

A newsletter to mark the start of British Summer Time and hopefully lift the spirits. As we are all rather confined to barracks at the moment, now is a great time to look at nature close to hand, in our gardens and in our local lanes. A month ago you may have noticed that the top of the churchyard was covered in snowdrops. Now the lane banks are littered with primroses and celandine, the occasional early red campion, violets and wild garlic. It's a great time to be outdoors, social distancing of course.

Bats, birds and butterflies.

For the past week I have seen two pipistrelles flying our garden at dusk, hopefully a pair! One appeared briefly in January for a couple of nights during a warm spell, which does happen occasionally, even though they hibernate for the winter.

There are a lot of chiffchaffs around now. These warblers are amongst our earliest summer visitors and some now overwinter in UK. Look out for a busy, small, slim greenish brown bird with a distinctive dark eye-stripe and of course the real give-away, the repetitive 'chiff-chaff, chiff-chaff' call. Watch out also for the arrival of wheatears and whitethroats.

Our garden is recently full of peacock butterflies. Members of the so called 'aristocrat' group (which includes red admirals, painted ladies and tortoiseshells), these beautiful, large butterflies with their distinctive false 'eyes' on the fore and hind wings, are another early garden visitor.

Watch out soon for yellow brimstones, another early flyer.

And how about this? With all the spare time you now have on your hands, get up very early one morning, take a cup of coffee into your garden and be enchanted by the dawn chorus. You can always go back to bed again afterwards!

Something you might like to try at home.

I read about this trick a couple of years back and thought I would try it. Rub some fat-ball into the rough bark of a nearby tree (you can make homemade fat-ball very successfully with a little lard, some breadcrumbs and if available, birdseed. But, keep it in the freezer). You then sit back and see what comes. You might get magpies, woodpeckers, tits, but if you are really lucky.....



a tree creeper!

These woodland birds are rare garden visitors and I was delighted.

(This was shot through the back-garden window using a 250mm lens).

Planting on Meadowside – update.

We now have permission from DCC Highways for a wildlife planting at the eastern end of Meadowside, where there is currently just grass. As there are drains running under this ground, we must avoid potential root damage from trees, but a planting of suitable shrubs and an area of long grass would be acceptable. I would like this to be a community scheme so will eventually be seeking help from volunteers, but obviously for the time being everything must be held in abeyance.

Mini-meadows in your garden.

If you are thinking of allowing a small area of grass to grow long this year to create a ‘mini-meadow’, you might need to decide on your cutting regime for this spring. Keep cutting until the end of May to create a late flowering meadow, stop cutting between April and June for an early flowering meadow. Or you can just leave it for the whole year. Whichever option you choose, cut and clear at the end of August to avoid choking next year’s growth.

You can find more information at www.moormeadows.org.uk

Non-paying guests – update (see newsletter #3)

I left the nesting box undisturbed. The mice seem to have moved out and as far as I can see, nothing with wings has moved in. We do however have very busy blue tits in our other nesting box, so all is well!

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