

## **Knowle Park Nature Notes: November 2018**

Hedgehogs will be fattening up on slugs and snails so they can spend the cold months of winter curled up in a cosy nest of fallen leaves and dry grass, so if you are having bonfires this month always check before they are lit.

Have you seen any King Alfred's Cakes? This is a fungus that is can be found mainly on beech or ash trees, looking like lumps of smooth charcoal. They aren't edible but are good for starting fires, a spark on to the inside surface and they are similar to a charcoal briquette. The name is said to come from the time when King Alfred was hiding from the Danes, he was given shelter by a peasant woman and he had promised to keep an eye on her cakes. As it was, he forgot all about them and they subsequently burned. It is said he then scattered them throughout the forest to hide his mistake!

In the early evening at certain sites Starlings can gather in huge numbers called a murmuration, it is not known quite why this happens, perhaps it is for protection against predators or the cold. Whatever the reason this is an amazing spectacle to watch as they swoop around the sky in dark masses chattering, and then all seem to fall to the roosts at once and all goes quiet as they settle down.



Autumn shades



King Alfred cakes

### **Why do leaves change their colour in Autumn?**

During the spring and summer sunlight is trapped in leaves by a dominant green pigment called chlorophyll. A process called photosynthesis then converts this light energy into chemical energy and this is stored as a sugar for food. As the days get shorter and the night time temperatures fall, the trees prepare for winter and the sugars aren't needed, so the chlorophyll decomposes. This allows the other pigments to be seen (carotenes and xanthophylls) and these are the autumn shades of browns, reds and gold.

If you see anything of special interest, please contact the Parish Ranger on [grounds@fairoak-pc.gov.uk](mailto:grounds@fairoak-pc.gov.uk)