

A SNIPPET FROM THE COUNTRYSIDE & THE BEACH

23rd October 2003

Pheasants must have been at the very back of the line when brains were being handed out, because as no one can failed to have noticed, they really are the most stupid birds that God ever put on this earth, or that you are likely to meet along the roads and lanes around here. From my experiences of meeting them while out, the males are more brainless than the females because the hens do make *some* effort to shift out of the road when a car comes along, but not the males, they are fully intent on suicide. I can only wonder if it's sheer arrogance because they think they are so beautiful, and no one would bash them to bits with their car, or if in fact that they are actually *brainless!* If you walk through woodlands and along the edges of the fields and disturb one there, they can frighten the boots off of you by suddenly flying up making the most awful noise, and it only takes the smallest thing to set them up, but come at them in your car along the road, and no way will they shift, they simply look at the car and carry on strolling along to wherever they are going, or even as they do most times, actually run in front of your car just as you drive past instead of going into the hedge nearest to them. I hit my first one last week I am afraid to admit, and I hope I don't do that too often either. There were two of them pecking away in the middle of the road on my way back from Tiverton. As I came around a bend in the road, I had a boy racer on my heels and another car coming the other way and so it was impossible to suddenly slow down or swerve to avoid Mr. Pheasant, and so he is no more! The stupid thing is, he looked up from his pecking in the road, and so could have made a quick escape, but simply carried on with what he was eating. It was a very quick ending for him, and as I looked back all I could see were feathers everywhere. When I got home, I half expected to have the pheasant pinned to the front of the car, but thankfully there was not a mark. This time of the year there are even more of them about as chicks that have been reared for the shoots have all been released and so there are hundreds of brain dead birds out there. **So beware!**

The village and surrounding countryside is just brimming with the colours of autumn at the moment, not only from the leaves but also with the many berries. As I walk the lanes the colours are changing every day, and the smell from the leaves is truly wonderful, it just has that autumn smell that says yes, summer is gone and winter is on it's way, but still enjoy the days while you can because we still get some warm ones, or little sun pockets out of the wind. Over the years, I have never been able to say just which of the seasons I enjoy the most, every time a new one begins, I say, ah yes, I love the spring or summer or autumn or the winter, but in truth, they all have something special to offer in their own way, and something to look forward to that is still to come after that particular season, and so I love them all.

I have had quite a few fieldfares feeding from the cotoneaster in my garden they fly here every winter from Scandinavia to feed on berries and in the fields because it's warmer in England. They will stay until spring when they will be off back to Scandinavia to breed again. They fly about in flocks and are quite noisy when disturbed with their harsh *chak-chak*. They are very like thrushes to look at, but they have a grey back and head.

If you have a bird table or put feed out for the birds, just sit and watch the different habits of each bird, it's quite interesting to see how each bird has its own way of feeding and behaving and at the same time you can try and identify the different species if you have a bird book to hand, which it is always a good thing to have near a window, because you just never know when an interesting bird will show itself and by the time you have found your bird book, they will be gone. Also, try and put your feeding point near to shrubs, hedges and trees, as birds like to have a corridor to fly along where they feel safe rather than being in the open too much.

We went down to Exmouth last weekend, and walked along the beach as it was such a lovely day. The wind was blowing strong enough to sand blast your ankles as the sand blew over the beach, but the sun was out, and so too were many people all doing their own thing. I couldn't help but compare them all with the animal kingdom because at the end of the day, man and animal all have the same thing in mind, they are all out to impress the female of the species! There were lots of young lads all cruising up and down the front in their souped up cars with the windows down and the music playing loud enough to burst their ear drums, but all in the name of attracting the girls, just like birds, the male of the species will preen himself up to look the most colourful and make the most noise just to attract the best female. You only have to watch any bird of paradise turning summersaults and singing the most wonderful songs to compare them. The thing that made my afternoon though was one particular man on the beach with a kite. As I have said before, it was a very windy afternoon and he had a very large kite. Out on the sea were many windsurfers and kite surfers cutting across the waves at a tremendous speed, but this one man on the beach, with a kite surfers kite, and obviously a novice at it, was determined to get it skyward, no matter what the wind speed was. Part of the kit that he had was a little wind sock that he had duly stuck into the sand, just to let himself know which way the wind was coming from, *as if he needed to know*. Anyway, there he was, a rather large gentleman, attached to the kite and laying face down on the sand in readiness, while his friend at the other end tried to get it full of wind to take to the sky. His girlfriend stood watching with her handbag slung around her shoulder and across her middle so that it wouldn't blow away, looking just a little apprehensive. After quite a few attempts and rather a lot of tangled strings, the wind finally took hold and away he went with not too much style as the kite lifted him off the ground with a *woosh* and dragged and bumped him along the beach for some way with the girlfriend in hot pursuit and the friend not quite sure what to do. By now, I myself was laughing so much that I could hardly see any more because of the tears, after all it was so obvious what was going to happen. He let go of the handles at last as panic set in, but of course was still attached by the harness around his chest (another part of the kit not to be left out). Luckily his friend had now jumped into action and ran to his aid and managed to let the wind out of the sail. He didn't seem to be hurt at all, just his pride, but perhaps he will find another safer way in future to impress his girl, and leave the kite surfing to those who know what they are doing. It did make my afternoon though, but then I have got a terrible sense of humour. It's just another example of nature (human or animal) at the end of the day with the male of the species trying all the time to impress the female in whatever way they can!

Just to finish off for now, don't forget to check your bonfires before lighting them because hedgehogs and other wildlife like to crawl inside places like thick bonfires to hibernate at this time of the year.