

## NOVEMBER 2007

With this part of the country dominated by high pressure for the first part of the month, Autumn colours, once a feature of October, were at their best well into this month. The foliage of the great **Beeches** in **Leigh Woods** were ablaze with copper and gold. The transforming of sugars in the



dying leaves into colourful pigments before they fall – but not in the **Ash** – is one of our annual natural treats.



I saw little evidence of a good crop of mast this year – a bonanza of food enjoyed by many birds at this time of the year. I had thought otherwise because our bird feeders were generally deserted by **Chaffinches** and tits during this period and this is often an indication of good feeding in the woods. Whatever they had found, it was not predominantly **Beech** nuts!

Not that our garden has been bereft of birds. The acorns on our small

Oak are collected not only by **Grey Squirrels**, but also by **Jays**. And if these exotically coloured members of the crow family tire of them, they attack the peanuts in the tit feeders. I was watching a pair the other morning and was interested to see that each bird had its own preferred way of getting an easy snack. One always leant across from a nearby branch to nibble the nuts while his more acrobatic mate clung onto the feeder like the **Nuthatches** and tits do. I managed to photograph the two birds through the window of my study.



One **Jay** takes peanuts this way ..... and the mate tackles them like a **Blue Tit**.



Our bird feeders are all squirrel-proof except this one. Although distressed by many of these rodents (look at the base) the **Greater Spotted Woodpeckers** and **Nuthatches** love it (left).

Every year, I mean to 'get to grips' with fungi, and every year I seem to miss the peak time for fungus forays. As usual, great clusters of **Honey Fungus** were evident in the woods and on the verges of Leigh Woods. By the time I resorted to photography, they were well past their best (right). Lethal to weak or damaged trees, *Armillaria* is a widespread species and is famous for the size its underground network of deadly threads can reach: a honey fungus living in California ramifying through 35 acres is estimated to weigh 10 tons (equivalent to two bull elephants) and is perhaps 500 years old.



A fallen **Birch** branch I came across in Leigh Woods was covered by these tiny parasols of what I take to be *club fungi*. Others had bright orange tips but I had no camera to record them.

The 'rotten world about us' - of death and decay is just as interesting as the living one!

During this month, our main trip has been to **Spain** – see [Cranes in Spain](#) under Bird Logs on this website. I am also occasionally called to the **Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust** at Slimbridge to do a bit of ‘volunteering’ – i.e. taking guided parties around. I have been twice this month and make no excuse for including the odd note here because it is a really important nature reserve of international importance on our own doorsteps. Furthermore, between *now and March is the best period to visit it* when a high tide occurs during the middle of the day.



On the 22<sup>nd</sup> November, the Mute Swans were very flighty; above, the take-off run. The next day, the crystal clear sky gave wonderful light to show off the colours in the collection. Spot the odd one out. A Carolina Wood-duck amidst drake Mallards.





(Left) A drake **Pintail** preening and a drake **Tufted Duck** 'pretends' to be asleep! (below)

Both are winter visitors from Scandinavia and are so easy to approach at Slimbridge.



There were 1500-2000 **Wigeon** grazing on the pastures along with **Canada, Barnacle, Grey-lag,** and **White-fronted Geese**. Large flocks of Lapwing were in evidence, and a **Bittern** had been seen from the Zeiss Hide. 50-60 **Bewick Swans** came in for the feeding at 16.00hrs.  
(Below) **Canada Geese**.



November started with colour, so I will end it with a splash of flaming pink of **Caribbean Flamingos** taking their final feed of the day as the setting sun throws a last shaft of light over them. Like all flamingos, to achieve their full glorious plumage in captivity, their food has to be laced with an anthocyanin pigment which replaces the planktonic plant pigments which they would normally take in with their crustacean and algal food in the wild.



..... and a November butterfly. A slightly worn **Red Admiral** basks in the weak November sunshine on the southern side of our house. The air is chilly but the insect's dark body absorbs the sun's energy and so keeps its flying muscles working.

**DAVID DAVIES** from **Abbot's Leigh** reports that no birds are taking his **nyjer** seed this year? The feeder full of tiny, black oily seeds was a top favourite, but the contents stay uneaten while sunflower seed and peanuts go quickly. He continues: I hope to attract **Siskins** and **Redpolls** which I have previously recorded taking **nyjer** seeds (see photo I took last year).



A month or two ago I bought a tray to fit under the sunflower seeds to keep the husks from building into an unpleasant pile below. However, I now find pigeons using it to perch on, and the seeds go practically overnight!

Somewhere recently I saw that **Blue Tits** have had a rotten year for breeding. It's not



evident in our garden. They are definitely the most numerous visitors. Also it's gratifying to see quite regularly at least two coal tits. Jays are frequent on the nuts and so, lately, has been a female **Great-spotted Woodpecker** - happily these larger visitors, although monopolising food when present, don't stay for very long, and the **Greenfinches**, **Great Tits** and others move in again the moment they're gone.

**Blackcaps** are becoming more frequent in the *cordyline* outside our sitting room window. They seem to love the white berries, and I suspect they also roost in there.



**Moorhens** seem to have multiplied on **Abbots Pool**. I've been aware of five for many weeks - but only four last week. In previous years I've not noticed more than two. The light on the pool - slanting rays of sunlight - can be magic at this time of year.

