

Climate change.

Part of my role as a CANS rep is to report on Climate change and its potential to change our local wildlife, flora and fauna. Often change is so small it is difficult to detect. E.g. It may be a lull, glut or disease of a particular plant or maybe the arrival of unusual and unexpected bird.

The Issue. I have randomly come across a phenomenon that I was not previously aware of. Several situations came together that led me to discover the topic of my report and without proper training and expertise I shall speculate as to what I think is going on. Clearly there are differences of opinion, levels of expertise etc that could perhaps verify these phenomena but I feel that its important for each of us to be more aware of our surroundings and feel confident to question if something is a climate issue or not and put it on the table for consideration. So what have I seen?

1. I had noticed a glut of blackberries on local bushes. These were early to ripen and often the berries were large but somewhat tasteless. Albeit other bushes were fine.
2. I was collecting Beech Mast nuts to feed the local Jays but thousands of nuts had empty, skinny kernels. Several other trees also had the same situation.
3. I found a beautiful Sweet chesnut tree, heavy with spiny shell housings that had burst open but each were full of tiny chesnuts barely the size of a grain of Sweetcorn. Some were the size of almonds but still had little or no flesh in them.

I understand that some bushes have what is called a 'Mast Year' and produce an enormous amount of fruit. Sometimes this is due to a drought throughout the year and the bush adopts a kind of survival mode dropping lots of seeds for the coming year. These fruits often have little flavour due to the lack of water early in the fruit's development. There are of course other reasons, like the lack of minerals /nutrients in the soil, the lack of pollinators can result in a poor fruit crop, high ambient temperatures, flood or the lack of water at the wrong stages of the plants development are to be considered.

With respect to the Beech Mast and Sweet Chesnuts that I found, it seems that early drought, lack of pollination or even disease can result in poor quality nuts. A knowledgeable friend told me that he was aware of a lot of trees that struggle in Essex soil and this can result in poor fruit and nut development.



Clearly there are many factors that can contribute to these situations and there have always been Mast years and poor crops for some trees whilst others thrive but I feel that the lack of rain in spring and early summer, rain during July and August, heat in late September has had a more noticeable influence on the health of some of our flora and fauna. Is it climate change? Is it more normal than I actually knew before? What other trees and bushes are suffering without it coming to our attention. I have seen many local trees losing leaves in August as if it was October.

Note - Birds and animals are my normal points of interest, but the health of our trees and bushes will be something that I am keen to monitor during the coming years, how about you? Either way, I hope that you enjoyed my article and thanks for reading it.

Reported by Graham Holloway - CANS Wildlife Rep.