

Downs Diary

Christmas special!



It's official! The **robin** is the UK's favourite bird. It first featured on Christmas cards in the middle of the 19th century. Why? Well until 1861 postmen wore bright red coats, earning them the nick-name of '**robin redbreasts**'. In the winter, male and female birds set up separate territories. Both sexes can be heard singing - a warning for other robins to stay away. Many Scandinavian, Russian and German robins migrate to over-winter in the UK.

Although the **mistle thrush** is named after its liking for **mistletoe** (a plant traditionally used for Christmas decorations), single birds can often be found dominating and defending holly trees for their berries.



Holly was traditionally brought into the house so faeries could shelter in the branches and join in the festivities, in return protecting the inhabitants against the wiles of house goblins. The version of the '**Holly and the ivy**' carol we are familiar with today was first published by Cecil Sharp. It is thought to have Pagan origins and could therefore date back over 1,000 years. It is most unusual for a carol like that to have survived that long, especially during the stern Protestant period of the 17th century. The colours of holly and ivy, green and red, are traditionally associated with Christmas.



We wish you a merry Christmas and a very happy New Year!