



# What to look for in December

In **December** winter truly starts to set in. For many species, the winter is a time of dormancy, with little food, less daylight and freezing conditions. Animals and plants are trying to save energy, only some species that are adapted to harsher conditions are able to continue as normal. Conifers are standing out proudly in the landscape in December.



Yew Cones

There are only three native conifers, **Scots Pine**, **Juniper** and **Yew**. Yew trees are one of the oldest trees in Britain and can live for hundreds, possibly thousands of years. Yews played a big part in ancient pagan rituals,

both as a place of worship and a symbol of everlasting life. The elasticity and strength of its timber meant that Yew was used hundreds of years ago to build English Longbows. Yew trees produce round pink fruits, known as cones. Their seeds are poisonous and bitter tasting but are still eaten by some bird species such as the **Great Tit**. Other evergreens



such as **Holly** and **Ivy** are abundant at this time of



Holly and Ivy berries



Teasel

year and are often used as seasonal decorations. Their year round foliage also provides shelter for nesting birds and bats. The red berries of the holly also provide an important food source for small birds in the harsh winter months. Ivy berries appear in December and will remain through the winter months. They are eaten by many birds, including Blackbirds and Thrushes. Another decorative plant that provides

winter food is the **Teasel**. Their spiny seed heads are a favourite food of small birds such as goldfinches, whose beaks are small enough to reach the seeds inside.