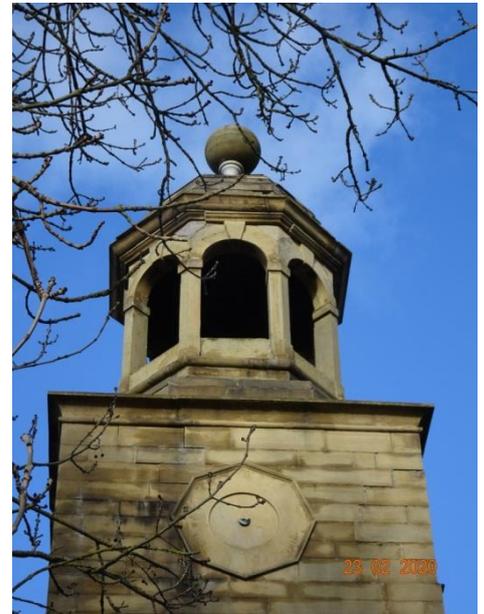


## St Matthew's Churchyard Lightcliffe

### February wildlife snapshot

February has been a wild, soggy month – not very conducive conditions for wildlife spotting, and creatures in the churchyard have been sheltering out of sight! However, February the 14th was a rare sunny, still day. Spring was briefly in the air with squirrels chasing each other up tree trunks and birds singing. Appropriately for Valentine's Day, blue tits were seen investigating a nest box on a large beech tree near the Till Carr Lane entrance.



**Blue tit having a peep inside...**



**...and out again!**

Nesting usually takes place in April and May although males will lay claim to breeding territories earlier in the season, which may have been what was happening on the 14<sup>th</sup> February. Scientists have found that blue tits line their nests with medicinal plants like mint and lavender to kill bacteria and create a healthier nest environment! Chick hatching is timed to coincide with the emergence of woodland caterpillars and there is some concern that global warming may interfere with this synchronisation. Britain's population of blue tits has increased slightly over recent years, probably due to milder winters and the availability of food and nest boxes in gardens, although very wet breeding seasons cause a drop in numbers. Blue tits have a wide-ranging diet, eating insects, spiders and caterpillars in summer and seeds, nuts and berries in winter. When doorstep deliveries of milk were commonplace, the blue tit was one of the birds that learned to peck through the foil lids to drink the cream!

Unusually, this robin was singing from the top branch of a tree – normally they choose a perch within a bush or tree. I caught it having an acrobatic scratch, balancing on one leg before flying to a more sheltered spot.



I've also spotted small flocks of chaffinches feeding regularly on the ground in the churchyard. This male came to sit on a branch by my car so I photographed it through the windscreen. Another old country name for the chaffinch is "bachelor bird" - Linnaeus noticed that all-male flocks are common in winter so he gave it the Latin name *Fringilla coelebs* (*coelebs* = bachelor).

## Fungi and plants

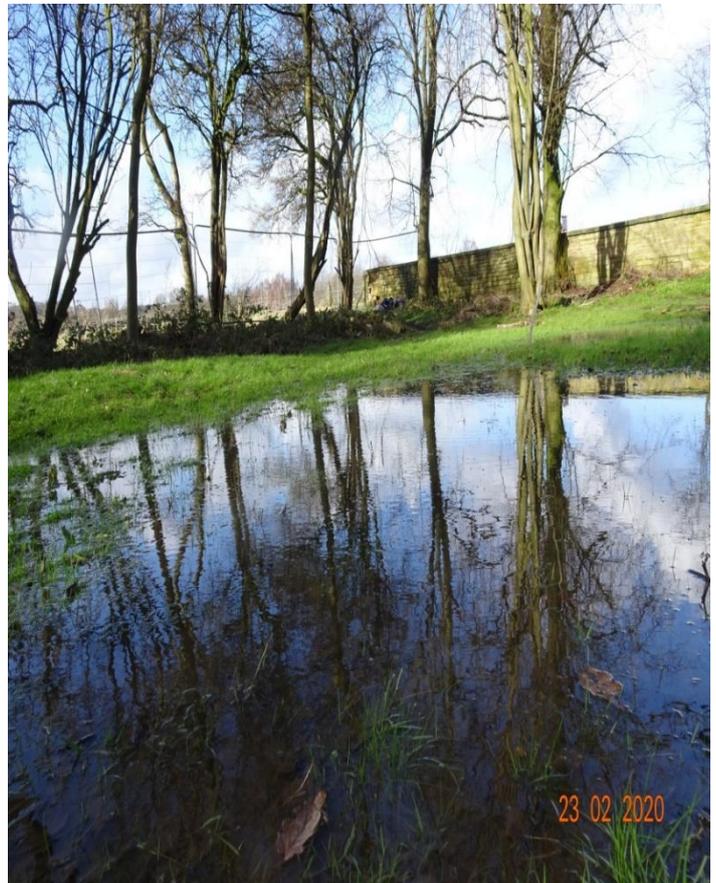
I found this striking fungus at the beginning of the month on a fallen branch. I think it's a *Trametes* species – related to the turkey tail fungus I photographed in the autumn. *Trametes* means "one who is thin"! The reverse side was a pale beige colour and from that angle, they reminded me of tiny, wavy-edged pancakes.





Snowdrops bring a promise of spring despite the stormy weather. They contain a natural anti-freeze so that even if they collapse in icy conditions, they are able to recover once the temperature rises. These flowers open fully when the temperature reaches 10 degrees, allowing bees to access an early source of nectar. In another example of synchronisation, bees only emerge from hibernation when the temperature reaches 10 degrees – isn't nature amazing? Daffodils are also starting to flower now, providing a splash of cheerful colour.

### February moods in the churchyard



Dawn on a snowy morning

