

BRIAN'S NATURE DIARY FOR FEBRUARY 2007

One of the bonuses for being late with your diary this month is that I can seem to be on the ball with my weather assertions. Two realities result from this. The first is that an undeniably mild winter has abruptly hit us with overnight lows of -6°C (not unusual for this time of year, but feeling devilish cold after an unseasonably mild winter so far). The second is that I must apologise to you out there, with no real excuse for my tardiness.

On my reluctant journey into town yesterday I saw a young fox dead at the roadside, one of thousands of sad sacrifices to our obsession with being somewhere else at high speed. It is my guess is that thousands of these beautiful mammals die at our roadsides annually. And if this is true of foxes, the deaths of badgers due to roadkill could be in the tens of thousands annually. They die either as a result of our indifference or our carelessness. For my part I can honestly say that I have not knowingly killed a large bird or mammal whilst driving. But I never drive at more than 50mph and I am sure that many of my fellow motorists must feel like killing me if they are unlucky enough to end up behind me! No doubt white vanman and his ilk must be thinking that they would never get through the day if they were forced to drive at 50mph, and given the present system they are undeniably right. So maybe there is something wrong with a system that forces them to do this? Many years ago a researcher concluded that if you do not want to kill birds or mammals on the road you should drive everywhere at 35mph. Fat chance!

My garden birdfeeders have been little used this year, until the last few days that is. Fact is that if there is enough wild food to sustain our birds and small mammals, the food that we provide at garden feeders is of little importance. But when times is 'ard garden feeders make the difference between life and death. So keep the food coming, and if it is not used straight away, it is down to nature providing enough. Dave and Jane report the good news that the badgers are coming for their daily handouts, though they are not often seen. Dave has complained that something has been digging great holes in his lawn. I suspect this is the work of badgers. Because of the unseasonably mild weather to date, the worms have stayed in the upper soil layers (they usually go deeper to avoid frozen soil). Worms are favourite badger food, need I say more?

One reason my feeders appear less popular is that I have been taken over by an especially aggressive robin, which regards all feathered comers as being out to steal what is rightfully his. He perches on top of the feeders, daring any to come for a share. Over the past few days he has been taken down a peg or two by a female robin which has turned up and decided he should be her mate. His amorous attentions to her have given the other birds a chance.

Environmental hint of the month: those plastic milk containers from the supermarket make excellent plant pots. Just cut off the tops with kitchen scissors and recycle them. Punch a few holes in the bottom and you will have a small plant container that will last a season or two and can still be recycled.