

The Misbourne Club

Occasional Newsletter Issue 5 - January 2024

Dear Colleagues

It's a new year and a new newsletter, welcome to Occasional Newsletter no.5 and 2024. The year has started with some interesting weather, fortunately the wind from Storm Isha has calmed down and I hope that you have not suffered any damage from that and the following Storm Jocelyn.

Over the past year, we have welcomed a number of new members to the Club which has been meeting monthly in Amersham for over 50 years. In this newsletter is an article describing how the club was formed and a little of the history.

Although our designated meeting date is the first Tuesday in every month, from time to time it is necessary to change the date and there are two basic reasons for this, mainly at the request of the Kings Arms which was the reason for us moving from Thursday to Tuesday. The Chapel is a very popular venue and needless to say, the Kings Arms can make more money from a wedding or conference than they can for us although we are a regular and valuable source of income. However, we have been asked on a number of occasions if we would change our meeting date and this is so in February and November of this year. On both occasions we have agreed to defer our meeting by one week, so February 13th and November 12th. Alternatively, we could meet in the restaurant but the general feeling is that that is not very successful. A second reason for changing is for days following a Bank Holiday as seen in January and will also happen in April and May. The committee are aware that members take the opportunity of a long weekend for a break or have family commitments and so try to avoid a clash.

Currently, the golf section is in abeyance but the walking group has dates for several months commencing in March with a view to continuing until November. Walks are either approximately 2 miles long or 4 miles and always conclude with a pub lunch. Even if you are not able to join the walk, the lunch is always an enjoyable occasion and all members and partners are welcome to join in.

It is hoped that some outings or events will be organised during the year, so watch this space. One date that has been confirmed is the annual Christmas Lunch on Friday, 13th December, again at Gerrards Cross Golf Club.

I hope that you enjoy reading this newsletter and if you feel compelled to write an article, please do as I am sure we will have another edition later on in the year.

With best wishes for 2024

David Abbis

Chairman

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1. The Misbourne Club Walking Group

A report by Jonathan Adams - Group Leader

Up hill and down dale' – the Walking Group is looking forward to hitting the trails again after the winter break! All members of the Misbourne Club are invited to join the Walking Group, which meets once a month from March to November/December, for a morning stroll through the local countryside followed by a pub lunch. Wives/partners are always welcome as well as any non-walking Club member who would like to join us just for lunch afterwards.

In order to cater for a range of walking abilities, we decided last year to alternate each month between routes of 2-2½ miles and about 4 miles. This has proved to be a popular move. For the shorter routes especially, we try to avoid too many challenges such as steep hills and stiles and none of our walks is intended to be a route-march; simply an opportunity for companionship and some gentle exercise out in the fresh air.

Our first walk of the 2024 season, which will be a 4-mile route, will be on Thursday 21st March provided the weather and walking conditions are favourable. Full details of each walk, including the lunch venue, will be circulated 2-3 weeks beforehand.

Meanwhile please make a note of the date for this first outing and for our walks over the following three months. I hope these will be useful for your diary planning.

Thursday 21st March – approx 4 miles	Leader Jonathan Adams
Thursday 18th April – approx 2 miles	Leader Peter Lane
Friday 17th May – approx 4 miles	Leader Alan Gray
Thursday 20th June – approx 2 miles	Leader David Turner

If any members of the Club, long-standing or new, who have not already joined the Group but would be interested in doing so, please contact me, my e-mail is jonathan@eandjadams.net



The walking group - November 2021

2. Members' Tales

2(i) MEG FANSHAWE – A Tribute by John Bailey

Mines in the Zambian Copperbelt are well-spaced along the outcrop of the copper reef, remote from each other and from any major conurbation. Consequently, the mining companies provide excellent sporting and other recreational facilities to retain expatriate and local employees. I worked at Rokana Mine, Nkana-Kitwe, from October 1970 to March 1975, where one could learn to fly at the Flying Club, race sailing dinghies on the tailings dam, take your pick from many sports clubs, or join the activities of Nkana Kitwe Arts Society at Kitwe Little Theatre (KLT). I chose to race an OK dinghy on Sundays and was involved at KLT through the week.



KLT was not a dilapidated Village Hall affair. The theatre was purpose-built with an auditorium seating 232 people on one deck, a thyristor lighting board, a stereo sound system, two film projectors and screen. The stage area had well-lit dressing rooms with stage sound relayed, a control desk on stage right and prompt on stage left. Inner and outer revolves were cut into the stage, which could move in opposite directions simultaneously. There were about six fly-bars for cyclorama and scenery backdrops, a costume wardrobe, properties storage and a workshop to the rear. An observation box at the back of the auditorium contained the lighting board and sound facilities. There was a Green Room for rehearsals, a ticket office, an admin office, and a bar area for drinks, bar lunches and dancing. A large, fenced parking area included a swimming pool constructed in early 1975.

The Club produced from ten to twelve shows per year in that era. It was common to have one production rehearsing lines in the Admin Office, a second rehearsing in the Green Room and a third on stage. I have no record of the many shows I became involved in back-stage, but I was Stage Manager for *Man of La Mancha* in 1971, a major musical that brought me the Club's Welch Trophy for the best staged production during the year. I have a tankard inscribed with the words: '*How's The World Treating You? 1972*', but my other trophies were stolen in a burglary at Mapridge Cottage, Great Missenden. I recall being Stage Manager, or Assistant, for about 15 other shows up to 1975; they probably included a *Music Hall*, a show of *One-Act Plays*, pantomimes, *A Lion in Winter*, *Dangerous Corners*, and *Fiddler on the Roof*. It was an absorbing and demanding hobby.

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Theatre Clubs usually attract interesting characters, and KLT was no exception. Among the many that I recall, Meg Fanshawe was outstanding. She was then about sixty years of age, maybe less, and distinguished by her grey hair and vanishing waistline. But her fading looks were no brake on Meg. On the Club's social evenings, a smart attentive young escort sometimes accompanied her. Meg was married to Dennys, a botanist and technical author employed in the Zambian Forestry Department. Meg liked Dennys, cooking, theatre, and men; Dennys liked Meg and trees. Theatre was not Dennys's scene.



Meg was a competent actress who joined the club in 1956. "She was an expert Witch who could fill a coven with the character parts she played. A trooper of the best kind: her ambition was to "Bump Off the Good Fairy". She was also, for example, the Wicked Witch in *The Wizard of Oz*, the Ghost of Grandma Tzeitel in *Fiddler on the Roof*, and the Dame in many pantomimes. She was always game, and always brought life to her part.

Her fondness of the men was well established, not that she appeared ever to attain her heart's desire. She never chased married men, but the bachelors had to be wary.

"As you are on your own John *darling*, you could join my luncheon club. We meet at my house on Wednesdays at 1-00 pm, and you all pay fifty ngwee [about 50p] towards the cost of the food. There is no other obligation upon you", she added with a light touch of emphasis. "If you would like to join us, please speak to Mike. He organises it for me".

I had informal chats with some of her diners, all of whom gave unreserved encouragement and recommended her wonderful cooking. "She is never any problem in other ways". Meg was an excellent cook, aided in her kitchen by two well-trained and uniformed house servants, one of whom waited at table. We all assembled at the appointed hour, and no one was ever late. Meg entered the room from the kitchen, flushed from the heat, and smiling bravely as she made a dramatic entrance in a floral cotton gown that swept the floor. Her food was magnificent and manna from Heaven for the Club's bachelors. It was a privilege to be there, but the others warned me, "Don't get involved with a girlfriend or she will drop you like a hot cake. She doesn't want to be the cause of trouble between couples". That was very wise and preserved peace in the Theatre Club. Meg was never short of flowers, chocolates, or little gifts.

In May and June 1973, I took paid leave to visit my family in England, making a stop-over in Cyprus *en route*. I rented a car in Nicosia for three days and did some sight-seeing to Kyrenia, Famagusta and the south coast beaches to Paphos. There was a roadblock on the way to Kyrenia where I was allowed to pass by taking a Turk with me who wanted to go there. An atmosphere of foreboding was apparent everywhere.

I returned to Kitwe in July 1973 to find that Dennys and Meg had decided to retire to Cyprus, their 'dream island', where they had bought a plot of land and started to build a house overlooking the harbour in Kyrenia. At my first opportunity I discussed the proposal with Meg and stated my concern on my recent visit to Kyrenia where I had been very much aware of local political tensions. Meg was totally satisfied with their choice of Cyprus and their plan to build a dream home. When it was time for them to leave the Copperbelt we gave them a farewell party at the Theatre Club without sparing the expense. Meg made a theatrical speech in reply to the good wishes of us all, ending with her arms in the air, as if to embrace us, and vowing "I love you all".

Meg and Dennys were in a Cyprus hotel waiting completion of their new house in Kyrenia when one morning a Turkish gunboat appeared in the harbour. Along with other expatriates, the British Embassy relocated them to the southern part of the island. From there they were flown to England. The last time I saw them was in the glorious English summer of 1975. They were in Cockermouth, Cumbria, in the employment of Lady Moon, Dennys as head gardener and Meg as housekeeper.

How very sad for them both, but they appeared to be content.

John Bailey

2. Members' Tales

2 (ii) Thoughts inspired by Cambodia by Tony Felts

As many Misbourne Club members have travelled to Cambodia in recent years, to visit the temples of Angkor Wat, It seemed appropriate to record a small journey that I undertook in a less accessible part of the country.



In the 1960s and 70s, Cambodia was embroiled in a complex political landscape. The Vietnam War spilled over into the country, destabilizing the region and exacerbating internal tensions. Amidst this turmoil, Pol Pot emerged as the leader of the Khmer Rouge, a communist guerrilla group seeking to establish a radical vision of agrarian socialism in Cambodia.

50 years on and many of the younger population are not even aware of the horrors of this period of Cambodia's history and yet it is on a par, if not worse, that the Nazi persecution of the Jews. And even as I write this article we are all watching the terrible atrocities that are occurring in Ukraine.

Pol Pot's vision entailed transforming Cambodia into a self-sufficient nation, known as the "Democratic Kampuchea." In pursuit of this vision, he implemented policies that aimed to erase all vestiges of modernity and create a classless, agrarian society. Under his leadership, urban populations were forcibly relocated to the countryside to work on collective farms. Money was abolished, private property seized, and social institutions dismantled.

The result was a genocide of unparalleled proportions. It is estimated that between 1.5 and 2 million people, approximately a quarter of Cambodia's population, perished under the Khmer Rouge regime. Victims included not only political opponents but also minority groups, religious practitioners, and anyone perceived as a threat to the regime's ideology.

The atrocities committed during this period were dreadful. Mass executions, forced labour, torture, and starvation were the grim realities faced by countless Cambodians. Places like the infamous Tuol Sleng prison, also known as S-21, and the Killing Fields near Phnom Penh, serve as grim reminders of the horrors inflicted upon the Cambodian population.

In 1979, after a number of violent incursions by their Cambodian neighbours, the newly unified Vietnamese government invaded Cambodia, defeated Pol Pot and installed a rival government. Pol Pot and the remnants of his followers retreated to the jungle in the foothills near the Thai border where they established their final stronghold in a place called Anlong Veng, in the border district of Oddar Meanchey.

Even as late as the year 2000 when I first went to work in the country there was continued violence in Phnom Penh and elsewhere, as a few remaining political factions fought for power. One of my roles was to identify and visit areas of the country in need of demining and disarmament, and that included much of Oddar Meanchey, and Anlong Veng.



Anlong Veng is off the beaten track for all but the most determined of tourists and several hours drive from Phnom Penh.

On arrival I was surprised at the quiet and pleasant surroundings of the village that hold the final fortress and burial place of Pol Pot. A wide tarmac road leads through the houses and on towards a border crossing with Thailand.

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This is only a few miles further up the hill but normally remains closed to traffic. Some of the surrounding jungle and agricultural land had been cleared of mines, but not all. And strange as it may seem Pol Pot seems to have retained a certain popularity in this area of the country. Driving back down to the village the old “fortress” came into view on the left. It was easy to identify due to the collection of rusting military vehicles parked next to the building, and served as silent witnesses to a bygone era.



Although somewhat larger than a typical Khmer house, and made of concrete rather than timber it was still very much in the traditional khmer style. The ground floor housed a large open living area, while offices and sleeping quarters occupied the upper levels. The walls of the ground floor were adorned with hand-painted murals depicting scenes of rural life as well as the majestic Angkor Wat. The

view of the paddy fields stretched out in the lowlands below was actually quite beautiful in the evening sun, but nothing could hide the cold haunted feeling of the place.

Towards one end of the room were a number of cages, approximately 5 ft tall and made of welded steel bars covered with wire mesh. As I stood beside the cages, a sense of unease gripped me.

These grim structures, made of steel re-enforcing rods and covered with worn wire mesh, were used for the imprisonment of chosen victims. They served as a source of perverse entertainment for the captors. Political opponents were subjected to prolonged periods of captivity within these cramped spaces, their lives reduced to a spectacle for the regime's sadistic amusement. The stains of blood, a chilling testament to the atrocities committed, served as a permanent reminder of the inhumanity inflicted upon the prisoners.

Outside and close to the road side there is a grave with a roughly written sign in Khmer designating this as the spot where Pol Pot's ashes were buried.

An un-kept ending for a man who caused so much pain and sadness in his quest for power and glory.



On my return to Phnom Penh I spoke to the office cleaner who had been forced to dig irrigation canals in her youth and had a daughter to a man who never lived to see his child; I spoke to my gardener who never spoke or was spoken to because he was known to have been a member of the khmer rouge, and my driver who was brought up as an orphan.

So here we are 50 years later and yet we have war in Ukraine, Syria destroyed, Iraq destroyed, Yemen a centre of conflict between warring religious groups, Israel and Palestine at war, and millions of desperate people displaced.

Our generation in the UK has been lucky not to have been directly involved in war, but maybe, just maybe, we could have done more to stop the carnage. Perhaps by reminding modern and future generations of these atrocities we can maybe help to prevent more of the same in the future.

Just maybe !!

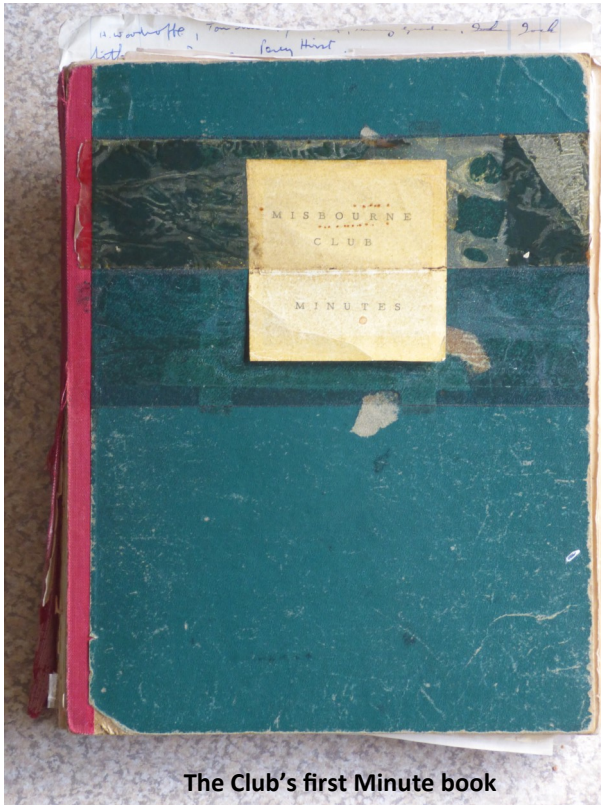
Let us all hope so.

3. THE MISBOURNE CLUB

A short History of its Origins & Development

Occasionally it is worth reflecting on the past and to remember how we came to where we are. The longer serving members of the Club will be familiar with some of the history of the Club but newer members might like to know how it began.

The formation of what became The Misbourne Club was down to John Grimmer when an interim meeting was held at his house in Doggets Wood on 7th February 1969. Present were Ernest Post (who took the Chair), John Grimmer (acting Secretary) and five other founding members, Harold Morris, Dick Coker, Ralph Flanders, Alfred Gee and Robert Gwyn Jones.



The Club's first Minute book

The inaugural meeting took place on 6 March 1969 in what was then the Millstream Restaurant in old Amersham. (The Millstream restaurant no longer exists and is now Ambers, a select ladies fashion shop.) In addition to the seven founding members the March meeting was attended by nineteen other founder members. An Agenda and other significant papers had been circulated prior to the meeting. It is not known if the business of the meeting took place pre or post the meal but clearly much was achieved. Ernest Post was confirmed as Chairman, John Grimmer as Secretary and Harold Morris elected Hon Treasurer. The other founding members were elected to the Committee with exception of Robert Gwyn Jones who was leaving the district and did not stand.

The proposed constitution & rules for the Club were circulated prior to the meeting and these were agreed by those present. The main criteria of the Constitution being that the Club be non-political, non- sectarian, for retired business and professional gentlemen.

It is a tribute to the integrity of the founding members that apart from a little tweaking now and again (to reflect changing times) the constitution & rules are still in use today.

Two names were proposed for the Club; Colonia and Misbourne but the latter was considered more appropriate.

Membership was set at 50 with a joining fee of ten shillings. The annual subscription was agreed at 10 shillings and sixpence. (Further research in the minutes revealed this was decided by the accommodation limitations of the lunch venue,)

It was agreed the newly named Misbourne Club would meet once a month for lunch.

The meal, at the inaugural meeting, cost 11 shillings plus 10% service.

From the outset consideration was given to providing as many social/sporting functions and outings as members would support. The first recorded event was a Golf Day at Harewood Downs GC on 30 May 1969. Tee off was at 9:00am with singles in the morning and foursomes in the afternoon. Fee for GC members was £1.0.6d and non-members £1.15.0d inclusive of lunch, tea and gratuities.

In June 1969 the Club jointly hosted a Garden Party with stalls, sideshows & refreshments.

The Misbourne Club was a success from its inception. A report to members 7 months from the inaugural meeting declared a full membership of 50 with a waiting list. The same report stated that *"The Committee would like to be able to arrange the lunch in a large Restaurant with a more varied menu. We hope to be able to report something to you soon."*

(continued overleaf)

(A short History continues)

The Club's minutes show that members undertook a variety of visits/activities in addition to golf and theatre. Visits were organised to the Metropolitan Police Horse Show, Didcot Power Station, Brevet Shoe factory and not to forget BBC TV studios (The Wogan Show).

Talks were also a feature of the luncheons covering a variety of subjects: Surgical Instruments, Local Government, The night I shot an Elephant, Channel Tunnel Rolling Stock, to name just a few.

One of the early activities of The Misbourne Club was the Annual Holiday. Members with their wives visited numerous places such as the Isle of Wight, Tenby, Woolacombe, Sandbanks, Aldeburgh & Sidmouth. The 1987 proposed Annual Holiday was to Bournemouth but they eventually discontinued due to falling support.

Not surprisingly the Club's luncheon venues have changed with the passage of time. The monthly luncheons at the Millstream continued until 1970 when it was decided to move to the Tudor Room at the Crown Hotel. Following alterations to the Hotel in 1985 the venue changed almost annually in an effort to obtain acceptable fare and accommodation. For a while the Club luncheons were held at Chesham United Football Club's Chess Suite in conjunction with Alpine Caterers. However, in October 1991 the records show a falling out with those providing the catering facilities and the Misbourne Club moved to Guido's Italian Restaurant in top Amersham. Guido's restaurant provided a stable base for the Club's luncheons until Thursday 1st December 2016 with a final lunch. Guidos closed at the end of December 2016 pending redevelopment of the site. From January 2017 the luncheon venue has been the King's Chapel part of the King's Arms in old Amersham.

A recurring theme for the Club from the outset has been the promotion of good fellowship. Harry Goodson, then Chairman, wrote to members on 6th July 1989;

"You will be aware that one of the prime objects of our Club is the promotion of good fellowship. From time to time, both formally at meetings and informally to members of the Committee, representations have been made by a not insignificant number of members that the use of reserve cards, coupled in some cases by "block booking" of tables has tended to operate against the desirable mixing of members to achieve wider fellowship.

Accordingly, your committee have considered the matter, and has decided to institute on an experimental basis for the months of August, September and October this year, a new system for our monthly luncheons.

The table places will be numbered. On paying for the lunch and collecting his name card, the member will draw at random a number, and for that luncheon only he will sit at the place at the tables marked with the corresponding number. The only reserved places which will be specifically allocated in advance will be those for the Chairman, Treasurer, Secretary and the Speaker.

It is appreciated that some members will not welcome this change initially, but I would ask for their co-operation and tolerance. After the expiry of the three months we can review the situation and decide on our future pattern of seating at our luncheons."

He subsequently reported on 4th January 1990, the year the Club celebrated its 21st Birthday; "You may be wondering what happened about our experimental seating trial period last year? 93% of members registered an opinion. Of these 72% voted in favour of continuing of seating by direction."

Despite the Club members mandate the Committee, under the direction of the Chairman Harry Goodson, decided their preference was for a scheme to evolve. They proposed for the time being to leave seating arrangements to individuals, with an emphasis on freedom to sit anywhere, but also with a strong plea not to indulge in big regular groupings. Chairman Harry is recorded as saying; "We are looking for the co-operation of all members over this. We will keep the mandate in cold storage for the time being – together with the reservation cards"

That the Misbourne Club has existed for over fifty years is a testament to the initiative of John Grimmer coupled with the myriad of Chairmen and committee members who have guided the Club through its many trials and tribulations. The manner in which the Club would operate was established in its formative year. That the formula has changed very little over time, coupled with a strong membership over the years, suggests it's a winning one.

Perhaps it is fitting to close with the words attributed to John Grimmer the Club's first Secretary. As a footnote to his first notice to Club members he wrote "I am sure that the formation of this Club is both desirable and necessary. There are lots of lonely retired people about, and if only we can help them, we shall not only be giving a service but enjoying ourselves at the same time." Long may the Club continue.

4. Natural History

Migratory birds to look out for during the winter months

by David Witton– Pictures by Linda Witton

It is during our winter months, from October until April, that thousands of birds, mostly thrushes and finches, migrate from Northern Europe and Asia to our shores, seeking a warmer climate and plentiful foods, like berries and seeds.

Most of the birds fly by night in great numbers, and when it is really cold, with snow and ice, they will seek out our gardens and take advantage of what food they can find.

Redwing



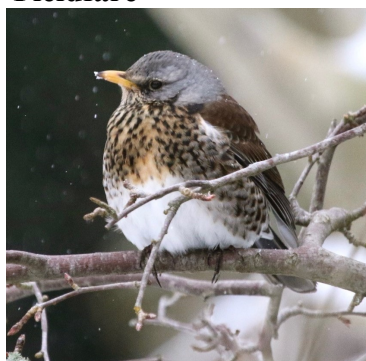
This is the smallest member of the thrush family.

Redwing migrate from Iceland, Faroe and Scandinavia. A very small number do breed in Scotland.

It has a direct flight with a high- pitched call and numbers can exceed a million migrating birds.

They feed on hawthorn and rowan berries and rotting apples.

Fieldfare



The largest of the thrush family, fieldfare migrate from Scandinavia and Russia.

These birds were once hunted and eaten by the Romans. Records in the 17th century show that over 600,000 birds were caught in one season by Prussian trappers.

Winter berries are their main source of food.

Waxwing



They are not long-distant migrants but in very cold weather, numbers will visit our shores.

They migrate from Fennoscandia (Norway, Sweden, Finland) and Russia.

A rather plump elegant bird with silky smooth pinkish-brown and pale grey plumage, black and white eye-stripe and a distinctive crest, and can be seen in supermarket car parks feeding on rowan berries.

They live for up to 8 years and their global population is around 3 million birds, but we are lucky if we see a small flock.

Siskin



One of the smallest birds of the finch family, they are very active and restless birds that fly in large flocks.

The worldwide population is between 20 to 36 million, the European population being 3 to 15 million birds.

One year we had a large flock of over 100 birds in our garden attracted to the bird feeders.

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Brambling



A member of the finch family, it is also called 'cock o the north' and 'mountain finch'.

It is widely distributed throughout Eurasia from Scandinavia to eastern Siberia.

The global population is between 100 and 200 million birds but numbers are decreasing.

During the summer they feed on insects, but their favourite food in winter is beech masts. Locally, up to 200 birds winter in Penn Wood. They are often seen, and can be confused with chaffinch.

Mealy Redpoll



Their range extends through northern Europe and Asia to North American, Greenland and Iceland.

A small bird that can be attracted to bird feeders by supplying niger seeds or sunflower hearts.

Lesser Redpoll



This bird is smaller than the mealy redpoll and about the size of a blue tit.

It often flocks with other finches like the goldfinch and siskin. Lesser redpoll were first introduced to New Zealand in 1862 and they are now widely distributed.

Crossbill



This is a stocky bird of the finch family.

Although not a migrant, they breed in Scotland but in extreme winter weather they do venture south and frequent local beech woods, occasionally visiting gardens.

We were lucky once to have one bathing in our waterfall. It became snared in the netting and after a hastily taken photo, was released undamaged to the wild.

Others

There are many more winter migrating birds that visit the UK. However, the birds listed above are more likely to seek food in our gardens. I should also mention that Blackbirds and Starling increase in numbers during cold winters and will travel over from Northern Europe.

Waxwing and Crossbill are by far the rarest birds to be seen.

Please let me know if they appear in your garden. E-mail: craignish@btinternet.com