



“Nutters” in the park, from grandparents to small children. Well! It is the best autumn festival I can ever remember. Clusters of nuts, absolutely bending the hazel branches. The old wife’s tale foretells a hard winter to come. In truth, it’s been a very kind growing season for all sorts of fruit. Nature has synchronised to produce an enormous bounty, a mast year of beech nuts and acorns along with the hazel nuts, rose hips and haws. In a clever way, this allows a glut of food for our creatures but also a surplus for new tree saplings. Unfortunately, by the time I got around to collect my share of the nuts, only discarded heaps of half shells on the ground were left.



Grey squirrel © Neville Davies @ecology-cymru

Of course, the grey squirrel had beaten me to the prize. The squirrel provides one of the easiest encounters with wildlife for lots of us. During the autumn look out for them foraging for fruits. One special trick of theirs is to bury a stash of spare food. Not in a single cache but scattered across their area. The food is then rediscovered by smell during the winter when food is scarce. Not all the caches

are found, and this helps with the dispersal of trees.

Later in the season watch out for squirrels performing high agility manoeuvres, racing through the bare trees. Extreme kiss chase this is, with the male in active pursuit. This is the way the female sorts out the fit from the unfit. The male at the front of her entourage is more likely to be the most physically fit. One, to keep up with her and secondly to fight off the others.

Given the amount of nuts this autumn there should be some vigorous pursuit races in the winter to come. Did you gather your nuts, apples or blackberries this year? For me, I can recommend Hawthorn wine.

Season’s Greetings

*Kerry*

Countryside Ranger