

The first newsletter of the New Year! Only 2012 doesn't feel new any more, the freshness and crispness has gone already. That's probably because it hasn't been cold enough for things to keep well, so the days have gone a bit limp.

I think the trees, in general, would prefer that it were colder. But the birds and the small plants, and probably the small animals too, are clearly delighted at the mildness of the winter. Our carp ark robin sings a long and lovely melody; I doubt that even a nightingale (a related species) could sing so beautifully. People talk about the songs of blackbirds, larks and thrushes, but to my ear, none compare with the robin. Everywhere in the wood, we see robins, there are dozens of them. That wonderful song is believed to be a challenge to other robins - "Keep Out of My Territory!" - but I think it's also that robins just love to sing. I don't believe people who say it isn't so: they don't know, because they can't prove a negative.

According to the RSPB, the robin is Britain's favourite bird. They like to feed on worms and insects, but they do also eat seeds and fruit, especially in winter. So whether we're digging the earth or scattering seed, the robins will come to us. We put bird seed on top of the containers throughout the winter, and are rewarded by the sight and sound of a host of small birds.

Maybe our carp ark robin sings the way he does because he presides over particularly rich territory; and, from his favourite vantage point on the top of a tall Western Hemlock, he can see a long way over the wood so he knows just how near his competitors are. Perhaps we should have other bird-feeding sites in the wood. If you're a regular visitor, perhaps you could bring a bird feeder and re-fill it with wild bird seed mix each time you come? It's all very well having nest boxes, but the birds need food as well as accommodation!

We're continually working on improving the food supply by opening up the wood and planting trees and shrubs to produce bird food, but this is a long term

strategy. It takes years for trees to grow big enough to bear fruit.

We've been spending a lot of time in the wood this month. There were wild winds at the beginning of the year and we got an urgent call to clear a triple spruce that had fallen across a path. In the space of an afternoon, it was reduced to logs and pine-scented chippings. We've already used the chippings to cover the bare ground around graves so that mourners don't get muddy feet at funerals. Nothing is wasted.

By the end of this month, we anticipate delivery

of our new picnic table and benches. We've levelled an area at the top of the footpath to the stream; this will be the picnic area, and it's designed to be accessible to wheelchair users. And of course we've been busy with our normal winter schedule - felling spruce, brashing, clearing and chipping, taking roots out, and planting native trees. Plus, of course, the regular repairs to the paths, which never stop.

On the last Sunday of this month, the 29th, we plan to pot up young holly trees and all volunteers are welcome. We intend to be in the wood from about 1 o'clock onwards. There will be hot drinks in mid-afternoon and I'm hoping the Apple Pie Fairy will contribute too. Do join us!

From 10am the following Sunday, February 5th, Bill Pywell will be hosting

another green woodworking day. This time he'll have some tools for sale, so if you want your own draw knife or side axe, bring some money!

We had a great time at his last session on New Year's Day, fortified by warm mulled wine, home-made soup, Christmas cake and chestnuts roasted on our pot-bellied barbie. Gwen's stool is almost finished now; what will she make next? Everyone is welcome to come and learn green woodworking with us. It's great fun - and free. But you'll have to bring your own lunch next time.

Bella



European robin,
Erithacus rubecula

