

Account of Purley on Thames

Winter in Sulham Woods

R200390 22/10/2017

By Bill Fisher written in 1980s

The tree sap is down and bereft of leaves the trees stand almost as sentinels, silently guarding their domain. The rigours of the season are not so pronounced as in latter years.

Nostalgic memories of the winters of 1938, 39, 40 are recalled when snow settled for several weeks; cycling to work as a 14 year old electrical apprentice through the roads with snow reaching up to the hubs of the cycle and arriving at work frozen and almost crying with the cold. I have since marvelled at farmers invariably requesting their electrical work to be executed during the winter months. The frozen Thames also indicative of the severity of the winters during this period. However I digress.

A mantle of hoar frost insidiously clothes the landscape, some arable land remains locked, Sadlers Pond, ice covered deprives duck and moorhen of their natural habitat although sedge and reed provides minimum sustenance, they disappear presumably to canal and river. I recall as an 11 year old knocking on Rev Henry Wilder's door at the old Rectory just prior to the approach of winter, soliciting permission to gather chestnuts in Sulham woods and receiving a signed chitty granting permission which could be presented if approached by the gamekeeper or any other estate worker.

My foraging paled into insignificance when pitted against the industrious squirrel. Throughout the winter months the squirrel may still discover occasional beechnut or chestnut. Wild life maintains a precarious existence. Rabbits abound, seemingly impervious to the cold. Birds fail to sing and of necessity deprived of normal sustenance some gravitate to the urban environment for scraps. The sensible hedgehog and dormouse hibernates. The miniature wild life, ensconced beneath the bark of fallen trees, although protected from the elements are not always protected from their arch enemy predators and in the battle for survival will need to penetrate to the cambrian layer of their host.

Pheasant, partridge and duck liberally supplied with their favourite food during the summer and early Autumn now fall prey to the guns. It is sad but when one cogitates that a clutch of pheasant or partridge eggs approximate to 18 and duck 8-10, without some form of culling, would by their very multitude ensure many of the birds death by starvation. I do not affirm a brief for or against. Some birds have already retreated to warmer climes to weather the winter and run the gauntlet of the guns en-route across Europe.

However the miracle of nature ensures that notwithstanding the scarcity of food, all creatures of the wild, in their majority may survive the exigencies of the winter months. Occasionally a white carpet envelopes the land which, although of short duration, creates a veritable Christmas wonderland with trees and hedgerows adorned or sparkling white. A stillness reigns supreme, the Sul meanders its tranquil way to the Thames, seemingly unaffected by winter. As I traverse the woods and fields I can sense, but not see...

sorry folks - the last page is missing

