

View from The Southwood Garden February 2018

It's amazing what you see when you look ...



"The only moving thing Was the eye of the blackbird"

From *Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird* by Wallace Stevens
Last month we took part in the RSPB's Big Garden Birdwatch. We spotted 4 species of birds. I did another watch at a church in Camden and saw 14 species. Should we be disappointed? No. We should celebrate the ecology we have and take a closer look. Our pair of blackbirds has been with us for several years and the garden is their territory. They follow me around if I am turning the soil, hoping for worms – they are ground feeders. They've nested in the yew trees at the back of the border and in the bay as they like low and dense vegetation. Blackbirds rear two to three broods a year. Food availability can be a problem, particularly in dry weather, so we will provide a reliable source of food and water for them and their chicks.



As part of St James's bid for a gold Eco Church rating, we are exploring a number of eco friendly initiatives in the garden including a small containerised **pond and bog garden** – more info next month.

Snow Patrol!

We've been experiencing an extreme cold snap. In contrast, this time last year the temperature was unseasonably



warm, with daytime highs of up to 14°C. The warmth and humidity last year led to fusarium patch or 'snow mould' appearing on our newly laid turf. By mowing the grass we let the air in and so increased the ventilation and this seemed to do the trick. Temperatures in urban centres are usually several degrees higher than the suburbs and countryside.

Whiter Shade of Pale

Can you guess the church grounds where Procol Harum filmed their classic 'A Whiter Shade of Pale'? The song's tenuous



connection to our garden is that I noticed one of the hardy fuchsias next to the caravan has produced a flower which is a pale shadow of its normal pink self. Similarly last year I noticed the bright purple Clematis viticella 'Venosa villosa' produced bleached flowers in November. I rang the RHS to find out why. The lack of colour, they explained, was due to low light and heat levels. I asked if I should remove the flowers to preserve the plant's energy for its normal flowering season but they said no. Once the flower buds are formed, the energy has been spent and there's no benefit in removing them.

Coming out this month

Camellia x williamsii 'Donation' (right); Helleborus x hybridus (many of which were kindly donated by one of the caravan's counsellors); the periwinkles Vinca major, V. major 'Variegata', V. minor 'Gertrude Jekyll'; Cyclamen coum; Crocus 'King of Striped'; and Rhododendron 'Christmas Cheer'; even a



pelargonium has coughed up a dark red blob of a flower. As bulbs and perennials begin to stir, the earth has a surface tension of expectancy. It's exciting to think what will emerge in March.

Thanks to Chris Davies for photography