

December 2011

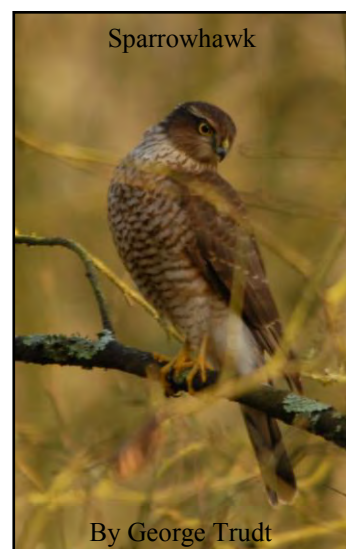
1. Views of the pond taken after a snowfall on the 6th and during early afternoon on Hogmanay.



2. Confirmed wildlife sightings:

a. Birds:

Blackbird, Blue Tit, Brambling, Buzzard, Carrion Crow, Chaffinch, Coal Tit, Dunnock, Goldcrest, Goldfinch, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Great Tit, Greenfinch, Grey Heron, Jay, Kestrel, Lesser Redpoll, Little Grebe, Long-tailed Tit, Mallard, Moorhen, Nuthatch, Pheasant, Raven, Robin, Siskin, Sparrowhawk, Tawny Owl, Tree Creeper, Willow Tit, Wood Pigeon, Wren, Yellowhammer.



b. Mammals:

Bank Vole, Fox, Mole, Rabbit, Red Squirrel, Roe Deer, Wood Mouse.



A mole was spotted as it scurried across the gravel path near the Centre and again as it poked its head out from cover when it reached the opposite bank.

c. Fungi:

December turned out to be yet another mild, wet month with several species of fungi still to be seen around the Reserve – including this Yellow Brain Fungus (*Tremella mesenterica*).



3. Mistletoe

Scientific name: *Viscum album*

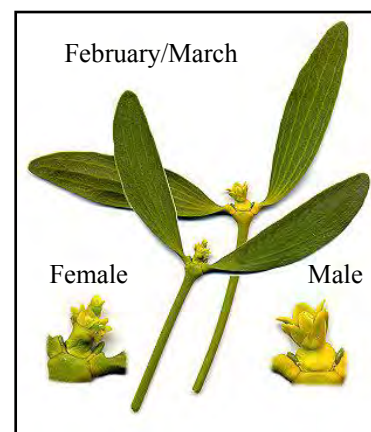
The name mistletoe is thought to come from one of the birds which feeds on the berries - the Mistle Thrush. The latin name '*Viscum album*' relates to the berries which contain a sticky, or viscous fluid (*Viscum*) and are white in colour (*album*).

Size: The stems grow up to 90 cm long.

Habitat: Grows on oak, hawthorn, lime, maple and especially apple trees.

Distribution: Mistletoe is a very hardy plant and will grow wherever its host trees will grow. It is common in central and southern England and there are many recorded examples of plants growing in Scotland.

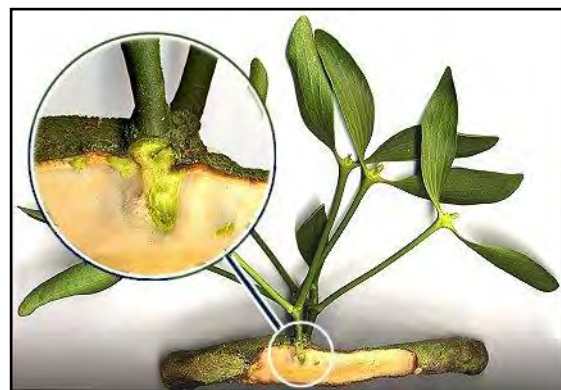
Flowering: Mistletoe usually starts to flower in its 5th year and has separate male and female plants so there needs to be at least one of each in proximity in order to get berries. Inconspicuous green flowers appear in late winter - February/March till April/May. Mistletoe berries mostly ripen in October and November. They change from green through yellow to a translucent or pearly white upon ripening. Those growing in moderate shade are likely to remain a pale greenish-yellow overwinter and may ripen the following spring but any underdeveloped green ones that are growing in heavy shade don't ripen at all and are shed by the plant.



Dispersal:

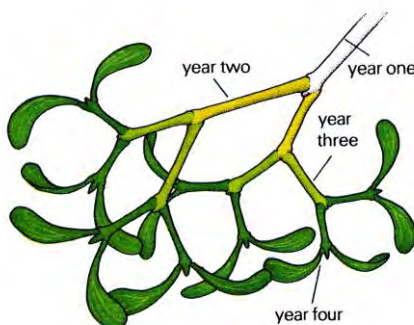
The berries (each containing one or two seeds) may be eaten by the mistle thrush and occasionally by blackcaps and wood pigeons. Other birds find the berries unattractive to eat. Consequently many seeds are distributed via bird droppings, though most of these fall to the ground and fail to germinate. As the birds feed on the berries their beak becomes coated with the slimy pulp and the seeds. Occasionally a bird cleans its beak by wiping it on the bark of a nearby tree and, as the slime dries and hardens, becomes glued to it, where the seeds are able to germinate and form another parasitic clump.

Special features: Mistletoe is a semi-parasitic plant which grows on the branch of a host tree. The mistletoe doesn't grow roots as the tree does. Instead the seed anchors itself to the tree by putting out 'tentacle-like' structures which penetrate the tree's bark and grow into the tissues beneath forming an haustorium. This operates like the placenta in a mammal, transferring water and nutrients from the host's tissues to the parasite. However, the mistletoe does not rely entirely on its host for food. It has green leaves and stems that can photosynthesis in the normal way to form energy rich sugars.



How to age mistletoe:

Mistletoe grows in a strictly regular manner. Each year its growing points fork into two. This makes it easy to age a specimen. Trace back along a stem from the tip to the base and count the number of times it has divided. The number is equal to the age of the plant.



In Roman times, mistletoe was believed to protect against lightning, poisoning and evil influences. It was also thought to increase fertility. This may be the source of the tradition of kissing beneath a sprig of mistletoe at Christmas.

In some counties the mistletoe was burned after twelfth night in case those who kissed beneath it did not marry.

4. School Visits to Eskrigg

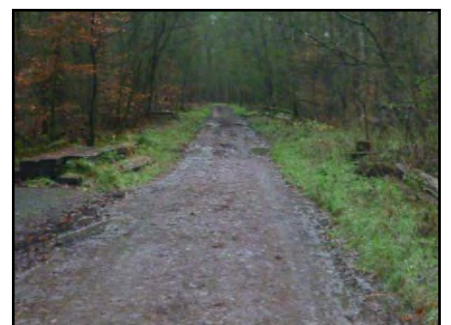
5th Dec. – Visit by S1 Environmental Studies with Mrs Muirhead and Miss Lewis.

Connor and Isaac spent some time learning how to use adjustable and socket spanners and tin snips, then used their skills to change the wire mesh on the large nut feeder and clean the feeder in the process. They also cleared the snow and ice from the bench seat opposite.



9th Dec. – Visit by S3 Environmental Studies with Mrs Muirhead and Mrs Good.

Teri, Pamela and Danny worked well as a team to cut up the trees that had been blown down across the forest road. They then moved the timber a side to clear the roadway.



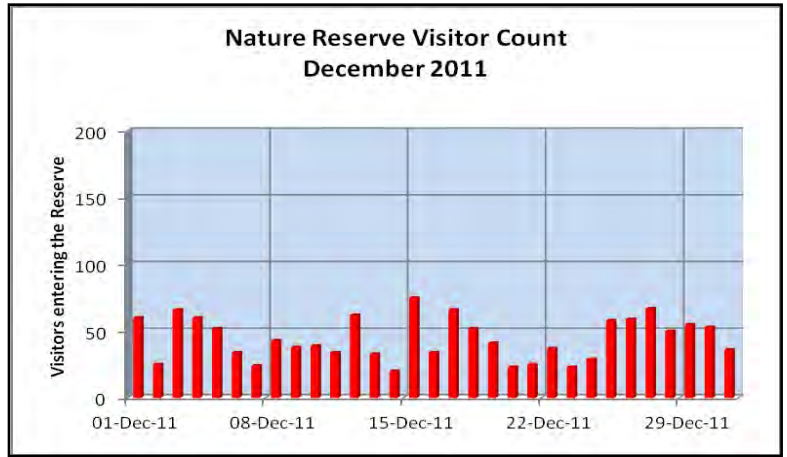
5. Maintenance Work:

The month of December was very wet and often quite cold. This limited the amount of maintenance work that could be done. On the 17th, wire netting was stapled to the top of the jetty extension to make it safer to walk on, especially in the wet and icy weather. At other times the path was raked, feeders cleaned, nest boxes checked, ditches and drainage pipes cleared and the Centre looked after.



7. Visitor Records:

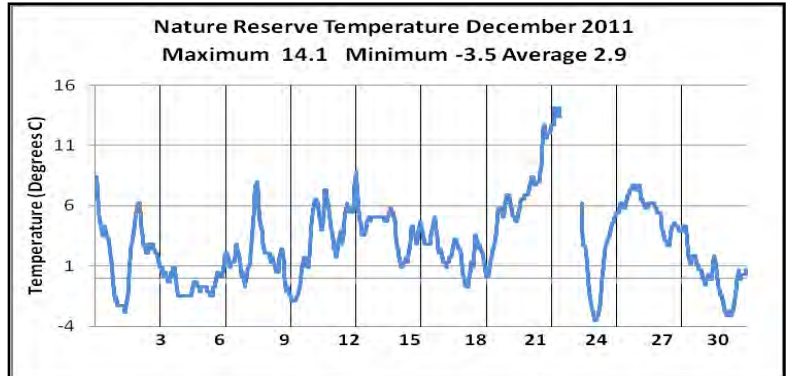
Month	Total number of Visitors	Daily Average Visitors
July	1689	54
August	1661	54
September	1515	51
October	1763	57
November	1432	48
December	1373	44



8. Weather Records:

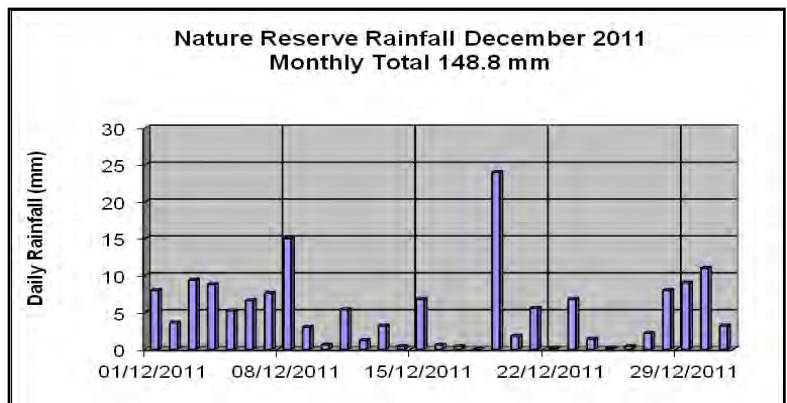
a. Air temperature

Month	Maximum	Minimum	Average
July	19.8	5.4	12.09
August	16.3	4.6	12.1
September	20.2	3.9	12.1
October	17.0	-1.8	9.2
November	12.4	-3.5	6.6
December	14.1	-3.5	2.89

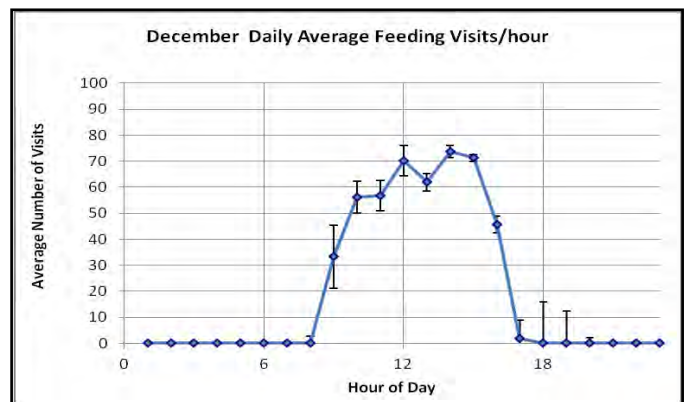


b. Precipitation

Month	Rainfall (mm)
July	155.65
August	127.6
September	151.6
October	167.6
November	96.8
December	148.8

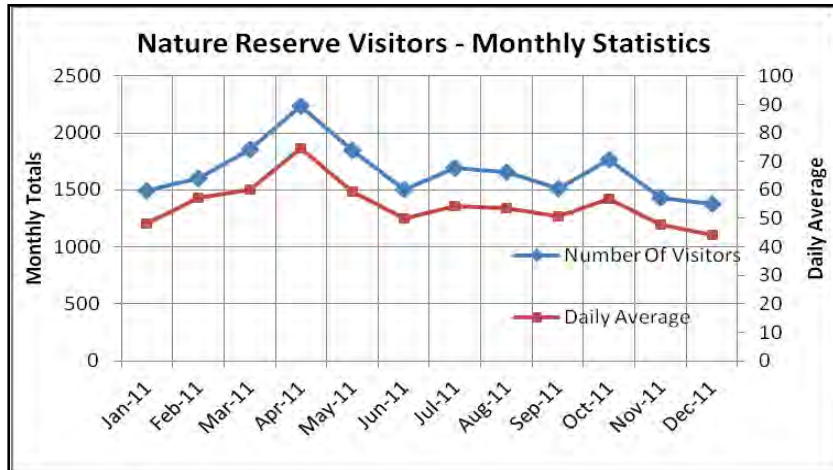


9. Monitoring Red Squirrel Feeding Behaviour

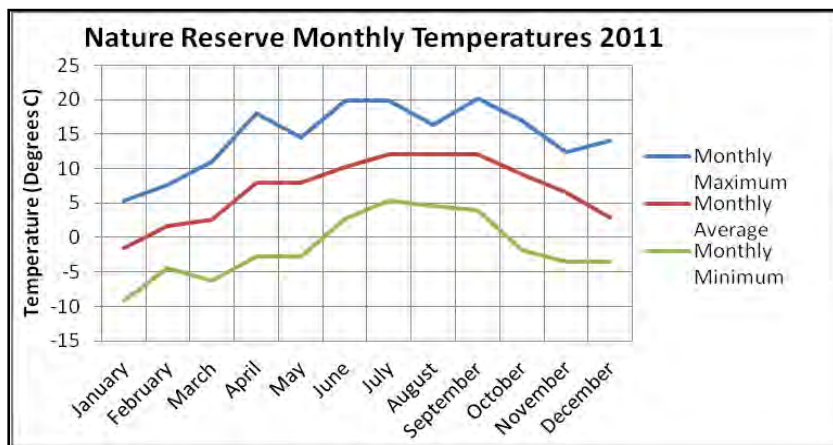


Review of 2011

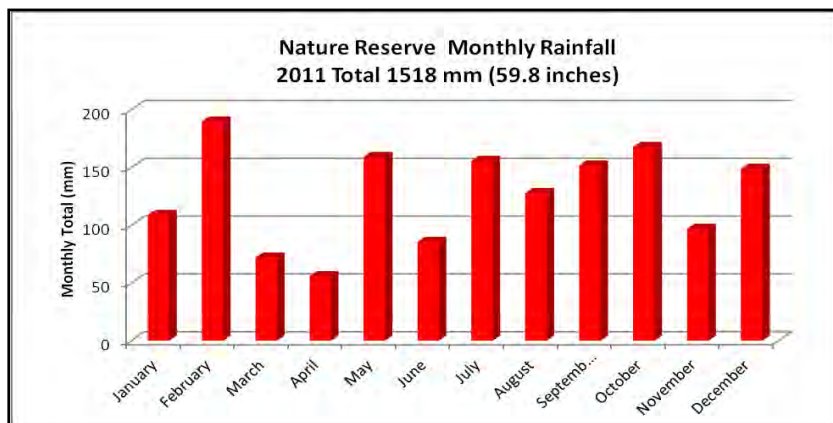
a. Visitors



b. Air Temperature



c. Precipitation



d. Squirrel Feeding Pattern

