

## The Cold Spell

This didn't really get under way until January but sharp frosts in December did get some birds moving with two Goosanders present at Harrold on the 10<sup>th</sup> and small numbers of Lapwing hurrying south on Boxing Day. The first snow appeared on the 5<sup>th</sup> January with a bitter north wind. This didn't stop Sparrowhawk displaying over Abbey Park and 50 Fieldfare were still to be seen at the bottom of the garden. The 7<sup>th</sup> January produced the extraordinary sight of Wood Pigeons taking it in turn to alight in the centre of the river at Harrold for splash and perhaps a drink, probably because most other water sources were now frozen. Images of doves over the Jordan come to mind! There was even a Woodcock in the garden on the 17<sup>th</sup>. These have been more frequent this winter than I can remember, perhaps because of severe weather further east. A brief mild spell brought our first Winter Moth to the door on the 25<sup>th</sup>.

Heavy snow on the 2<sup>nd</sup> February and again on the 6<sup>th</sup> really set things going. Ravens were seen in and around Abbey Park and there were reports of Waxwings and a Brambling visiting birdfeeders. The Waxwings are readily identifiable by their crests, reddish-buff colour, their sweet calls and yellow tips to wings and tail. Two were seen in the Abbey grounds on the 15<sup>th</sup> and singletons subsequently, but not by me! I've been waiting 37 years to see one, perhaps next year. Birdwatching in snow produces all sorts of strange sights – everything looks bigger and brighter: Kestrels turn into Lesser Kestrels, Sparrowhawks into Goshawks, Buzzards into Long-legged Buzzards and even Gulls become male Hen Harriers. Everything deserves a second look.

A walk from Harrold up onto the higher ground to the west was hard going because of the snow and the ice. There were markedly fewer birds than on a similar walk in December with very few ground feeding birds, as one might expect, but still lots of Crows and Tits. Most of the birds were concentrated on lower ground and especially round the villages, and many were in song. Once could hear Song Thrush, Chaffinch, Robin, Dunnock, Great Tit, and Collared Dove in full song on the 4<sup>th</sup> and Great Spotted Woodpecker drumming on the 8<sup>th</sup>. Coal Tit and Blue Tit have been in song subsequently with Goldcrest heard for the first time on the 19<sup>th</sup>. Milder weather has now set in and with it we've had two more species of moth: our first Pale Brindled Beauties and a Dotted Border, and an early Small Tortoiseshell today on the 21<sup>st</sup>. This last is probably pushing its luck. We haven't seen the back of winter yet!

Br. John