

Knowle Park Nature Notes: January

Although a lot of the wildlife is hibernating at this time of year there is still plenty to look out for while you walk around the park. An early morning walk is a good time to spot a variety of birds and mammals. During the winter when food is scarce and temperatures are low some mammals, like hedgehogs that mainly eat insects and other mini-beasts, find it difficult to survive so they usually hibernate. Squirrels and badgers might sleep during the very coldest days to save energy, however along with foxes and deer they can remain active throughout the winter. They may grow a thicker coat in winter to help keep their body temperature constant during the cold weather. They have also prepared for winter by eating as much as possible during autumn to fatten up or hide food away so they can find it again in winter when there is less food around.

This month you may see grey squirrels engaged in a courtship chase where the females are chased by one or many males wanting to mate with her. They can be very noisy with strange chattering and rasping sounds.

Many smaller woodland birds are also active, on sunny days blackbirds, greenfinches and great tits will sing and listen out for great spotted woodpeckers drumming against a tree. Birds of prey and can be easier to see amongst the branches of deciduous trees.

Other things to look out for:

- The first shoots of spring bulbs are emerging and snowdrop flowers are beginning to open.
- January is also a great time to look for some of the signs of life that the animals who are awake leave behind them. Things to look out for include footprints, nibbled food, feathers or fur, animal homes and droppings.

