

NICE WEATHER FOR WILDLIFE 2010

The traditional seasons we've had recently have been good for our country's wildlife. Although we haven't enjoyed the freezing start and end to the year, (well, *you* might have enjoyed it if your school was closed and you went sledging), the colder winters and warmer start to the summer has helped lots of wildlife to survive.



The last few winters have been mild and soggy, which is not good news.

It seems that most mammals, insects and birds have done quite well this year.

The cold winters have helped wildlife to hibernate for the winter. **Hibernation** is a very deep sleep. The animals slow down their heart rate and breathing. The body temperature drops. They use very little energy during hibernation so have no need to eat. Their body feeds off fat that the animal has stored by eating extra food in the autumn. This is a special fat called **brown adipose tissue**, or brown fat.

If the weather is unusually warm, an animal such as a bat will wake, and then have to look for food. Of course it won't find much, so uses a lot of energy without any reward. This might mean it can't last out through the winter. The same goes for hedgehogs.



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Of course, badgers don't hibernate - they estivate, (or aestivate). They don't undergo the same sort of bio-chemical slowdown like bats and hedgehogs do. Badgers eat through the summer and autumn, and put on lots of weight. In winter their food, particularly earthworms, are much harder to find. The badgers will then spend a lot of time just sleeping in their cosy setts, - a bit like teenagers really! They can stay underground for several days.



The warm spring and early summer butterflies enjoyed the reasonably until July, when we had a bit of Lots of hoverflies and ladybirds, gardens. But, it was a poor time for



weather were ideal for insects. Many sunny June. (Insects were doing well very windy weather that killed a lot.) which feed on aphids, were about in butterflies such as the painted ladies.

The emergence of the daddy long legs, was poor again for the third year in a row. This is bad news, as they are an important food for birds and bats.

The beginning of flowers. However, spring in the frosts, and we had a Dry weather also meant that the grasses didn't out-grow the flowers.



the year was cold, and that slowed down the emergence of many when the warmer weather did appear, it caused a spectacular garden! Blossom on fruit trees was late, but that meant it missed the good year for fruit. (The apples in my garden went crazy with fruit!)

Hard frosts in February meant many trees suffered from rabbits and hares eating bark as they were unable to graze beneath snow and ice.

In October, frosts meant the leaves turned early and calm weather meant that we had a great show of autumn colour because the trees kept their leaves long than usual. In fact, hazel catkins appeared early in autumn in parts of the North East, rather than March and April, when they usually appear!



Autumn rainfall meant a very good year for grassland fungi.

In the Peak District, the only place that they are found in England, mountain hares enjoyed the wintry environment with their white coats in the snow.



Some birds, such as cranes, had a good year, but others, such as Cornwall's choughs, lost all of their chicks. There are also fears that some of our garden birds will suffer from our bitterly cold end to 2010. Winter is the ideal time to feed the birds – even if you don't do it right through the year. They need extra when it is cold, to help them maintain their high body temperatures.

Puffins on the Farne Islands, here in the North East had a good breeding year. However, mid-summer storms, which have become more common along the Northumberland coast made it hard the Little Tern and Arctic Tern's colonies.



So, all in all, it seems that the traditional seasons are better for wildlife. We'll have to see whether climate change means our weather changes for good or for bad. Only time will tell.

Look up the words in red, (and any others you find interesting or don't understand.)