



Berry Interesting

by John Bland

As I munched my seasonal portion of *Meleagris gallopavo*, I pondered why cranberries are called cranberries. (Yes, I know that's sad, isn't it). I knew that berry comes from the Old German beri, but that doesn't help much. Botanically, any berry is a fruit with its seeds enclosed in a pulp, so a tomato is a berry and so is a banana, but strangely a strawberry isn't. However, in general parlance a berry is any small roundish juicy fruit without a stone so strawberry creeps in. That name is easy to explain as straw is used to keep strawberries off the soil but what about cran. I found out along the way that a cran is a measure for fresh herrings of about 37.5 gallons but the plant was named by American colonists in the 17th century as the craneberry, presumably because the birds were seen where the plant grew.

The terms mountain cranberry, European cranberry and wild cranberry are all applied to the cowberry, *Vaccinium vitis-idaea*, perhaps to make the fruit more acceptable. Vitis-idaea means the vine of Mount Idaea, which is in Crete, but the plant grows best much further north and on both sides of the Atlantic. In Newfoundland and Labrador they are picked in the wild to use in jams and baked goods and are known as partridgeberries. In Sweden they are called lingonberries and are a staple item. IKEA sell lingonberry jam and juice and serve lingonberry sauce with meatballs in the café.

annual berry where you can sow seeds in spring and harvest fruits in autumn, but there is a problem. The berries are only ripe when they turn from purple to black but when they do, the shiny black reflects the green of the leaves and they look green again.

The bilberry, whose bil name stems from the old Norse bolle, is also called the blaeberry, where blae is an old corruption of blue. The blueberry, of course, is a related *Vaccinium* species, which appears in the transatlantic confection, the blueberry muffin. Also in the heath family is the strawberry tree, *Arbutus unedo*. The species name means "I eat only one", apparently because the fruits are insipid rather than poisonous. My dictionary defines crowberry as the flavourless fruit of *Empetrum nigrum*, so much the same there. Nigrum means black but the berries change from green to pink then purple then black.

The gooseberry has the scientific names *Ribes uva-crispa* or *Ribes grossularia*. Uva means bunch of grapes and crispa can be curly or trembling. Grossularia means rough, from the hairiness of the berries. There doesn't appear to be any clear link between the bird and the berry. Wild gooseberries grow in alpine thickets and rocky woods, which are hardly the habitat of geese. The link may be the same one that gives us gooseflesh, that bristling state of the skin produced by cold or fright. Your hairs stand on end like the hairs on a plucked goose and the berries are covered in hairs. To play gooseberry is to be an unwanted third person with a romantically involved couple. It is suggested that a chaperone might tell a couple that they were "just going to pick gooseberries" as a way of giving the couple time on their own. However, the term normally means an unwanted hanger-on, not a chaper-



In certain circumstances (ask David Gibbons) cowberry can hybridise with bilberry, *Vaccinium myrtillus*. Myrtillus relates to myrtle, which stems from the Greek and Latin names for the bush. It is corrupted to give whortleberry and hurtleberry, which is corrupted to give huckleberry, which is a real plant and not just the name of some lad called Finn. It is *Gaylussacia baccata*: the baccata, which also appears in *Taxus baccata* the yew, just means berried. It is the only

one, so it could be that they were as unwanted as small, hairy, acid gooseberries. One further possibility is that Old Gooseberry was an old nickname for the Devil, who would be unwanted in any company. As for babies being found under gooseberry bushes, I have seen explanations but none that can be printed here!



Blackberries are of course black, but they are also known as brambles and there are over 2,000 microspecies of *Rubus fruticosus*. The bram comes from the same word as the plant broom. I had always thought the bird name brambling must have something to do with brambles but apparently not. It should really be brandling, meaning something small and brindled. Brindled, of course, means brown or tawny with streaks of other colour, which the bird's plumage is. Just to confuse things a brandling is a red earthworm with yellow stripes. There are several berries related to the brambles. Dewberry, *R. caesius*, has fruits which are bluish with a waxy bloom, fleshier, with fewer larger segments. The berries of stone bramble, *R. saxatilis*, are red when ripe with fewer much larger segments. Cloudberry, *R. chamaemorus*, has orange fruits and it is interesting to note that chamae means dwarf and morus means mulberry.

In the 17th century James I encouraged the planting of black mulberry trees in an attempt to rear silk-worms for the home production of silk. It was thought that prisoners might work in silk production and trees were planted in prison exercise yards. The rhyme "Here we go round the mulberry bush" is said to have originated from daily exercise around the tree. Sadly, silk worms prefer the white mulberry which does not grow well in Britain.

I have nothing on file to explain the rasp of raspberry other than it is related to raspis, which was the name of a type of wine. The scientific name is *Rubus idaeus*. Rubus comes from the latin ruber for red and idaeus indicates it came from Mount Ida.

The loganberry is generally thought to be derived from a cross between raspberry and blackberry, accidentally created in 1880 or 1881 in Santa Cruz, California by the American lawyer and horticulturist James Harvey Logan. In his yard he had several varieties of *Rubus* from which he gathered seed for planting. The 50 seedlings produced resembled the blackberry parent but one of them was loganberry. Since then, deliberate crosses between *Rubus* cultivars have confirmed the parentage. A similar hybrid is Nessberry which is a cross between dewberry and raspberry. The phenomenal berry is a 2nd generation cross, i.e. two first generation crosses of blackberry and raspberry crossed to each other. Whilst loganberry proved productive and well suited to local conditions, its flavour was not popular with customers but it has been the parent for further hybrids. Tayberry is loganberry x raspberry, Boysenberry is loganberry x dewberry, Youngberry is phenomenal berry x dewberry and olallieberry is a black loganberry x youngberry. All of these have a finer flavour than the loganberry but I still think the tastiest is the Halle Berry.

Ladybird, Ladybird by Sue Jones

John found an unusual ladybird on the rear windscreen of his car when it was parked on my drive in Mickleover. It was all yellow apart from some white dots on its head. Its wings were extended and again were plain yellow. Intrigued as we had not seen one like this before, I kept it overnight. By morning it had completely changed. It had become orange, developed black spots on its body and its head pattern had also changed. It turned out to be a harlequin. This was confirmed and photographed by Bill Grange:



**Harlequin Ladybird (*succinea* form),
found at Mickleover, August 2007**
Photographed by Bill Grange

Footnote by Bill Grange

In 2005, there seemed to be an isolated invasion of Derby City far away from the original main colonisation in the South-east. Since then, the harlequin ladybird, *Harmonia axyridis*, a native of eastern Asia (introduced to mainland Europe and subsequently flown the English Channel), has spread right up the country. It's now reached most parts of England and is now into Wales and Scotland. Because this voracious beetle eats a wide range of insects, it poses a serious threat to biodiversity and ecology.

On one day in September 2007, harlequins were swarming in great numbers in my local park at Allestree, landing on peoples' clothing...a portent of things to come?

For the latest information on the spread of this menace, go to the website of the National Harlequin Survey at <http://www.harlequin-survey.org>