

SNAP CRACKLE AND KER-POW!

I BELIEVE THAT I am developing hypochondriac tendencies and it is all because of browsing through the breakfast cereal boxes. Actually it's my brother's fault. He came to stay with us over the Christmas holidays and happened to remark as he shook various golden flakes of corn in to his bowl "Have you ever read the information on these boxes?" I must confess that I normally grab the paper and having absorbed the bold headlines of the latest disaster turn hastily to the sports pages, which often contain the same amount of gloom.

One morning the paper hadn't arrived as I shook those familiar shrivelled flakes over one of those flat biscuit things, that are slightly reminiscent of a kitchen scouring pad (one cannot advertise) and my gaze fell on those colourful cartons. Fortified with vitamins and iron they announce, containing Vitamins B, C and D. But that's not all. They bounce with other things that I'd never heard of before such as Thiamin, Niacin, Riboflavin and Folic acid, Oh not that as well!

By now I'm getting worried. I mean I've actually mixed them together. Reading on I find that thiamin and niacin help to release energy and riboflavin maintains healthy skin and eyes and apparently gives niacin a boost. As for the dreaded folic acid I am informed that this produces red blood cells to stop me becoming anaemic, well that's a relief at least. Vitamin B gets your blood and nerves perked up and Vitamin D gives you

healthy teeth and bones, but wait for it, we learn that Vitamin C is needed to make collagen which we need to bind the cells of our tissues and also helps our bodies to absorb iron.

The way I put away my morning "scoff" with all supposed iron and energy I have visions of me bursting my clothing like some geriatric Incredible Hulk! Does it happen, does it heck. In truth I don't feel any more energised than if I'd had a piece of toast and marmalade, but at least I now know that cereals are definitely good for you and don't carry a government health warning.

Well that snow arrived, mentioned in last month's ramblings, appropriately on my birthday on Valentines Day which I share with our jovial gardening expert I note (I hope you had a good day "Mitch", I did). However it was the following day that we received a more generous covering of the winter wonderland which came courtesy of the Europe. Fortunately we were not too inconvenienced and with the sun shining afterwards I took the opportunity to take some local winter scene photographs. Foolishly when we later took the excited dogs for a walk, I omitted to change to my wellies with the result that I executed several toe loops and triple salkoes that Torvill and Dean would have been proud of. However the excellent Torvill and Dean don't have to control several pounds of healthy dog on the end of their leads as they skate, but it was my own fault I know.

Particularly during the cold snap we have had a single cock pheasant grace the garden helping out the bantams with their mixed wheat and maize. He also jumps up on the wall to the allotment field where we put out the bowl of wild bird food and rotten apples. He really is a very handsome chap. My diary records that on Sunday February 20th whilst we were having breakfast in the conservatory I was pleasantly surprised to see a flight of four long tailed tits feeding from the suspended nut holders in the plum tree. These tiny birds reminiscent of mini budgerigars are generally seen feeding in the tops of beech trees where they flock together and I imagine this splinter group had taken the hazardous trip across the open area of the allotment from the woodland alongside the cricket club. Pretty little birds they are, with their black, white and cinnamon pink colouring and if you haven't seen their nests before, I assure you they are a work of art.

My wife Sue and I discovered an old nest once when we were enjoying a walk after a picnic lunch near Wotton-Under-Edge. They are perfectly formed little domed nests made from lichen and cobwebs and so delicately put together. As we watched I noticed a larger bird speeding across the expanse of the allotment like a jet fighter aircraft intent on raiding the gathered small birds in our plum tree. The drama was over in seconds and fortunately the male sparrowhawk departed as quickly as he came, without any prey clutched in his merciless talons.

Nature, of course can be very cruel but the handsome sparrowhawk has to live just as much as the smaller birds that we encourage in to our gardens and they are bound to occasionally take some of our favourites. The female of the species, a larger bird, will take doves, blackbirds and starlings as part of it's diet. Sparrowhawks are now on the increase again after virtually being made extinct in the last few decades due to harmful pesticides being used.

Happily man has seen the folly of his ways regarding the poisoning of the countryside or at least we would like to think he has. There are still some who flout the law however and reports of ecological disasters large and small can be found in the newspapers virtually every day.

Now to our tail piece, I am delighted to announce that to Biddestone Picturesque (Jessica) and Juniper Dale (Rossie, also known as Rastus), the arrival of six beautiful border terrier puppies (3 girls, 3 boys) delivered on March 2nd and 3rd are all making excellent progress. I cannot believe that we now have 10 dogs under our roof! As an added post-script may I thank the gentleman in the Milton Road who so kindly "guarded" my old yellow van when she broke down recently outside his house. Poor Buttercup was ignominiously towed away the following morning by the A.A. but I'm happy to say that she's alright again now.

Tony Boardman.