



What would our Christmas look like without nature?



It seems to be a given that so much of our folklore and fable is inspired by the natural world but what about Christmas traditions? Santa's messenger, the beloved plump little Robin was first associated with the festive season in the 1800s when Victorian postmen started donning their iconic red colour. But this is not the Robins' only link with the holiday. Lesser known tales, tell of a brown Robin earning his red breast by nobly placing himself in front of a fire to save baby Jesus's face. Another Christian fable suggests the kind Robin gained its red as it was stained by Jesus's blood as it tried to lessen his load, removing a thorn from his crown on calvary. Holly is a plant that links to similar Christian images of Christ's blood and crown of thorns while also symbolising the heartwarming message of Eternal life and Rebirth in the coming spring as it remains evergreen. Nevertheless, **Reindeer** are perhaps the most recently adored Christmas helper.



For although the legend of Santa Claus can be traced as far back as 280AD upon the birth of the monk St.Nicolas. The first written account of Reindeer in association with the modern Santa legend was in Clement Clarke Moore's poem "Twas the night before Christmas" in 1822. The UK isn't the only country to incorporate animals into the festive season though. Across Sweden and other Scandinavian countries, **yule goats** are made from straw to represent Santa's or in Sweden- Jultomten's gift-giving helper. Aside from Christmas day itself; in Ireland where boxing day is more commonly known as St. Stephens day. A **Wren** would be hunted (today an artificial bird is thankfully used) and paraded on a decorated pole by young men dressed in straw costumes who would sing traditional tunes and rhymes. Money raised would often then be donated to a local school or charity. To conclude I hope it's clear to see just how important wildlife's role has been in influencing our customs. Which will hopefully reinforce the urgency of protecting our native flora and fauna before they too fade into myth.



Nature News

Keep up to date

"Coking coal" first of all what is it? Well unlike the coal used for energy production as a "fossil fuel" coking coal is used exclusively for steel production- a distinction the conservative government is trying to fall back on as they face criticism for "taking a step backwards" toward the pasts unsustainable industry. It is important to remember that the UK has made significant progress in removing fossil fuels from our nation's power sector with power provided by fossil fuels falling by ~40% since 2010 and aims to halt the use of coal for energy generation completely by 2024. However, for a project that's main saving grace is the 500 jobs it promises to create in a bid to "level up" the long-neglected North of England. The benefit to the local industry remains unclear. With the Climate change committee highlighting 85% of the coal as marked for export to Europe and with neither of the UK's major steelmakers (British Steel nor Tata) committed to the project as buyers it is hard to see how the estimated 400,000 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions (each year) can be justified.





Looking for some festive crafts or garden projects well the Wildlife trusts "Wildlife watch" webpage and Youtube video collection is the place to be. There's something for everyone with projects particularly geared towards you junior school students- so take a look through their lockdown library, whether you think you'd like to learn to identify birds by ear or practice some Woodland maths! Also, for anyone whom nature documentaries remind them of boring afternoons at home- maybe checking out their pages on Weird beetles, Wacky mammals and Strange looking species can offer a new perspective:)



Whats on in the Locality?

Marble Arch caves visitor centre- Rain, Rivers, Resurgence.
 Until the 21st of December
 It's been running since the 12th of September this year but don't miss out on the captivating Indoor guided walk & Cave Explorer Virtual Reality Experience. That explores the inaccessible regions of the cave system.

Star Observing at Delamont Country Park- Downpatrick
 20/21st January 2023 7:00 pm start
 Everyone is welcome to join the friendly astronomers of the IAA for this night of Stargazing with sessions catering for all levels of capability.

Bundoran- Atlantic Irish fest
 21st-25th of January 2023
 With over five days of cultural talks and tours, outdoor activities and a full program of live music what's not to enjoy? All are situated along the spectacular Wild Atlantic coastline.



Nature Positive NI

To mark the beginning of the UN's biodiversity conference which started this month the RSPB released the below poll results, showcasing the Northern Irish publics' frustration at the lack of an executive to meet growing demands for biodiversity protection/legislation. If you're interested in finding out more head to the RSPBs youth campaigners page and if you get the chance the RSPBs 2022 manifesto for suggested change is a worthwhile read.

