

Country Notes for May 2020

I have just returned from a walk over the fields with Bracken. It is Easter Eve or Holy Saturday, and the temperature is forecast to reach the mid 20s! This follows several days of almost summer-like weather. I wonder what it will be like by the time you read this at the beginning of May!

The air was full of the sound of birdsong. In the trees and bushes there were chiffchaffs and blackcaps calling, fresh from Africa. Above there was the sound of a skylark and in the distance the plaintive meowing of a buzzard. Even this early, the trees and hedgerows were sporting their first tinge of fresh green shoots. At this rate everything should be in full leaf by the start of May, much as it was last year. Yesterday I saw my first sand martin of the year flying over my cottage and there has already been a profusion of butterflies. May and June are probably my favourite times of the year. Everything seems so green and fresh! By the time we reach mid summer the green on the trees and bushes will be turning darker and the freshness will have gone.

At the start of May all our summer migrant birds should have returned, with the exception of swifts. These are always one of the last summer migrating birds to arrive and the first to go, usually after the third week of August. However last year the house martins, so much a part of the summer skyline in Hollingbourne, were very late to arrive too, most failing to appear until the start of May. Even then the numbers were well down on what we have seen in the past.

House martins build their nests out of mud and clay just under the roofs of our houses – and what welcome visitors they are. I always look with envy at those who have them as guests for the summer! Should you be fortunate enough to have them, cherish them, as they are a declining species – and spring and summer would just not be the same without them.

At the moment a walk in the countryside is something we can all still enjoy. What wonders are there for us to see when we do so, at this glorious time of the year!

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