



## What happened to Summer?

PERHAPS I was lucky to be in hospital as at least I was dry and the humid stormy weather prompted the nursing staff to get out all the fans. It was really quite a pleasure to sit and enjoy the breeze. The only drawback was the view, a grey roof and a grey wall opposite. Not a green leaf to be seen.

Once again neighbours noted the lack of cuckoos this year. Various friends have suggested that this may be because there are fewer small birds about. If so the reason may be that with the sparrow hawk population increasing, they are now becoming so plentiful that they play their part in the disappearance of the small birds and there are fewer nests for the cuckoos. The magpie population, however, has mushroomed. It is such a beautiful bird when it is seen close up in the sun with its glossy black and white and blue plumage and it has no real fear of us, trying to stare you out before taking flight. It's a shame they take so many little ones. Jays are another carnivore that raid nests, but we don't see so many of them. We stopped in a lay-by in May to walk in a bluebell wood and as we pulled up we saw a jay picking up something from the verge. It flew off as we parked, but it was a pleasure to get a good, if brief view of it.

A neighbour in Iffin Lane tells me that in October this year there was blossom on her apple tree. I would not imagine they will form after that one night of crippling frost. A quick walk round my garden later when it had warmed up showed blackened plants that should have been taken up some weeks ago. At the same time some, in sheltered corners, had survived. This neighbour, who also has what would be an understatement to call a large pond, also had tadpoles in October. A pair of mallard ducks come to the pond frequently and sometimes bring a party of friends.

We have only got a small pond now, but it is amazing how much wildlife it attracts. When the large pond was cleaned we found newts that we did not know that we had. The frogs of course

thought it was heaven and now all try to jam into the smaller one, birds of all kinds come to drink and we have to keep a pond heater on in the winter so that they can get water.

*I think my favourite visitors to the pond are the dragonflies.*

Some of them are huge, but no way can I identify them—even when they are laying eggs they shoot off before I can register their colour and other details in my book. I find it strange that while we have lots of dragonflies, we have never yet seen a damselfly here.

Did anyone see the report on the local TV news about a European Eagle Owl in Charing? I was half watching the news and half writing Christmas cards when I heard the story. Apparently the bird is decimating guinea pigs from somewhere in Charing and has actually injured the young girl that feeds them. I was watching a documentary on these birds a few months ago and they have been breeding in Yorkshire for some years now and the young ringed birds have been found around the country. It would be expected that an extremely large bird like this with a five foot wingspan could not be easily missed, but their secretive behaviour means they stay unnoticed.

And finally—a reminder of summer; I am told that the 'Road Closed' sign propped up in Stuppington Lane is still there from the Tour de France. You really would think that someone would have claimed it by now.

**Merry Christmas. Until March.**

*Joan* 451 492



*My  
VIEW*

By JOAN GOWER