

Comings and Goings

We can expect to see some of our winter visitors soon putting in an appearance. **Redwings** and **Fieldfares** are both members of the thrush family. The Redwing is our smallest true thrush while, conversely, the Fieldfare is a very large thrush. Both love fruit and berries as well as insects and you can see them flocking across the fields or landing in the hawthorn hedgerows. Both will leave in April/May. We may also be visited by the beautiful **Waxwings** if the berry crop in their wintering grounds of Scandinavia and Siberia is low. Our resident **Blackbird** numbers are often boosted by winter migrants as are **Starlings**. Recent sightings of a flock on the Marina have been a real bonus. On the going side of things **Swallows**, **Swifts** and **Martins** and most of our **Warblers** will soon be heading back to their winter quarters. However, an increasing number of **Chiffchaffs** are now staying all year round probably due to the country's warming climate which means the birds can survive the winter here. Not easy to distinguish visually but the song is a giveaway as it repeatedly calls its own name.

Hibernation

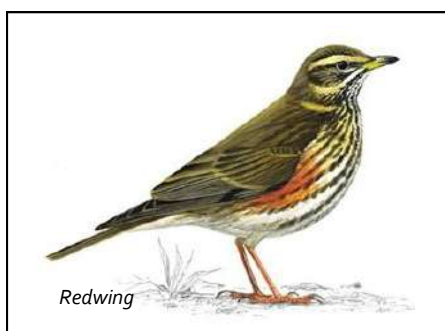
The only animals in the UK which truly hibernate and we know we have at the Marina are **Bats** and **Hedgehogs**. Bats will do so in their normal roosting places and wrap themselves in their wings. Hedgehogs prefer to make underground nests. Favourite sites are under hedges and roots of trees, in piles of brushwood, inside compost heaps or in old rabbit burrows and underneath timber buildings and sheds. All our other mammals Voles, Shrews, Mice etc. remain active all year and are of course vital food sources for Owls,



Mercia's Autumn Watch

etc. which not only provide a home but also are an essential food source. Fungi is often viewed as dangerous, magical and mystical and only concerned with decomposition but is fascinating in all its bewildering forms and is vital to the wellbeing of our trees creating great support networks helping trees to thrive and survive. The fruiting bodies of fungi make a tasty meal for the wildlife. Squirrels store them high up in the trees to munch on through winter. You can often spot teeth marks from voles and other rodents as they gnaw at them.

other birds of prey and larger mammals. Red Admiral, Tortoiseshells and Peacock **Butterflies** are regular hibernators inside houses and sheds and occasionally under boat covers. If you find any please just leave them alone. However, if there are



Redwing

any old spiders' webs nearby, clear them away so the butterfly doesn't become entangled when it wakes.

In The Undergrowth

Of vital importance to invertebrates of all kinds are the leaf litter, dead grasses,

The Nature Society will still be selling bird seed, fat balls etc. and nest boxes and feeders. If you want anything get in touch with Jane Wakeham on 07469 256447 or email janetavis@aol.com

What Can We Do To Help

In most cases it is best to leave well alone with a few notable exceptions. Especially hedgehogs. If anyone sees them out in the winter particularly during the daytime it is important to contact Hedgehog groups or wildlife rescue as soon as possible. It is illegal to disturb bat roosts and comes with a hefty fine. If done deliberately it can lead to imprisonment. Dead plants, leaves and fallen branches should be left where they fall, unless a safety risk.

We are all far too fond of keeping things 'neat and tidy' but this has very little benefit to wildlife if any at all.

Probably the most beneficial impact we can have on wintering wildlife is bird feeding and the constant provision of clean water for them to drink and wash in. Most importantly get out there to watch and enjoy the changing seasons. Clear up and don't leave any litter. Keep an eye open for animals in distress and as is often quoted 'Only leave footprints and only take away memories'. Remember that nature has its own balance and cycles of life and we need to respect that.

Jane Wakeham



Mercia's Pumpkin Challenge

It's that time of year again, and this Halloween your challenge is to carve, paint, decorate or dress your pumpkin, and then put it on display on your boat or lodge and take the best picture of it that you can (or ask for help) and send it to: tony@merciamarina.co.uk. Everyone can vote for their favourites in the adult and children's categories and categories for presentation and creativity. Hopefully some of these images will inspire you.



Where can I get one from?

Pumpkins can be delivered the next day from our local Field Supplies (a 'monster' priced at £2.35, 'large' at £1.99 and 'medium' at £1.75). Or have a trip up to Scaddow's Farm and pick your own.

What do I do with the insides?

(Put your fresh left over flesh into dishes for the wildlife – squirrels, foxes, badgers and birds will be delighted (it will be too tasteless and stringy to eat yourself – unless you get a small 'culinary' pumpkin). Dry the seeds before putting them out for the birds (10 minutes @ 180 degrees).



Pete Hick's Memorial Fishing Match

It was a wonderful tribute to Pete that so many people joined and supported the Memorial Fishing Match on Saturday, 26th September. With everything properly socially distanced, bacon baps were delivered to the fisherfolk at their stations at the beginning of the match and burgers a welcome snack at the end. It was a lovely occasion and the photographs speak for themselves. Sue Hicks was delighted to be able to present £425 to Pete's charity – our local Air Ambulance.

Left: Lee & Mark present Gail Limming with the winner's prize for the heaviest catch.

Centre: Sue Hicks receives the donation from Nigel Hunt for the local Air Ambulance in memory of Pete.

Right: Beatrice delivers the bacon baps to Keith Griffiths.

2020 UK winner
WORLD GOURMAND
COOK BOOK AWARD
FOR FOOD TOURISM



"A Foodie Afloat"

This is Di Murrell's second book (the first "Barges and Bread" will be explored and reviewed in next month's Mercury). To quote her:

"[A Foodie Afloat is] the story of a cook's journey through France on a barge. As the landscape changes so too does the cuisine and the wine. Bought in the market, dug from a lock-keeper's garden, even foraged along the towpath beside the waterway, the food I find and cook is always seasonal and local to the region. The boating life, though rarely sensational, is full of small events and chance encounters. This, I hope, is an enticing story of slow boats and slow food brought to life. I hope it will appeal

to those who dream of boating off into the sunset as well as those who nurse a special interest in food and wine in all its guises."

Tam and Di started carrying freight on the canals around 1970. You'll see them in the photograph "all that hair sort of gives the game away as to when this photo was taken - long, long ago, during our happy-hippy days. At the time we were working a pair of English canal boats and in the picture we are seen loaded with barrels of unprocessed lime pulp, heading up the Grand Union Canal to L. Rose and Sons wharf at Hemel Hempstead.

It was also on these long trips across England, that I learned the value of slow food cooking. A pot of something deeply



unctuous, gently bubbling away, left to its own devices for long periods of time, would act as a spur to keep us going through rain and snow and fog, knowing

that we would be devouring our delicious dinner mere minutes after we had tied up for the night. Once on the move, I was either steering the butty or lockwheeling ahead of the boats, so there was little time to attend to niceties of cooking. Oh - but we did have some cracking meals then."

The book is a wonderful read. Chapters lead with a superbly written guide to where they are, what food can be foraged or is given, local food producers and the changes wrought by time which see the once bustling locks and canalsides becoming all-too-frequently quiet backwaters. Then follows a collection of recipes linked to the food just gathered – tasty, seasonal foods with a tempting twist or two. It's had me looking at self-drive barge holidays in Burgundy and start planning.

[A Foodie Afloat by Di Murrell, Troubadour Publishing. ISBN: 9781838593513]

◆ AROUND THE MARINA ◆



Bins On Fire

During September The Veolia Recycling Lorry had a fire as a consequence of collecting waste at the recycling bin by Avocet pontoon.

Someone had disposed of an automotive battery in the bin. As it was being compacted, the plates touched which causes a short circuit and that set off a fire. The fire alarms in the cab went off and the entire load had to be dumped.

Whoever did this should know that it is against the law to dispose of automotive

batteries precisely because of this sort of danger. It was unbelievably stupid behaviour when, only a few steps away, Streethay would have taken it for safe disposal. And scrap yards will pay for them. Whoever is identified as doing this can be fined up to £5,000.

Walk in aid of Prostate Cancer UK

Tony Haslam's walk from Preston Brook



to Shardlow starts on Sunday 6 October. The quickest way to give is either to click

on www.justgiving.com/fundraising/tony-haslam1 or drop a donation into the Office. Give what you can for a very important cause and a great effort from Tony and friends.

Boat Moves

The boat moves (for residential moorings only) will happen in October. Most

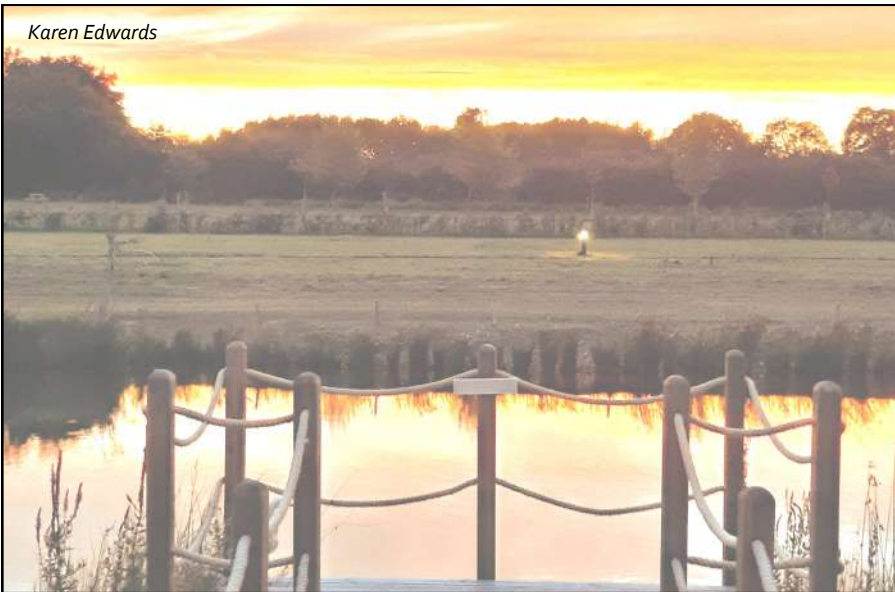


pontoons tend to have a system worked out so if you arrived in the Marina within the last few months, ask your neighbour or your Pontoon Rep. for more information.

Please make a note of the date you move; this is needed by the Office so it can be recorded against your boat's name for the official records.



Rebecca Parker



Karen Edwards



Lee Gallagher

August's Photography Competition Winners

Congratulations to Karen Edwards, Rebecca Parker and Lee Gallagher for their late-summer inspired images.

Each receives either a bottle of Prosecco or a box of chocolates from the Marina Office.

If you are out and about around the marina with your camera and take a photograph you think merits inclusion in the Mercury, submit your entries to tony@merciamarina.co.uk

HANDS

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SPACE

Covid-19

A message from Robert Neff
(General Manager & Partner)

When the *Mercia Mercury* is distributed, we may have been given new guidelines or information about new restrictions. But I imagine we'll all need to continue to behave as carefully, courteously and aware as we have been through throughout most of this year – self-distancing, avoiding close contact, going out only for essential journeys, necessary shopping trips and exercise.

I would also hope that we have basics in the store cupboard and have the information we need for local shopping and supermarket deliveries. We've shown what a wonderful community we can be; make sure this continues through the winter months and that no one is feeling alone on their boat or in their lodge, no one is worrying about an errand that needs to be run and no one misses out on daily conversations even if it is through windows, open doors, on Zoom or over a phone!

And – most importantly – to ask for help or support from friends, neighbours and the Marina. It seems as though we're in for a difficult winter so do take care of yourselves and each other.

HANDS

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**Our thanks to
Midland Chandlers
for their support with
this newsletter**

