

# Chiff Chaff

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GILBERT WHITE'S HOUSE & GARDEN  
and THE OATES COLLECTION



Issue 7

January 2011

## Alan Titchmarsh to formally open *Gilbert Who?* Exhibition

Whilst visitors have been enjoying the new *Gilbert Who?* Exhibition for a couple of months, we are delighted to be welcoming back Alan Titchmarsh on Saturday, 9th April at 11.00am to formally open this HLF grant aided exhibition.



We have received many favourable comments on the new presentation and not just from our increasing number of family visitors, who are now much better catered for with the range of simple and fun Interactive elements incorporated into Bell's Library. If you haven't yet seen the new developments, why not put this date in your diary?

Miriam Tong



## Rugged Siberian Weather



As I write, the end of January is just a few days ahead. The sun is shining and it's tempting to think that the worst of the winter is already behind us. Snowdrops are coming into bloom, days are getting longer and there's even an occasional hint of warmth in the rare spells of sunshine, so surely spring is just around the corner. Maybe, but to make such a prediction at this time of year is definitely asking for trouble. It's only a few weeks ago, during the pre-Christmas snow, that we were hearing assured predictions of a very hard winter, beginning early and continuing for several months. Well, so far, so good, but there's still time for a lot more snow. I am willing to make one optimistic weather forecast however. We can be confident that we are unlikely to experience the dire winter conditions that Gilbert White did!

How can I be so certain? During White's lifetime, the world was going through a spell of very cold winters, so cold that the period has been dubbed the Little Ice Age. The period lasted for a few hundred years but the lowest temperatures occurred during the 17th and 18th centuries. White describes conditions in Selborne during the second half of the 18th century, a time when winter conditions were particularly severe.

On 28th February 1765 a snowstorm occurred, which was the worst in the village's memory. Three years later there was more deep snow and in 1771 the first four months of the year were exceptionally cold. In 1774 the first snow fell in Selborne on 11th November and in 1776 snow began falling on 7th January. The freeze continued throughout the month and on 12th January 1776 White recorded in his Journal:

*A very deep snow. Poor birds begin to be distress'd, & come in a door...*

In the following days he continued:

*The snow is drifted up to the tops of the gates & the lanes are full. Poultry do not stir-out of the hen-houses: they are amazed, & confounded in snow, & would soon perish.*

*Rugged, Siberian weather. The narrow lanes are full of snow ....*

Given that the world is now on a warming trend, we've seen a surprising amount of snow over the past three winters. I haven't heard our weather forecasters using such graphic language but the 'rugged Siberian weather' has certainly taken its toll on our wildlife. White's report of birds being distressed in 1776 would be equally applicable in 2009 and 2010. Small birds in particular have been hard hit. For example, our surveys of Dartford Warblers on the Thames Basin and Wealden Heaths have shown that their population fell by around 95% as a result of the 2009 and 2010 winters. We don't know yet what the effect of our current winter will be but I, for one, am hoping for an early spring so that I can find out!

*John Eyre*



## Half-Term Antarctic Adventures



For those of an adventurous nature who would like to explore without having to travel hundreds of miles, why not join us for our half-term 'Antarctic Adventures'. Come and see the penguins. Pull a sledge, and race to raise the flag. Adults must be accompanied by children!

**Saturday 19th – Sunday 27th February**



## The Wakes Garden This Winter & Spring

What a winter it's been so far – snow made it difficult to locate the borders last month, never mind work on them! This was followed by great downpours of rain which made the soil impossible to work anyway. But did garden staff and volunteers go into hibernation – much as they might have liked to, they certainly didn't!! We were busy packeting seeds, turning out sheds and cupboards and overhauling the engraving machine, to name just a few of the jobs successfully completed. But what it does mean is that we are behind on our schedule of maintenance tasks, so we need all the help we can get in the next few months to stay on target!

We are looking forward to an exciting new year, with newly labelled plants in the garden, an expanded and improved plant sales area and professionally labelled plants on the plant stand– as well as improving yet again our standard of maintenance. And we have an exciting programme of garden courses and lectures– including a snowdrop day to be held in February. But none of this can be achieved without volunteer help, so please come and help us make 2011 the best year ever!

Best Wishes & Good Gardening

*David Standing*

## Passages from Gilbert's Writings



January 24, 1758 *Set-up about 20 Yards into the Hanger, in a line with the six Gates, a figure of the Hesperian Hercules, painted on board, eight feet high, on a pedestal of four feet & an half. It looks like a statue, & shows well all over our out-let..*

This photograph, taken in December, shows the recently renovated pedestal of Hercules deeply blanketed in snow.



# Spring Events



Wednesday 2 March, 7.30pm

Winter Talk: *'Gilbert White's Garden - Cutting New Ground in Garden History'*

by David Standing

Tickets £15 to include Wine or Soft drinks and Nibbles.

Phone 01420 511275 to book. **Book early - places limited!**

Friday 25th March 10.00am—4.00pm

Workshop *'Pruning—How to Get it Right'*

with David Standing and Rose Malyon

Phone 01420 511275 to book. **Book early - places limited!**

Friday 2nd April 10.00am—4.00pm

Workshop *'Flowers in Watercolour'*

with Jan Harbon

Phone 01420 511275 to book. **Book early - places limited!**

Saturday 9th April 11.00am

Official Opening of *Gilbert Who* Exhibition

with Alan Titchmarsh

Standard admission charges apply.

Saturday 9th April—Monday 25th April

Easter Holiday Activities *'Easter Bunny Eggstravaganza'*

Standard admission charges apply.

Saturday 14th May 10.00am—4.00pm

Workshop *'Bark Basketry'*

A Gone to the Woods Course

Phone 01420 511275 to book. **Book early - places limited!**

Monday 16 May 10.00am—4.00pm

Workshop *'The Fragrant Cottage Garden'*

with David Standing

Phone 01420 511275 to book. **Book early - places limited!**

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The Wakes, High Street, Selborne, Hampshire GU34 3JH

01420 511275

info@gilbertwhiteshouse.org.uk

[www.gilbertwhiteshouse.org.uk](http://www.gilbertwhiteshouse.org.uk)

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