

BRIAN'S NATURE DAIRY FOR DECEMBER 2007

When the leaves are on the trees small birds are well concealed, and usually only betray their presence through their songs and calls. But the bare twigs of a cold December day provide no hiding place. This is one reason why birds band together into flocks at this time. Many pairs of eyes are on the lookout for danger, and their sharp alarm calls soon alert the rest of the flock. Likewise, when one of them locates a promising source of food the others are quick to join in. In this way they are enabled to glean enough food during a day when they need to be constantly active to stave off overnight starvation. Truly do they continuously live on a knife-edge.

Today, on the trunk of the lime tree at the end of my garden I caught sight of a flash of white. Binoculars revealed it to be a tree creeper, inching its jerky way diagonally up the trunk for all the world like an avian mouse. Its brown upperparts made it almost invisible, only the flash of white underparts as it edged its way around the trunk betrayed its presence. Every now and then, using its cobbler's awl of a bill, it would probe deep into cracks and crevices for a tiny morsel, perhaps a hibernating aphid or a silk-encased ball of spider's eggs. Or, with a deft flick of its head, it would remove a fragment of bark in search of anything edible concealed there. Quite often one of these little birds will join the bands of tits, as a sort of honorary, but temporary, member, as long as they remain in its territory. So while you are watching the tits as they swarm through your garden it is worth keeping an eye out for one of these quiet little gems.

Another brief visitor to the lime trunk was a great spotted woodpecker. Although I hear them often calling or drumming in springtime, from the much larger garden next door, they do not often honour me with a visit. This mainly black-and-white thrush-sized bird seems, unlike many other species, seems to be doing well in our country, and increasingly they are turning up in our gardens. No doubt some of you have them?

Jane, Dave and I are very busy at the moment. We are revising and hopefully vastly improving our website. Our ebay shop is doing well and we propose to put more items that we hope will interest you on it. For those not far away Brenda at the post office in Walgrave, near Kettering, is featuring a good range of our products. If you can visit you will find a warm welcome there.