

"... the cosy dark quiet of winter... fruit compotes lie in wait for the remaining winter months... birds seem like practical survivors making the most of this wintry sparseness..." Our Elevate artists reflect on the season with words and images to delight and inspire you.



elevate your mood

bringing colour and inspiration to you

Issue No.5

Mid-winter musings

Hannah Lefeuvre writes from her off-grid small holding in Somerset

Throughout December, I spent most evenings making wreaths for our community. The process of assembling brings nature's details into focus, and this winter, as well as noticing the classic complimentary



green and red tones, I have been struck by purples and yellows, available in berries, flowers and the occasional young teasel. On many wintry mornings, I could be seen walking through the village, with a wheelbarrow of wreath deliveries. It seemed a creative way to share the diversity of our winter garden and connect with the community. I savour this timeless tradition and hope that the arrangements were also enjoyed by passers by, before being put back into the hedgerows to compost.

Meanwhile, as some parts of our garden go back to the soil, there remains a fine array of produce available, in cold stores and in the ground. Root vegetables are scrubbed, roasted and turned into warming soups, while apples are abundantly stored, for

cakes and crumbles. At this time of year, we enjoy red cabbage, brussels sprouts, chard, parsnips, carrots, kale and potatoes. Berries come out of the freezer, jars of tomatoes are opened and fruit compotes lie in wait for the remaining winter months.

As soon as mid-winter's day arrives, I dig out my daylight hours chart and observe the detail of increasing minutes and seconds of daylight each day. I open the curtains just before dawn and soak up each minute of light, as it gently infuses our home. The three weeks either side of winter solstice are the most challenging for solar electric and this year we are benefiting from an additional lithium battery system, to ease the long dark evenings. By early January, we can already feel the extra length in the late afternoons - hooray!

The vegetable crop rotation plan has been drawn up for the new season and our seeds have been ordered. The spring bulbs are starting to sprout. It's time to dust away the winter cobwebs, enjoy the fire, food and log stores and envision a brighter 2021.



A Winter Walk by the Sea



*Let the shoreline keep us as children
where we breathe shapes into the foam
and soak our laughing hemlines in the salt
giddy at the horizon that childhood has folded down
collecting pebbles – gifts,
each one with a name.*



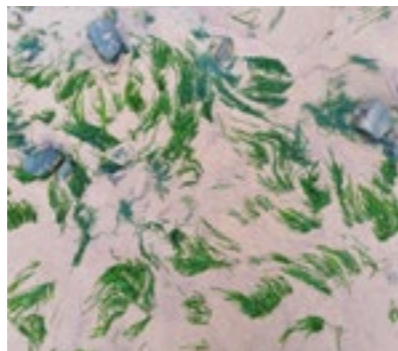
Birdlife along the West Somerset shoreline fascinates me. The huge tidal range in the Severn estuary helps make the mudflats and sandflats which, in turn, create outstanding wildlife habitats for shoreline birds. Estuary mud, reflecting stunning silver light, contains enough worms and shellfish to attract and feed these long-distance visitors.

So what makes shoreline birds so interesting for me? Well, a bit like me on my winter walk perhaps, these birds seem like practical survivors making the most of this wintry sparseness. They also occupy the spaces where my eye is drawn towards... the tideline and open sea. The beachcomber

in me is a bit like a shorebird foraging... connecting to some instinctive habit of noticing and responding to patterns.

Spotting these shorebirds feels special – often they are camouflaged by the silvery silt, rocky shelves and sparkling light and can easily remain magical, unseen company. Apart from the variety of shorebird characters, my thoughts turn to migration and the huge distances some of them travel to be our summer and winter guests.

The West Somerset shoreline winter guests this year include:



- The tall, prehistoric-looking grey heron (probably resident all year in the region) who stands silent and statue-like on the edge of tidal pools, patiently contemplating its next meal. The grey heron in flight (often accompanied by its loud, harsh "frank" call)

with slow-flapping wings and long legs stretched out behind makes a sight not to be missed.

*Sunlight, bright on the water
becomes the scales on a giant fish.
splits silver light into white light, into transparency.*

*...winter warmth and wildlife from West Somerset's shoreline
- David Davies*



*Where the earth meets the sky,
the sand is a million silvers and the air is gold
and the tide smooths our memories with its hands, whispers
there now,
it will be alright.*



Image: Shantanu Kuveskar*

- Dunlins are small sandpiper type waders which breed in upland areas and spend their winters foraging along estuary shorelines. Dunlins seem quite gregarious and can flock in large numbers on mudflats. Their call is a typical sandpiper "peep", and their display song is a harsh longish trill. Their foraging style includes sticking their bill into the mud and water right up to their face – quite thorough and enthusiastic foragers!

- My favourite is the scarce Kentish plover. This tiny shorebird, which weighs only around 40 grams (about 1½ ounces or a heaped tablespoon of flour!), has a subtle black-grey darter neck ring and eye stripes and black forehead, gorgeous sandy-brown mantle, back and wings and all this contrasted with a snow-white underbody. This robust looking shorebird forages on the shoreline with subtly beautiful and engaging movements: – looking ahead, followed by short runs, stopping, turning, walking, then looking again – like a graceful dance.

Studies show the Kentish plover to be versatile, using weather cues of light, wind

and rain to maximise foraging potential and it uses its large sensitive eyes for night time foraging too. Breeding pairs build their nest in frugal hollows scraped in open ground on the stony edges of beaches, often near brackish water pools. Beach nesting makes Kentish plovers vulnerable to disturbance from beach users and is why recent sightings are so encouraging.

The Kentish plover has a wonderful delicate, soft call, heard as "too-eet". – Lovely!

I Would Like

I would like to have things to draw on my strengths – Coping mechanisms for the future, when I'm faced with challenges: To use my inner strength; To be reminded that I can do it – That I am not diminished.

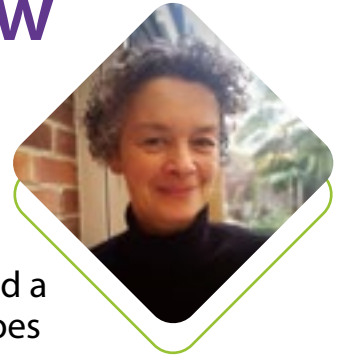
This poem was written by LK as part of our Talking Journey's project

Would you like to contribute to a future edition? See back page for details.

*Kentish Plover 'Charadrius alexandrinus' at Akshi Beach, Maharashtra, India. Photograph by Shantanu Kuveskar. File licensed: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/deed.en>

January Apples in the Snow

Stephanie Jalland



January named after Janus, the Roman god of beginnings and endings, hanging around in the places in-between, passages, doors, gateways. He is usually depicted as having two faces, looking at opposite ways, one towards the past and the other towards the future. I too, am enjoying the cosy dark quiet of winter but at the same time noticing the daylight hours getting longer minute by minute each day.

I don't have to look far to be reminded of what is on its way in the near future as the first green tips of bulbs are poking through the soil. Buried deep in the dark and cold but just starting to show, like a lightbulb that brightens the room.



Image: www.pexels.com

Galanthus Nivalis, the snowdrop, always the first to flower at the end of winter and the beginning of spring, symbolizes hope. The white of the snowdrop also symbolizes innocence and purity. Seemingly delicate and quivering but as Ted Hughes wrote in his poem *Snowdrop*,

*"Brutal as the stars of this month,
Her pale head heavy as metal"*

A tough and resilient little flower to break through the frozen ground and stand in

the frost but always a magical sight and to find a carpet of them really does look like snowfall.

I have one apple still clinging to the tree in my garden, fat and yellow amidst the bare branches. This year the tree produced only four fruit. Later in the month it's the turn of apple trees to be wassailed or blessed. An ancient custom which involves drinking and singing to the health of the trees in the orchards in the hope that they will provide a bountiful harvest in the autumn.



*"Apple tree, apple tree we all come to wassail thee,
Bear this year and next year to bloom and blow,
Hat fulls, cap fulls, three cornered sacks fills..."*

The wassailers traditionally moved from orchard to orchard singing, shouting, banging pots and pans, and even firing shotguns, generally making as much noise as possible in order to both waken the sleeping tree spirits, and also to frighten off any evil demons that may be lurking in the branches. I think I need to wassail my tree.

Thanks for reading. It's been good to be in touch. Would you like to contribute some of your own reflections, a poem or image for our next edition on the general theme of winter into spring?

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