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## Bob Triffitt's Nature Watch

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Today is New Years Day and I've been out collecting hazel sticks for bean poles in the garden and also for one of my hobbies, which is making walking sticks to give to friends. I have been delayed this year because of the bad weather, which has affected both plants and animals in the countryside. In the garden the blossom of the winter jasmine and mahonia were severely damaged so we missed their beautiful colours; but when the snow melted it was lovely to see the snowdrops appear in abundance.

Our garden visitors have been many. In this cold weather, the search for food is very hard for our feathered friends and the fight for the damaged apples, collected in autumn and saved for the winter, is amusing to watch. The crows and magpies are so greedy they steal the apples and carry them away. To prevent this, and give other birds the chance of a feast, I've pinned them to the ground. The birds also enjoy fat balls, peanuts and birds seeds from the various feeders in the garden.

As I look out of our window today, I can see 14 blackbirds, a mistle thrush, crows, a chaffinch, magpies, blue tits, tree sparrows, field-fares, a flock of goldfinch and a wagtail. We had a bullfinch and a song thrush yesterday.

Walking by the river near the pump house the other day, I saw a lone swan sitting in a field - which suggests it has lost its mate, perhaps another result of the bad weather. This stretch of river is tidal and it has obviously overflowed recently, almost breaching the flood bank. The farmers must be grateful it was still intact. While on my walk I saw jays being very vocal, having a real argument, I am not sure why. As I returned home, there was a dog fox walking across the field opposite, quartering the ground looking for his next meal. He did not look as well as he did before winter set in.

### *Looking for food?*



*A stoat  
in the Wand Lane area  
(Photo: John Limbert)*

I am a keen angler and visit Barlow Common Nature Reserve each week, where I combine my love of fishing with my duties as a water bailiff. As I fish, I'm privileged to see lots of birds: tree-creepers and wood-peckers (both green and greater-spotted) as well as kingfisher, heron and buzzard. Last year a woodcock visited, which is unusual. During the year, beautiful flowers come into bloom, including four varieties of orchid and some unusual fungi are to be seen. To anyone interested in nature and the outdoors, Barlow is an excellent local amenity and well worth a visit.