

NATURE WATCH

There will be a change in the air towards the end of the month that will send a little shiver through the leaves and the walker to remind us that the days are drawing in and autumn has arrived.

The house mouse, which has lived outside during the summer, will also be aware of the change and will now start to look for food indoors. Modern houses do not provide the right habitat so it will look for outbuildings where it will build a nest in well concealed cavities or under the floorboards. The house mouse has a brownish-grey colour while its cousin, the field mouse, is yellowish-brown with larger ears and a longer tail. The field mouse will be storing berries in its outside burrow for the winter months.



In late September last year I was walking in the Wolds around Rothwell and came across the wonderful sight of a hare nibbling some grass at the edge of a newly ploughed field. The ploughing had presumably destroyed its form and it had to move to the long grass in the periphery of the field. Its huge ears were alert for any sound but they had not picked up my presence as I remained transfixed in wonder at this creature that has inspired much folklore. In many traditions the hare represented the moon

goddess and was a symbol of fertility. Regrettably the hare is still persecuted for sport but it has a weapon in that its huge heart enables it to escape its predators in the chase.

I have a new bird table and feeder in my back garden but, as yet, it has had no visitors. This is not unusual for this time of year as there is abundant food elsewhere and many of the garden birds are keeping a low profile as they are moulting before they acquire their bright new autumn feathers. While moulting they are vulnerable to predators and they will stay well hidden. I expect that they will all be returning during this month. One of my garden pleasures is to



see a family of pied wagtails with their heads bobbing and their tails wagging as they rush through the grass looking for insects and occasionally jumping into the air to catch a wayward fly. The male is a distinguished black and white while the female is rather grey and the young have a brownish tinge.



In my youth I loved the sound of the corncrake in the evening after the work in the fields had finished. This was in the days of the horse-drawn hay and corn mowers which left the corncrakes nest unharmed. The introduction of the lower mowing tractors and the earlier cutting of hay for silage meant a sharp decline in the numbers of corncrakes but an RSPB-led project has seen some recovery. They are still common in the Hebrides and I believe there are millions in Russia.

Wasps are out and about this month. The young queens are looking for a mate and both sexes seek mates from other colonies. It is the queens that have stings and respond when people annoy them as they seek out the jam on the picnic table. By the time winter arrives all the old queens and the males will have died leaving the young queens to hibernate and build a new colony in the spring.



Oliver Castle



Oliver Castle



Jim Blaney

This is also the month for crane flies, or daddy-long-legs as we call them. They will live for only a couple of weeks during which they mate and the female will lay her eggs in the grass. While they cause no harm, their grubs eat the roots of the grass leaving brown patches on lawns which attract starlings that will eat them.



Jim Blaney

The forest fires last month are bringing home the seriousness of climate change to even the most sceptical observers. The city of St Augustine is the oldest continuously occupied city in the USA but has a growing problem: the city is increasingly flooded as the sea rises; while Miami, further south, is now in a flood zone. Maps on the internet show the effect of rising sea levels on a global scale and one I noticed had the North Sea lapping its shore at the east end of Welton.

Jack Falcon

