

SFPT November 2016 report for Fromus Meadows

Hedgerow larders

Mid November in Fromus Meadows, and the sun is beating down from a cloudless sky. There is not a puff of wind, and the Fromus river is bubbling and chuckling again, after its long dry spell. The hedgerows are at their best right now for all the birds raiding the larder before the cold weather arrives. There are many redwings picking off the juicy, bright red hawthorn berries, and quiet cluckings from the depths of the hedges pinpoint hidden blackbirds working hard to claim what is rightfully theirs before the pushy Scandinavians eat the lot. Actually, research by the British Trust for Ornithology proves that over 10% of the autumn and winter blackbirds we see in our gardens and the countryside hail from the continent – and they are fractionally larger, as well.



The blackberries are long gone, but there are plenty of postbox-red rosehips available on the menu, and also seeds for the goldfinches zipping overhead. The dull black, hard berries of ivy are irresistible to woodpigeon, although they appear to be the least appetising food in sight. I am being watched by beady black eyes: a grey squirrel in the crotch of an oak is frantically chewing his way through an acorn, and almost certainly he has planted many others around the tree as a supply of winter food. At last – a flower! A single yellow bristly ox-tongue recalls the vibrant flood of summer flowers that swept through the meadows not so long ago. The Circular Pond reflects the sky, and is full of floating pondweeds and water plantain.



I have come here to meet new arrivals to the reserve, and I can see plenty of evidence that they have settled in and are very happy in the meadows. And here they are – a small herd of native British White cattle carrying out their role in the management of the reserve, by eating grass and rough herbage to improve habitats for the flora next year. Basically white all over, with black ears, black feet and a big black muzzle, they are a polled – hornless – breed, and friendly and very curious: I am having to stand well back to fit them in my camera viewfinder. Cowpats are all over the place – a valuable new habitat for many invertebrates. Saying goodbye to the girls, I head for home. Near the gate, I suddenly remember the delicious golden bullaces on trees beside the track to the A12. Will the birds, wasps and squirrels have eaten them? No! There they are, and just within reach. Mmmmm.



Laurie Forsyth