Prestwood Nature
WINTER NEWS 2026

Conservation group for Prestwood Region including Great Missenden, the Hampdens, the Kingshills, North Dean and Speen

Issue 73 3 February 2026

Working together with nature



Prestwood Nature's Secretary writes…

I've been watching birds in my garden for many years, and a species new to our garden or the return of one I haven't seen for a while, always gives me a thrill. As we continue to work on making our garden more wildlife-friendly the birds are now as likely to be rooting around amongst the fallen leaves, drinking from the pond or eating from seed heads left for them as they are to be on the bird feeders. Over the years there have been some noticeable changes – greenfinches, which used to be common visitors, are now a rarity, and there are fewer woodpigeons, while long-tailed tits now crowd around the fat balls much more often and in greater numbers.



Long-tailed tits (Neil Craggs)

I look forward to the *Big Garden Birdwatch* as marking the point when gloomy January is almost over and signs of spring are really starting to show. Sometimes some of the regular species don't co-operate by showing up in my chosen hour, and it's just the ubiquitous tits and blackbirds that get counted. This year I was pleased that our two novelties of this winter, redwings and redpolls, both showed up to be counted, although our regular nuthatch did not. And, despite topping the *Birdwatch* poll most years, in almost 30 years of living in Little Kingshill I have still never seen a house sparrow in our garden!

Frances Rawle

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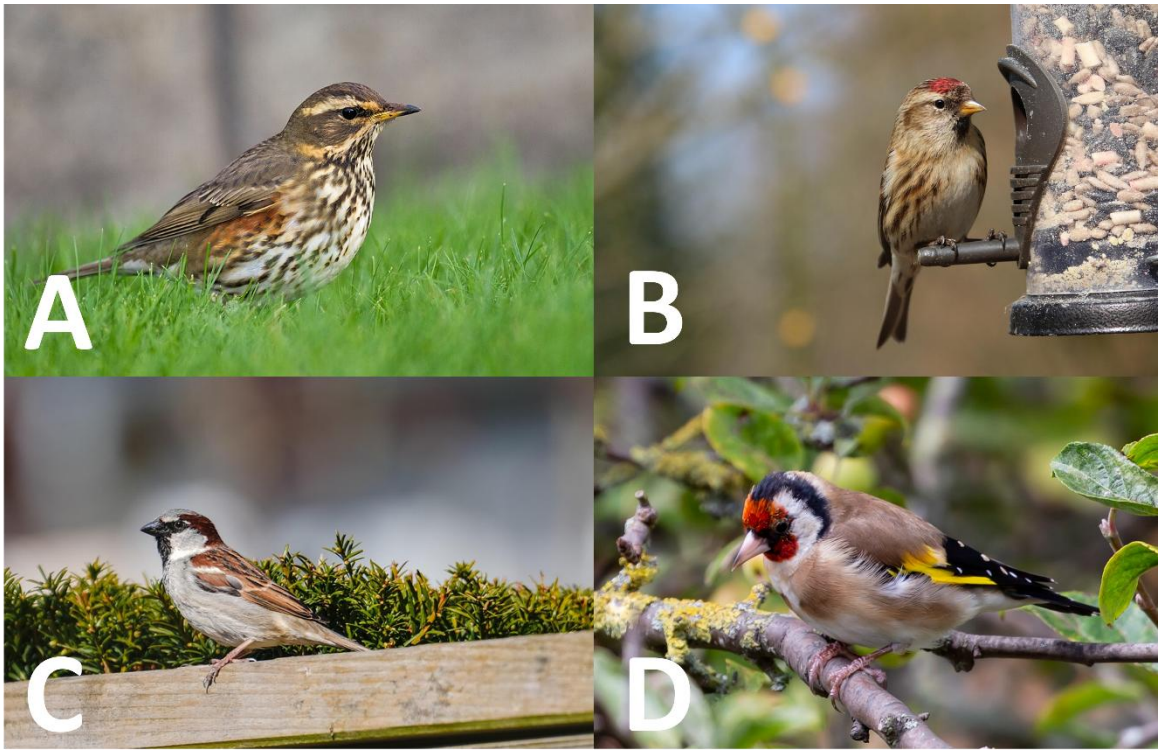
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Winter quick quiz

1. Name each of these garden birds.
2. Which of these appears to be similar in appearance to a fieldfare … and how do you tell the difference?

Winter botany …

'Spurge' – What's in a name?

Spurge laurel (*Daphne laureola*) and wood spurge (*Euphorbia amygdaloides*) are both native species found in our local woodlands, but despite their names and superficial similarities, they are not closely related.



Spurge laurel flower (*Daphne laureola*)



Wood spurge (*Euphorbia amygdaloides*)



Euphorbia amygdaloides (Rasbak CC-BY-SA 3)

Spurge laurel belongs to Thymelaeaceae - a family of mostly woody shrubs. It is an evergreen with glossy, leathery leaves and small yellow-green flowers that appear in late winter. All parts of the plant are poisonous. Daphnes are popular plants for the winter garden, due to many varieties offering attractive flowers and intense fragrance in the winter months. We have planted a few Daphne bholua in the Pollinator-Friendly garden at Kiln Common.

In contrast, wood spurge is a member of Euphorbiaceae, the true spurge family. Many Euphorbia species and varieties are popular architectural plants in the garden. Wood spurge is a perennial plant with whorled, narrow leaves and distinctive showy lime-green bracts surrounding its spring flowers. When damaged, it exudes a white, milky latex typical of euphorbias.

The confusion arises because the shared word spurge was historically applied to plants thought to have purgative properties. In modern classification, however, the two species are unrelated. Both species favour calcareous soils and grow in deciduous woodland or shady hedge banks. They will be flowering around now, so why not see if you can find them – and can you tell them apart?

Karen van Oostrum

Should we feed the birds?

In January, Prestwood Nature co-hosted an online talk from bird expert Simon Nichols about the practice of garden bird feeding and the value of supplementary feeding in the context of habitat loss and the intensification of farming. Here PN trustee James Appleby considers arguments against bird feeding…What do you think?

Feeding the birds is a very popular pastime in the UK. Over 17 million households have bird feeders, stocking an estimated 150,000 tonnes of bird food across the country annually, along with 4.7 million nestboxes. Watching birds on feeders is positive for wellbeing, and feeding them, especially in winter, can help support their populations. But some biologists have suggested that there might be some unintended consequences of our love of birds.



Great tit (jggrz via Pixabay)



Willow tit (Francis C Franklin, CC-BY-SA 3.0)

Not all birds are created equal. They have different food-sources, nesting patterns, and some are more aggressive than others. As anyone who has watched a bird feeder for a time will know, the ultimate bruiser of the songbird world is the great tit. Larger than the other tit species, these birds have a dark side, known to kill smaller birds as well as rodents and even bats! And unlike many other British birds which have been declining, their population has increased by 40% over the past 25 years, to around five million birds. Two smaller species, the marsh tit and willow tit have declined by 53% and 87% respectively. These similar-looking birds have evolved unique strategies to survive. Marsh tits have a stronger beak than their relatives, allowing them to exploit seeds that are hard to crack. Willow tits are capable of excavating their own nests from rotten trees and stumps. These adaptations allow both species to survive in marginal habitats where great and blue tits are unable to get a foothold. However, with the abundant provisioning of easy to access foods like soft seeds and nest sites in the form of nestboxes, these habitats are becoming rarer, causing great tits to move into areas they didn't previously hold, and pushing out their diminutive cousins.

This is just one example of the unintended consequences of feeding garden birds. Similar trends have been observed with the population of greater spotted woodpeckers increasing by 143%, while their smaller relatives the lesser spotted woodpeckers have declined by 73%. Birdfeeders laden with seed are also no help to flycatchers and warblers, while invasive species like ring-necked parakeets and grey squirrels can dominate these resources.

Is the solution to stop feeding birds altogether? Probably not. For a start, many birds have become reliant on birdfeeders, with some species like blackcaps even changing their migration patterns to take advantage of Britain's bountiful gardens. A sudden halt to supply might cause more problems than it would solve. Birdfeeders have helped to compensate for the intensification of farming – birds typically associated with farmland have shown far greater declines in recent years than woodland species. However one farmland species to have increased by 152% is the goldfinch. Once a rarely seen species, now they are commonly spotted in large numbers congregating around seed-feeders, spared from decline by enthusiastic gardeners.



Lesser spotted woodpecker (schauhi via Pixabay)

But what of the marsh and willow tits, and the lesser spotted woodpeckers? Probably the best thing for these species is to be left to their own devices. If you think you have spotted one of these rare species in your garden then you might already be doing the right thing, which is nothing at all!

James Appleby

A Hankering for hawks



Red kite (TheOtherKev via Pixabay)

Many in the Prestwood Nature community will no doubt be racing to the cinema to catch Claire Foy as Helen Macdonald in the adaptation of her 2014 memoir *H is for Hawk*. When it was published, Helen's story of training her Eurasian goshawk, Mabel, caught the imagination of many readers and earned a raft of awards.

Here in Prestwood, we are lucky enough to enjoy a similarly cinematic display from the community of raptors that wheel above our heads daily. Us more earthbound creatures can only marvel at the soaring agility of the red kites that have increasingly filled our skies since their re-introduction to the Chilterns from 1990-94. That project was so successful, it has helped make the UK home to around 17% of the global population, according to the RSPB.

The figures make for a heartwarming story but the real satisfaction to my mind is the awe they inspire as they climb ever higher into the (occasionally) blue sky on unseen thermals. As every glider pilot knows, catching those upward drafts is a skill which is much desired but not easy to master and matching the kite's ability to stay aloft so effortlessly is the aspiration of each one. Rarely even flapping a wing, the kites squeeze every drop of energy out of the thermals around them, the rising air currents that, invisible to us, provide the stepping stones for their balletic performance.

We may have the technical know-how to take us to the other side of the world in a day or get astronauts to the moon, but none of us will ever get to experience the show of freedom and gracefulness, expertise and elegance, that us fortunate Prestwood-ers get to witness above our homes year-round. And all without the interference of air traffic control.

Rarely has a creature so closely inhabited their name as the red kite. The only thing it lacks – thankfully – is the string.

Lynda Marlow

Winter interest at our Kiln Common sites



Lonicera fragrantissima (biolib.de CC BY SA 3.0)

The Pollinator-friendly garden has been quietly resting for the last few months, and as the days gradually start to draw out there will be several signs of spring down there to enjoy. Crocuses and daffodils will start to make an appearance, and our two winter-flowering shrubs will come to life. These are the shrubby honeysuckle *Lonicera fragrantissima* and the sublime *Daphne bholua*. You should also expect to see our richly coloured, red-stemmed dogwoods (Cornus) looking their best this month – in the absence of flowers, coloured stems can bring real interest to the garden, particularly in the winter. These shrubs are sited at the back of the plot, to draw your eye across the whole garden.

We usually meet on the 3rd Sunday of the month to care for our Pollinator-friendly garden. February will see a change from the normal routine though, as we will use the slot on **Sunday February 22nd** to carry out some maintenance of our Community Orchard instead. We plan to:

- prune the apples and pears, including removing lower branches to ease movement through the orchard
- clear around the bases of the trees
- check all the stakes and netting

So, if pruning is 'your thing' then do let us know – it will be great to have you on board! Please contact Karen via pfg@prestwoodnature.org if you would like to get involved.

Interested in Volunteering for Prestwood Nature? There are many different ways you can help Prestwood Nature protect and enhance the local environment. See our Volunteering Page for details (and the list of volunteer session on page 8).



December: Reinforcing the fenceline in preparation work for the new hedge at Boug's Meadow (A G.)

Boug's Meadow, a winter update

At Boug's Meadow, we have a new focus for 2026: planting a hedge on site next to the Link Road. Preparations have been ongoing, over several volunteer sessions, with the clearing of dead wood and detritus essential in an area that had become overgrown and a little forgotten. Following this work, further effort has been put into securing the rickety fence to create a robust defence for the whips we plan to plant in March, with the support of students from Pipers Corner School who have fundraised for the hedge. The hope is that a new mixed, native hedge will enhance the diversity of habitats on site, an apt project therefore for Pipers' HOPE group (HOPE standing for 'Helping Others Protect the Environment'). Nearby, in the copse, our volunteers took on the sizeable job of digging out the older compost heap on the fenceline with Link Road, which was well rotted, with years of cuttings from the site (and having had plenty of time to mulch down). In December, this compost was spread on the paths amongst the hazel, chequers and other trees to build up the walk-ways and cover tree roots which had become a trip-hazard. Thank you to all those who wheelbarrowed and raked – the woodland paths look transformed.

Though no formal work party took place in January, litter-picking credit goes to those volunteers who rummaged in the undergrowth along the boundaries of the site to grab (and recycle) a significant number of tin cans that had accumulated. It is easier to see what's there at this time of year! Also in January we carried out a *Big Garden Birdwatch* in Boug's Meadow (RSPB), identifying seven species including goldcrest, with many more passing through. The site was also surveyed as part of a *New Year Plant Hunt* (a Botanical Society of Britain & Ireland initiative) in very early January – so citizen science continues even when the digging and the clipping stops!



Hazel coming into flower

Deadnettle flowers at NY, 2026





Do join us at a future volunteer session at Boug's if you are interested. Details of our sessions are available on the website. The team is friendly, parking is easy and the public toilets have reopened. Do bring your own gardening gloves, secateurs and coffee; but cake and other essentials are provided!

Words and images by Alice Griffiths

Prestwood Nature dates for your diary

February

Boug's Meadow Volunteer Session, Link Road, Great Missenden: Sunday 8 February 10am-1pm

Community Orchard Volunteer Work Party, Kiln Common: Sunday 22 February 10am-12:30pm

Sheepwash Pond Volunteer Work Party, Prestwood: Saturday 28 February 8:30am-12:30pm



March

In-person talk: Leather Lane Conservation Group: Monday 2 March 7-9pm. Venue: Prestwood Village Hall – no need to book, just turn up. Free, donations from non-members welcome

Boug's Meadow Volunteer Session, Link Road, Great Missenden: Sunday 8 March 10am-1pm

Pollinator-Friendly Garden Volunteer Work Party, Kiln Common, Prestwood: Sunday 22 March, 10am-12:30pm.

Spring Botany Walk around the woodlands and glades of Prestwood: Sunday 22 March 2-4pm. Location and other details via PN's website. Families welcome!



Building up the path in the copse on the Boug's Meadow site, in December 2025 – a team effort (AG.)

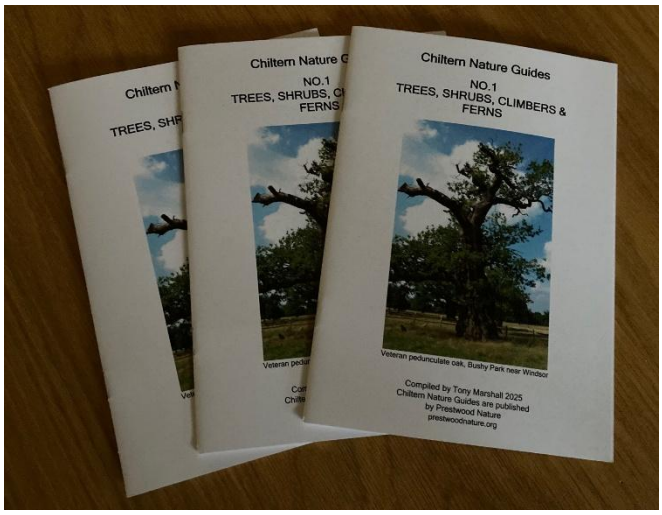
April

Boug's Meadow Volunteer Session, Link Road, Great Missenden: Sunday 12 April 10am-1pm

Pollinator-Friendly Garden Work Party, Kiln Common: Sunday 26 April 10am-12:30pm

May

Dawn Chorus Walk with Simon Nichols, Great Missenden: Saturday 2 May 4:45am. To book go to **Prestwood Nature on EventBrite**



A New Prestwood Nature publication

Recently Prestwood Nature published a new local nature guide *Trees, shrubs, climbers and ferns*, compiled by longstanding Prestwood Nature member Tony Marshall. The booklet distills some of Tony's amazing botanical knowledge in a format that is intended to be easily accessible to beginners wanting to know more about nature in our area. It includes lots of clear colour photos of leaves, fruits, flowers and bark to help identify trees, climbers and shrubs you might encounter when out and about in the Chilterns and includes tips on where to find some of the species locally. It's small and light enough to fit in a pocket or backpack when you are out for a walk. This is intended to be the first in a series of *Chiltern Nature Guides* which will be on sale at Prestwood Nature events and in some local shops soon.

A quick reminder: Membership renewal time is coming up!

The Prestwood Nature membership year runs from 1st April to 31st March, so the time to renew your membership is approaching. The membership fee remains at £10 per year for 2026/7, for either an individual or a family group (up to 6). You should get an automatic reminder e-mail about a month before the expiry date, but you can sign in to Membermojo (our membership management software) and renew your membership anytime from now on using this link. No need to remember a password, as the site e-mails you a one-time link. This is also the place to go to check your contact details are up to date.

Other local groups involved in nature conservation

Berkshire Buckinghamshire & Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT) www.bbowt.org.uk

Bucks Owl and Raptor Group (BORG) https://www.giveahoot.org.uk/

Chilterns Conservation Board www.chilterns.org.uk

Field Studies Council Amersham at Mop End www.field-studies-council.org/locations/amersham/

Friends of Priestfield Arboretum https://priestfieldarboretum.org.uk/

Leather Lane Conservation Group – Preserving and Protecting Leather Lane https://saveleatherlane-wp.org.uk/ ***and*** *Wild Amersham https://sustainableamersham.org/nature-and-biodiversity/*

The Big Plastic Count (9–15 March 2026): Help build a clearer picture of how much plastic waste the UK produces – and what really happens to it

The Big Plastic Count is a nationwide project designed to produce a detailed snapshot of plastic use and disposal in the UK. Its purpose is to better understand the scale and nature of plastic waste at household level. It runs every two years and is coordinated by charity Greenpeace and social enterprise Everyday Plastic.

During the count week, participants record every piece of plastic packaging they throw away – whether it goes into general waste, recycling, or is discarded while out and about. At the end of the week they submit their count online. Data from everyone who takes part are combined and analysed to show how much plastic is being used, what types are most common, and how much is likely to be recycled, incinerated, or exported. The findings are used to inform national discussions on waste reduction, packaging design, and the need for big changes, way beyond what you or I can do alone.

Previous counts have shown that a significant proportion of plastic packaging is difficult or impossible to recycle, and that much of what is collected for recycling is ultimately burned or shipped overseas.

Although the project is national, the issues it highlights are visible locally. When volunteers recently turned over the compost at Boug's Meadow, they noticed small pieces of plastic mixed into the material – likely fragments that had blown into the compost piles or become caught up in the grass cuttings from the meadow over time. It's a reminder that even well-managed green spaces can accumulate plastic from the wider environment

If you're interested in understanding your own 'plastic profile', this is an easy and informative way to do so. Find out more, and sign up here.

Caroline Greenwood



The River Misbourne's annual re-appearance



28/1/2026: Halfway between the two lakes – a small flow has just started over the last few days (N Hardy)

This January may have seemed particularly wet, but there is at least one benefit to us here – helping the River Misbourne resurface locally. A winterbourne's typical pattern is to flow from late winter, peaking in the spring and then typically drying up in the summer. Very occasionally the Misbourne flows all year round through Great Missenden … if we've had a particularly wet preceding year! The downstream lake (Bank's Pond) in the Abbey grounds fills first, with water then appearing in the upper lake (Warren Water) as the Chalk aquifer fills. The river itself then starts to flow, and of course if we are lucky the Misbourne will flow further upstream through Boug's Meadow for a few months.

Frogspawn and toad spawn can be seen in Warren Water most years from around mid-February. Waterfowl also breed in both seasonal lakes, as well as various invertebrates. In recent years a particularly fearless heron has taken residence in the Abbey grounds too.



28/1/2026: The water level is gradually increasing in Warren Water (Nick Hardy)

Further information:

Misbourne River Action

Little Missenden gauging station's flow data (via the National River Flow Archive)

BBOWT: How is this local council saving chalk streams?

Nick Hardy

Prestwood Nature welcomes a new trustee: Caroline Greenwood



Caroline Greenwood lives in Great Missenden with her partner and two children. After relocating to the Chilterns for work, the family quickly put down roots and now can't imagine living anywhere else, drawn by the landscape, the community and the easy connection to London. She has a particular fondness for the bluebells in Angling Spring Wood and tries (and fails) every year to capture in a photo just how astonishing they are.

Caroline works as a Scientific Director in Medical Communications. Although she doesn't come from a formal conservation background, she brings a lifelong curiosity about the natural world – sparked early on by a childhood fascination with frogs, which led to a sizeable collection of frog-themed ornaments that her daughter has now enthusiastically inherited. In her professional life, she also co-leads the environmental pillar of her company's corporate responsibility programme, helping to drive sustainability initiatives alongside her main client work.

Having attended various Prestwood Nature events in the past few years and volunteered sporadically at the Pollinator-Friendly Garden and Boug's Meadow work parties, Caroline is pleased to be able to contribute more formally as a Trustee. With her children now a little older and more self-sufficient, she is keen to support community conservation and give back to the local area she and her family feel so connected to.

Winter quick quiz answers:

1. A is a redwing. B is a common redpoll. C is a house sparrow. D is a goldfinch
   (Images A-D by: Andreas Trepte, CC BY SA 2.5; JLasWilson via Pixabay; Mariya M. via Pixabay; and TheOtherKev by Pixabay).
2. The redwing is similar in appearance to a fieldfare but has a bold white eye stripe and calls 'seep, seep, seep'. Fieldfares' call is 'chack, chack, chack'.

Prestwood Nature's *Spring News 2026…*

…will be published in early May 2026. If you would like to write an article or share an image to be included in this newsletter, the deadline is 25 April 2026. Email the Editor, Alice Griffiths, using the email address newsletter@prestwoodnature.org

Ps. Don't forget to join our Prestwood Nature Facebook Group to stay in touch and share your own nature finds in our local area in 2026.

Christmas volunteering!









Thank you to all of our Prestwood Nature members who volunteered to help the Rotary Club Father Christmas fundraise in Great Missenden and Prestwood in late December. Prestwood Nature is lucky enough to be one of the local causes that will benefit from the funds raised. (A Griffiths, H Tyler)

All views expressed in this newsletter are those of individual contributors and do not necessarily represent those of Prestwood Nature or its trustees.

Prestwood Nature

Working together with Nature