

# St Matthew's churchyard, Lightcliffe

Early spring 2022 wildlife snapshot and autumn/winter round-up.



The churchyard is looking a picture at the moment with many clumps of daffodils brightening the scene, along with primula and crocus.



From early March, large queen buff tailed bumblebees have been busy prospecting for nest sites in amongst the gravestones - they are constantly on the move and have evaded my camera! These are usually the earliest bees to emerge in spring; only young queens from the previous summer hibernate over winter. They build their nests in old mouse holes, tussocky grass (of which we have plenty!) and even bird nest boxes and will form colonies of several hundred bees.

**Buff tailed bumblebee queen**  
Photo by Graham Calow

## The nuthatches are back!



On the 12<sup>th</sup> March, I observed a nuthatch sitting with its head sticking out of a nest box - the same one as last year on the beech tree. It stayed motionless in the same position for several minutes, before emerging a bit further, showing off its beautiful slate-blue back, orangey underparts and black bandit-style eye stripe.



A couple of weeks later, I noticed that the characteristic mud-plastering had been started below the roof. No doubt the birds will continue, as last year, so that it extends around the hole in order to deter predators such as woodpeckers from raiding the eggs and chicks. The nuthatches seemed to go into overdrive with the mud last year and it eventually all fell off during a very wet spell!

Also on the 12<sup>th</sup> March, two redwings, blackbirds and woodpigeons were feasting on ripe, black, ivy berries which are very nutritious at this time of year. The following day, I saw a flock of around 40 redwings in a field near Priestley Green . They must have been about to migrate back to Scandinavia for the breeding season as that was the last time I saw them. The churchyard was full of the tinkling song of goldfinches, high up in the tallest trees, along with wren and robins.



Redwings were present in the churchyard throughout autumn and winter, often very well camouflaged amongst the leaf litter.



**Spot the Redwing!**

The mild October and November temperatures meant that hogweed was in full flower and yellow ivy flowers (later to ripen into black berries) were a magnet for lingering ladybirds and wasps.



There had been a recent spell of rainy weather which had filled the empty flower urns on some graves. I watched goldfinches coming to drink from the urns and captured some aggressive behaviour as one goldfinch fiercely defended its drinking hole! Although my photo is blurred, you can see the striking colours of these beautiful (but feisty!) birds.



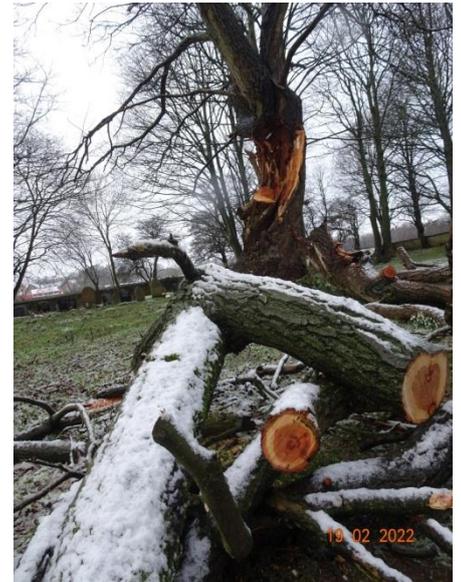
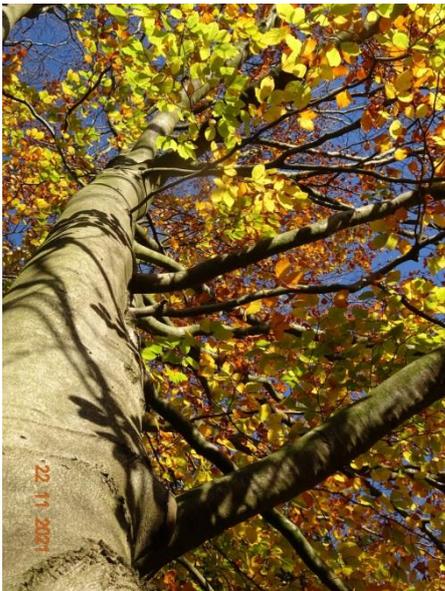


I photographed the moss covering the East wall one snowy day, noticing lots of red stems. I think it is one of our most common mosses: Swan's neck thyme moss *Mnium hornum*, traditionally used for stuffing mattresses as people thought it helped them to sleep better! Moss provides a habitat for tiny invertebrates, and squirrels and birds use it to line their nests.



Swan's neck thyme moss. Photo John Bridges

### Autumn and winter moods in the churchyard 2021 - 2022



Marjorie Middleton April 2022