

Account of Purley on Thames

Nature Notes 2006

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Michael King January - March 2006

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I am very pleased to report that Michael King has agreed to write notes on the natural history of Purley and surrounding areas for our Journal and the following are his first contributions - Editor.

January 2006

The weather patterns for this month have alternated from fairly mild temperatures and dry conditions to heavy frosts and cold winds. The flow of water in the Pang is very low for this time of the year. Our first walk of 2006 on a very bright but cold day was a round trip through the Sulham Valley ending at Beech Road. The woodlands are still in their winter dormancy. It is pleasing to see bulbs pushing their leaves above the soil, with the occasional flash of white from the snowdrops in local gardens, hopefully forecasting spring is just round the corner. Winter flowering shrubs are in full bloom. Regular sightings of deer grazing in the field between Purley Hall and the A329 and flocks of sheep feeding on the meadows bordering the Thames. Whilst working on the allotment I saw three birds of prey - Buzzard, Red Kite and Sparrow Hawk. These birds are now regular visitors to the valley.

February 2006

The month started on a mild note with the first substantial rain of the winter. Watched a Blackbird gathering nesting material and a pair of Robins eagerly hopping in and out of the ivy prospecting for a nesting site. The local squirrel was also collecting extra leaves for its dray - was this because it had the foresight that the temperatures would drop dramatically? Our walk along the Thames was in very foggy conditions limiting what we saw. Heard and saw Rooks gathering in the rookery at the top of Purley Lane and also below Home Farm. Saw several pairs of Great Crested Grebes and flotillas of Tufted ducks on the river. In the early hours of the 3rd we had three foxes on the lawn and around the pond. This month has been disappointing for wintering migrants such as Fieldfares, Redwings and Siskins. With all the snow and colder conditions further north one would have hoped to have seen these wintering birds. It has also been reported there have been less sightings generally of the Tit family around garden feeders. The cold temperatures have slowed down the growth of the emerging bulbs and early spring flowers.

March 2006

Most of this month has been very cold. We have heard frogs back in the pond to spawn on warmer nights only to disappear again as the temperatures have plummeted. A great deal of shrub clearance has been carried out on the railway embankments locally during the winter months. Unfortunately this will have taken away a great deal of natural habitat for birds and wildlife of the area, but the vegetation will re-establish over the next few years. This work has particularly opened up the view of the valley from the Roebuck pub looking towards the town. Counted 70 swans grazing these fields. The Rooks were very vocal in the rookery at the top of Purley Lane by the traffic lights. Some pairs still building, but one or two of the nests had sitting birds. The temperatures rose at the end of the

month, which has brought more colour to the gardens with the opening of the spring flowers. Green shoots can now be seen on some trees and shrubs. Nature responding to warmer days and daylight length.

Noted in the winter edition of Upstream, newsletter of the Pang, Kennet and Lambourne Valleys Countryside Projects, signs of otters have been found in the Thames catchment of both the Kennet and Loddon rivers. It is hoped in time otters may be seen in our part of the valley.

