

# Tales From Hillside Farm

## & Bird of the Month



by Suzy Sharpe  
February 2021

# Dates & Events

The next full Moon can be seen on 28 January 2021.

Called the Wolf Moon, Quiet Moon, Storm Moon or occasionally the Ice Moon it will appear for around three nights. I have no Wolf Paintings so we will have to enjoy a Fox looking at the moon instead.

I was woke by the sound of Foxes a couple of nights ago, piercing through the cold air which is so much quieter during this time of lockdown. I also had the pleasure of watching one from behind my horses as it was completely unaware of me I was mesmerised by it, a large male I should think beautifully bright, searching for morsels to eat around the edges of the field.

For some of our wildlife the breeding season has now begun so it is vital that we tread carefully, trimming hedges should now stop as nests are being built and eggs will soon be laid.

I must not forget between the 29 - 31 January its the [RSPB Big Garden Bird Watch](#)



1st February is St Brides day also celebrated as Imbolc which is one of the four major “fire” festivals, lying half way between the Winter Solstice and the Spring Equinox.

It is also a traditionally a festival honouring Brigid, she became woven into the Christian church as St Bridget. She is a Goddess of healing, poetry and smithcraft, Goddess of Fire, of the Sun and of the Hearth, she brings fertility to the land and its people and is closely connected to midwives and new-born babies.... To the Gaels the Oystercatcher is an emblem of St. Bride, who carried one in each hand. Legend has her arriving on the shores of South Uist with an oystercatcher on each wrist. When she was becalmed at sea, oystercatchers flew to her boat and by the beating of their wings, filled the sails of the boat so that she could sail safely to land.

In Gaelic, the Oystercatcher is called the Guide of St Bride, as she was supposed to send the birds to guide sailors to safety. It bears the form of a cross on its plumage as it once covered Christ with sea-weed when his enemies pursued him

2nd February is Candlemas day there is a saying  
“If Candlemas day be fair and bright, Winter will have another Flight,  
but if Candlemas day be clouds and rain, Winter is gone and will not come again.”

14th February Traditionally, spring begins on St Valentine’s Day the day on which birds chose their mates. In parts of Sussex Valentines Day was called ‘the Birds’ Wedding Day’.



Bird of the Month  
February

# The Dark Goose

Branta



# About The Goose

For me led by my very favorite poem by Mary Oliver (which you can hear read by her [HERE](#)) the sound of geese calling whilst flying overhead is the sound of the wild...

Many navigate over incredible distances ( 2,500 miles or more) to visit our shores for winter and I always feel very blessed to hear them.

However not all the local geese are migratory and as is often the case some are not entirely welcome by everyone... the most common goose in Cornwall is now the Canada Goose. As is often the case we are faced with a dicotomy too complicated to fully discuss here, I had the pleasure of looking after a Canada Goose for a very short time and have kept domestic Geese for their wonderful eggs in the past. I have always found them to be great characters. I had one gander who would attack everything, me most often, usually when I leasted expected it, whilst I was quietly gardening with my back to him or when I had my hands full of shopping bags and he would be tugging at them as I tried desperately to get them to the house before their contents were liberated!

Geese belong to the family Anatidae which comprises the genera Anser (the grey geese and white geese) and Branta (the black geese).

The collective noun for a group of geese on the ground is a gaggle; when in flight, they are called a skein, a team, or a wedge; when flying close together, they are called a plump!

Canada Geese have a wingspan of 168 cm and weigh around 4.6kg they were first recorded in 1676 and first introduced to Hampshire 1890 They typically lay 5 - 7 eggs which are incubated for 28 - 30 days by

the Female. The oldest bird recorded is 31 years 10 months 29 days (set in 2007) BTO Ringing Data with a typical expectancy of 6 years with breeding at 3 years.

Baracle Geese are smaller and in the conservation AMBER classification due to a decline in the breeding population with a wingspan: of 138 cm and Weight at 1.7 kg they arrive with us in August and leave again around mid March to June. ALthough there are now a number of resident birds staying in the UK all year round. The oldest recorded bird is 26 years 11 months 11 days (set in 2004) BTO Ringing Data with a typical life expectancy of 14 years breeding at 3 years.

Brent Geese are smaller still with a wingspan of 115 cm and Weight of 1.4 kg again they are in the AMBER conservation category and arrive from the end of August leaving from February to June. The oldest bird from ringing is 28 years 2 months 12 days (set in 2001) BTO Ringing Data but a Typical Lifespan would be 11 years with breeding at 2 years.

I was told that the highest recorded bird flight is undertaken by the Bar headed goose, having been heard flying across Mount Makalu at 8,481 m (27,825 ft) and apparently seen over Mount Everest 8,848 m (29,029 ft). Folklore tells that this is because the Geese pre-date the Himalayers and that they would not change their migratory route just because a mountain range grew up in their path.



# Poetry

The Geese & The Cranes

By Walter Crane

The Geese joined the Cranes in some wheat;  
All was well, till, disturbed at their treat,  
Light-winged, the Cranes fled,  
But the slow Geese, well fed,  
Couldn't rise, and were caught in retreat.

Beware Of Enterprises Where The Risks Are Not Equal



## The Goose - By Alfred Lord Tennyson

I knew an old wife lean and poor,  
Her rags scarce held together;  
There strode a stranger to the door,  
And it was windy weather.

He held a goose upon his arm,  
He uttered rhyme and reason:  
Here, take the goose, and keep you warm  
It is a stormy season.

She caught the white goose by the leg,  
A goose twas no great matter.  
The goose let fall a golden egg  
With cackle and with clatter.

She dropt the goose, and caught the pelf,  
And ran to tell her neighbours,  
And blessed herself, and cursed herself,  
And rested from her labours;

And feeding high, and living soft,  
Grew plump and able-bodied,  
Until the grave churchwarden doffed,  
The parson smirked and nodded.

So sitting, served by man and maid,  
She felt her heart grow prouder;  
But ah! the more the white goose laid  
It clacked and cackled louder.

It cluttered here, it chuckled there,  
It stirred the old wifes mettle;  
She shifted in her elbow-chair,  
And hurled the pan and kettle.

A quinsy choke thy cursed note!  
Then waxed her anger stronger.  
Go, take the goose, and wring her throat,  
I will not hear it longer.

Then yelped the cur, and yawled the cat,  
Ran Gaffer, stumbled Gammer.  
The goose flew this way and flew that,  
And filled the house with clamor.

As head and heels upon the floor  
They floundered all together,  
There strode a stranger to the door,  
And it was windy weather.

He took the goose upon his arm,  
He uttered words of scorning:  
So keep you cold, or keep you warm,  
It is a stormy morning.

The wild wind rang from park and plain,  
And round the attics rumbled,  
Till all the tables danced again,  
And half the chimneys tumbled.

The glass blew in, the fire blew out,  
The blast was hard and harder.  
Her cap blew off, her gown blew up,  
And a whirlwind cleared the larder;

And while on all sides breaking loose  
Her household fled the danger,  
Quoth she, The devil take the goose,  
And God forget the stranger!

Goosey, Goosey Gander - By Leonard Leslie Brooke

Goosey, Goosey Gander.  
Where shall I wander?

Upstairs, downstairs,  
And in my lady's chamber.

There I met an old man  
That would not say his prayers:

I took him by the left leg,  
And threw him downstairs.



# Folklore & Myth

The Celts associated the goose with war, possibly because of its watchful nature and aggressive temperament. Warrior gods were sometimes depicted with geese as companions. Remains of geese have been found in warrior's graves

In Egyptian mythology, the earth-god Geb was sometimes depicted with a goose on his head.

In China geese are still a symbol of marriage, due to their lifelong pair bond.

In both ancient Egypt and China the goose was considered a messenger between Heaven and Earth.

The Ancient Romans held the goose as a sacred animal of Juno, a goddess of light, marriage and childbirth. A story tells of how the Gauls tried to sneak up in the night, but disturbed a sacred flock of geese that lived in the temple of Juno. Their alarm calls alerted the Roman guards.

The Britons kept geese, but did not eat them. They were, however, sometimes used as sacrificial offerings.

The goose can be associated with travel or a journey, shamans were said to be aided by spirit geese on their journeys to other worlds



# Saints

## St Werburgh and the Wild Geese

St Werburgh was born in Staffordshire early in the seventh century and died at Trentham in 3rd February in 699 or 700.

She was the daughter of a King but longed only to do good, to make other people happy, to grow good and wise herself. She studied, worked hard and became a holy woman and Abbess.

One day a large flock of wild geese were found destroying her growing corn by feeding on it. To stop them she had them confined in a house overnight, as if they were domestic geese to teach them a lesson. In the morning, when she called them, ready to send them out, she saw that one was missing. She discovered to her dismay that it had been eaten by the servants.

She calmly asked for all the feathers and bones to be brought to her. When they arrived she laid them out before her and spoke softly asking that it be made whole again and live, it was resurrected before the servants.

She then instructed the geese, which were cheering and shouting at the happy return of their lost companion, that they must never for all eternity return to that field. They all left safe and well and they have never returned to the present day.

This is a common miracle told of female Saints.



# Fable

There was once a Countryman who possessed the most wonderful Goose you can imagine, every day when he visited the nest, the Goose had laid a beautiful, glittering, golden egg.

He took the eggs to market and soon began to get rich. But before long he grew impatient with the Goose because she gave him only a single golden egg a day. He felt he was not getting rich fast enough.

One day, after he had finished counting his money, the idea came to him that he could get all the golden eggs at once by killing the Goose and cutting it open.

However when he Killed the goose and cut it open not a single golden egg was found and his precious Goose was dead.

The moral

Those who have plenty want more and so lose all they have.



# Story

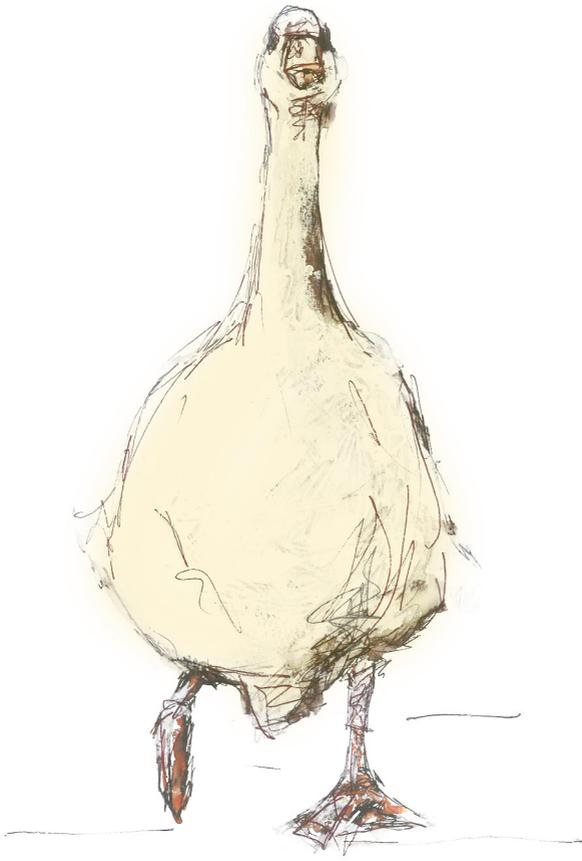
## The Golden Goose

There seem to be many golden goose stories but I have chosen this one for this edition.

There are 3 brothers, The eldest brother is sent into the forest to chop wood, fortified with a rich cake and a bottle of wine. He meets a little gray man who begs a morsel to eat and a swallow of wine but is rebuffed. The eldest brother injures his arm falling into a tree and is taken home. The second brother meets a similar fate. The youngest, given the nickname Simpleton is sent out with a burned biscuit cooked in the ashes of the hearth and soured beer, he is generous with the little old man and is rewarded with a golden goose. The goose has been discovered within the roots of the tree chosen by the little gray man and felled by Simpleton.

Simpleton takes The Golden Goose to the inn, under his arm, where as soon as his back is turned, the innkeeper's daughter attempts to pluck just one of the feathers of pure gold and is stuck fast. Her sister comes to help her and is stuck fast too. The youngest daughter is determined not to be left out of the riches, grabs the sisters aprons and she ends up stuck to the second. Simpleton makes his way to the castle and each person who attempts to interfere is joined to the unwilling parade ranging from the parson, his sexton, and two laborers.

In the castle lives the King with the Princess who has never smiled. The king offers the hand of the princess to anyone who succeeds in making her laugh. The despondent Princess, sitting by the window and glimpsing the parade staggering after Simpleton and his golden goose, laughs so hard she eventually cries. Simpleton is offered her hand in marriage.



# Bestiary

'The goose can signify men who are prudent and look out for their own safety.' There are two kinds of geese, domestic and wild. Wild geese fly high, in an orderly fashion, signifying those who, far away from earthly things, preserve a rule of virtuous conduct.



Domestic geese live together in villages, they cackle together all the time and rend each other with their beaks; they signify those who, although they like conventual life, nevertheless find time to gossip and slander. All wild geese are grey in colour; I have not seen any that were of mixed colour or white. But among domestic geese, there are not only grey but variegated and white ones. Wild geese are the colour of ashes, that is to say, those who keep apart from this world wear the modest garb of penitence. But those who live in towns or villages wear clothes that are more beautiful in colour.

The goose, more than any other animal, picks up the scent of a someone happening by, as the discerning man knows of other men by their good or bad reputation, even though they live far away. When, therefore, a goose picks up the scent of a man approaching, it cackles endlessly at night, as when a discerning brother sees in others the negligence that comes with ignorance, it is his duty to call attention to it. The cackling of geese on the Capitol once helped the Romans, and in our chapter-house daily, when the discerning brother sees evidence of negligence, his warning voice serves to repel the old enemy, the Devil. The cackling of the goose saved the city of Rome from enemy attack; the warning voice of the discerning brother guards the life of his community from disruption by the wicked. Divine providence would not, perhaps, have revealed to us the characteristics of birds, if it had not wanted the knowledge to be of some benefit to us. From the Aberdeen Besiary.

## Of Barnacle Geese

I told them of as great a marvel to them, that is amongst us, and that was of the Bernakes. For I told them that in our country were trees that bear a fruit that become birds flying, and those that fell in the water live, and they that fall on the earth die anon, and they be right good to man's meat. And hereof had they as great marvel, that some of them trowed it were an impossible thing to be.

Sir John Mandeville 14th century CE



The aim of this project was to research a different bird each month, gathering poetry, songs, facts, stories and historical information from rich sources such as medieval manuscripts, myth, fables and folktales to further understand, discover and share ways in which we can help wildlife in the wild.

I also use this sometimes to document the passing of time at Hillside Farm.

More of my work can be found on my [website](#) including past editions of the ebooks, greetings cards, prints, printmaking and original drawings and paintings.

## Other things to do

1. Join conservation groups
2. Support Charities who protect habitat and wildlife
3. Encourage good practice in farming and land management
5. Sign petitions to protect Birds
6. Share your love of wildlife with friends and family
7. Sign petitions to end persecution and improve understanding

Some links for further information:-

[British Trust for Ornithology](#)  
[RSPB](#)  
[Birdlife](#)  
[The Wildlife Trusts](#)  
[The Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust](#)  
[West Cornwall Wildlife Volunteers](#)

# See you in March



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