

Nature's Calendar

Autumn



Autumn is characterised by a changing of colour in the landscape - trees turn from green to russet and are laden with berries and seeds. Why not go on a fungal foray? This is the best time to look for mushrooms and toadstools.

September

Goldfinches are seen in flocks known as a 'charm', and they feed on thistle and teasel seeds. Signs that the badgers are active are their latrines (loos), which quite clearly show that they have been eating blackberries!

The summer migrants are starting to gather on telegraph wires in great numbers ready for their long journey back to Africa. Both swallows and house martins will group together noisily chattering away. Peregrines are here all year round, but at this time of year they leave their young to fend for themselves, look for the young clumsily trying to catch the swallows.



October

The hedgerows are full of 'old mans' beard' - wild clematis with its straw coloured bearded seed heads trailing over the vegetation. Dormice are relatively common in hedgerows with a lot of hazel; look for nuts that the dormice have nibbled, easily recognisable as the nutshells have a distinctive round hole with a smooth inside edge.

Left - peregrine;
From top - goldfinch; dormouse; song thrush;
Far top right - cowrie and scallop shells





Fieldfare

Listen to the robin singing wistfully in a tree, it's more mournful than his summer song. The song and mistle thrushes like to feed on the autumn berries, stocking up their fat reserves for the winter.



November

Now's the time to look out for the winter migrant birds such as fieldfare and redwing. They are members of the thrush family and gather in large numbers in fields. They spend the autumn and winter here because it is warmer than their native Siberia.

The autumn gales wash up a treasure trove on the coast: cowry and scallop shells, cuttlefish and perhaps 'by the wind sailors' - jelly fish with triangular sails which may be washed onto the beaches in their hundreds.



Wildlife Hot Spots for autumn



Andrew's Wood OS SX 713 520

Woodlands are the best place to experience the autumnal colours, there is a good population of dormice here so have a good nut hunt!

Avon Woods – Woodleigh OS SX 732 490

This Woodland Trust reserve is an ancient woodland with plenty of colour from field maple and crab apple.

Blackdown Rings OS SX 719 521

An iron-age settlement that is not only of historical interest but is a good place to search for fungi such as earth balls and red, yellow and white wax-caps. Also watch flocks of mistle thrushes feeding on the rowan and hawthorn berries.

Blackpool Sands OS SX 853 479

This is a good beach combing spot with plenty of shells. Look out for ravens and peregrines too.



Top - robin; **From left** - bracket fungus; view out to sea from Slapton

Photos by Jon Morris, Clare Morris, David Hackford and Alex Marr