

Got to Pick a Currant or Two

Clusters of glistening spheres hiding in cool caves of leaves and branches, whispering: 'Come on, eat us' . . . Wham! . . . 'Oh, we forgot to mention that we're not very sweet'. It's the blackcurrants again, old bushes, witnesses to almost all our time here at Turvey. Moving to Turvey had given us more opportunity to try our hand at soft fruit and vegetable growing, an activity which is very much part of the Benedictine tradition. We did grow some fruit and vegetables at Cockfosters, but now we have more space.

The Turvey birds thought our soft fruit an excellent idea and prepared to eat it. A very grand walk-in fruit cage was erected using the old heating pipes from the Abbey, the net carefully tucked in to stop the birds getting caught in it. Well, that worked if the birds were on the outside, but sharp-eyed blackbirds swooped effortlessly through any tear in the net. The only time there were no blackbirds inside the fruit cage was when there was a brown bird inside, hanging upside down on the net like a parrot. The blackbirds were everywhere else, some looking straight at me as if to say: 'Do something!' We finally got the bird of prey out, and the blackbirds then chased it. The pigeons had a technique of their own, they were so fat that when they landed on the top of the net they pushed it down, and could then eat the fruit though the net.

Two years ago the crop of blackcurrants was simply enormous. My friend from Kempston was determined to pick as many as possible for her large family, I understand that she and they are still eating them—and enjoying them.

Perhaps I could end with a recipe for blackcurrant jam, or talk about the value to health of eating raw blackcurrants, but I think the last word has to go to the blackbirds. Perhaps blackbirds don't spring to mind as an obvious example of the Christian virtues, although Tertullian (circa 155 – 240 AD) wrote in his treatise on prayer: . . . *the birds taking flight lift themselves up to heaven and, instead of hands, spread out the cross of their wings, while saying something that may be supposed to be a prayer . . .* One could say that the blackbirds' example of perseverance and determination when it comes to getting those blackcurrants is something we could take note of for our own personal goals.

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