season of the deer now comes to a close, the stags and bucks now enter a period of recovering energy stores and rest. The herds' priorities shift to surviving the harsher months, forming large groups and seeking shelter in attempt to stay warm. Supplementary feeding is provided safely by the Ranger team to sustain the herd as the availability of grazing starts to diminish. During Winter, both the fallow and the red deer undergo the moulting process. Whereby, they shed their summer coat and grow a thicker winter coat. Their winter coat has two layers; a hollow outer layer which traps heat, and a shorter dense underlayer, allowing the deer to stay warm throughout the winter months.

Annual Butterfly Results

During the colder months, UK butterflies enter a dormant stage, common overwintering practices include hibernation in piles of deadwood on the woodland floor, in ivy that can be commonly seen on many trees around the park, and in crevices in fence posts. This emphasises the importance of deadwood in a woodland habitat. Throughout the year, the Ranger team undertake weekly butterfly surveys to monitor trends and look at how we can adapt our practices to support any declining species. The Annual Cheshire and Wirral Transects report has recently been released which showed a great increase in number of individuals compared with the 2024 report, including the reappearance of several species and an exciting first record of purple hairstreak on the Tatton transect.



Bats

During Winter, the bats of Tatton will enter a state of hibernation, often referred to as torpor, where they seek out roosts in trees, buildings or many of the bat boxes around the parkland. These are monitored and cared for by South Lancashire Bat group. On the groups recent bat box checks they found 9 Soprano Pipistrelles in one box alone, and 2 Nathusius' Pipistrelles in another. This shows the importance of Tatton Park as a habitat for UK bat species, and the great work South Lancashire Bat group do to monitor their progress.

Compiled by Tatton's Ranger Team.