

### WEATHER

The New Year began with a period of sustained cold, wet weather. The precipitation fell as snow initially and this persisted for a while as pockets of white, icy slush in the shaded parts of the path (*right*). The weather improved during the second half of the month as intermittent sunny days were experienced. These, together with the longer days, gave the feeling that spring was about to reveal itself.



### USE & CONDITION OF THE WALK

Apart from a few quite inhospitable periods, when there were no footprints in the snow in some parts of the walk, the path has been used quite considerably. The mud has been churned up by frequent use in a number of places. There have been some tricky muddy patches needing sure-footedness to negotiate the inclined sections but the newly-made up path continues to hold up extremely well. It is not unusual to find twigs scattered on the path following a cold, windy spell, but quite large branches bearing good numbers of cones also fell this month. Needless to say, they make excellent fuel and were not visible for long!

### OBSERVATIONS



Siskins were reported and a visiting birdwatcher also heard the call of a Brambling. Long-tailed Tits, Blue Tits, Goldcrests, Chaffinches, Robins, Blackbirds, Wrens, Dunnocks and a noisy Woodpigeon have been sighted this month. A flock of Redwings and Fieldfares visited the area mid-month and were seen on a number of occasions in the nearby grazing field. Little Grebes are a delight and are seen and/or heard on all visits and were particularly active towards the end of the month.

The Grey Heron appears shy but has been spotted a few times. Shelducks, Tufted Ducks, a Gadwall and Wigeons (22 on one occasion) have been welcome visitors over the month adding interest to the Mallards, Coots, Moorhens, Cormorants (*above left*) and large numbers of bathing Herring Gulls and Greater Black-backed Gulls. The birdsong has been particularly sonorous in the second half of the month and Mallard and Little Grebe behaviour seem to indicate that spring is here!

The number of fungi seen has been on decline with the cold weather but Coral fungus was seen earlier on and a second flush of the rather gorgeous Earthstar was found. Some rather brave Amanita gemmata appeared but the cold weather appeared to stunt their development. The dead Elms provide ample nutrition for the large numbers of Jews Ear – a jelly ear-like fungus - which seem to be on the increase. The Turkey-tail fungus is a bracket which thrives on dead wood and is seen throughout the reserve.

It is interesting to note that, again this year, birds have been disturbing the fallen Pine needles as they go grubbing. However, they have also been busy attacking the dead trunks (previously covered and decayed by fungi and boring insects) bordering the path leaving splinters of wood and debris on the path.

The spell of cold weather affected the flowering of a number of our plants which seem a little delayed, compared with last year's records. A solitary Lesser Celandine and a handful of Dog Violets were found near the derelict buildings. The Daffodils are in buds and promise to give us a good show of colour shortly. Primrose rosettes and shoots of Hemlock Water Dropwort are greening up the edges of the path.



Trees and shrubs are slowly coming to life as buds are swelling. Hazel catkins (*above right*), making an attractive sight, are found in a number of spots. The first few woolly buds of the Goat Willow catkin are also about to break.

Butcher's Broom still has bright red fruit and at closer inspection, its flattened leaf-like stems are bearing their delicate white flowers too. It is easy to overlook Red Campion and Gorse flowers but they have provided welcome colour again this month and deserve a mention.

Despite experiencing a sharp spell of cold weather at the start of the New Year, there was plenty to see and hear as you proceeded around the Reservoir and we are left with a feeling of pleasant anticipation as the new season approaches.

**Rhiannon Cook and Val Bloese**