

## February

Sally always says that February should be banned! Well, this has been a gloomy one, the **dullest** on record for **50 years**. This is confirmed by the relatively poor performance of our **photo-voltaic panels**. Although the total for the 28 days was **66.5Kw/hrs** (our largest 4 year old one contributing **42Kw/hrs**), on some days, they barely managed to generate one or two Kw/hrs. The weather station at **Filton** ([www.martynhicks.co.uk](http://www.martynhicks.co.uk)) only recorded **40.8 hours of sunshine**, and significantly less than in January (nearly 50 hrs). rainfall for the month was 58mm, making it a rather dry one. In fact, the UK's winter rainfall was apparently 22% below normal. Another rather surprising statistic is that, despite the brutal freeze in December and January, the winter has proved to be a relatively warm one! It was, according to the Meteorological Office, only 15<sup>th</sup> coldest in the last century. In fact, the average was raised by this month's relative warmth. **February's** average temperature in **Filton** was **7.6degs C**. Shivering in **Leigh Woods**, I would hardly credit the fact that this month was the **9<sup>th</sup> warmest February since 1910**. So, to summarize, the month was dreary, warm and dry! Being busy in my study for much the last four weeks, I have little to report on except what turned up in the garden.

The occasional **Brambling** turned up in the garden to feed with the **Chaffinches** and at last, a **Blackcap** took up residence in the bushes outside the kitchen, causing much aggravation among the other birds coming to feed. It first arrived on the **15<sup>th</sup>** and stayed was still here as I write this on the **5<sup>th</sup> March**.



**A**      **bove:** Our cock **Blackcap** taken on the **17<sup>th</sup>** February perched on a dogwood.



A couple of days later, up to 4 **Siskins** started to visit the niger seed feeder. On the **left** are two nicely marked cocks – the first to arrive. This species always tends to appear well after Christmas. Some years, they are absent.

The 4+ **Goldfinches** that come to the feeder are quarrelsome enough between themselves but they are dominant over the slightly smaller **Siskins** that have to await their turn to access the tiny, oily black niger seeds.



**Right:** A hen **Siskin** – streaky grey but with a couple of very pale yellow wing bars and a streak of yellow on the rump.



On the afternoon of the **20<sup>th</sup>**, after I had had a day in the garden, I came across this **Tree Creeper (left)** clinging to the trunk of one of our small birch trees. It looked very fluffed and seemed oblivious of my presence. I had seen one in our garden the previous day, but it was too active to get a picture. However, on this occasion, I rushed indoors to get a camera and took several shots of it. I then approached to within a foot or two, and it suddenly 'woke up', took a couple of shuffles up the trunk and flew off. Was it dozing or had it

devoured an unpleasant tasting insect? Who knows. But apart from ringing a couple when I was a youth, I had never been as close as this to a **Tree Creeper**.



**Left and below:** We get a visit from 'the Kinglet'! On the 27<sup>th</sup>, a **Goldcrest** started appearing on our wall feeding station. This, the smallest of our **British Birds** at 3.5 inches, it makes even Coat Tits look large. By rights, this is the species that ought to have adorned our *farthing* instead of the **Wren**. For those bought up on decimal coinage, I have included a picture of this dinky copper coin, 4 of which, made a **penny** when it was worth something!



We have always had **Goldcrests** in the vicinity of our house, but they have generally kept high up in the conifers where one could hear their very high pitched calls and song – alas long lost to my ears. In fact, the older you get, the more difficulty you have in registering their voice. If you can hear them when you are over 50, you still possess a good set of ears! However, one of our near neighbours have always watched **Goldcrests** in their garden. So it was very pleasing that, at last, this diminutive warbler-like bird has descended from the trees to where we can see it properly. It comes down several times a day, resorting with the **Tits**, and **Robins**, and, during the first few days of March, was waiting for me to put out the crumbs early in the morning.

The **North Americans** honour their related species with a much more fitting name – instead of the straight forward, descriptive **Goldcrest**, they call their's the **Golden-crowned Kinglet**.

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