

## Country Notes for April 2023

One of the great delights of life is a walk in the countryside, and for me, as for many of us, there are two walks a day. Bracken and Tilly wouldn't let it be otherwise! One of the really exciting things is seeing something you have not noticed before or seeing something this year that is different from last year.

On my walks recently two things have stood out for me in particular. Firstly, I am sure that there are more catkins than I have ever seen before. Is this just because I have been really looking out for them, or is it actually the case? Secondly, I have noticed how early weeping willows burst into leaf – and at the time of this particular observation it was still not spring! How lovely to see these early signs of life after what seems to have been a winter that has dragged on for far too long!

The most exciting of my observations however, was when I was walking through some of our village fields and on top of the hedge that ran beside the footpath were two small chestnut, black and white birds which kept flying on ahead of me as I approached. Their flight was very fluttery, almost looking as if their wings were too short and they were having to make a real effort. They looked almost bumble bee like. The birds in question were male stonechats and this was the first time that I had seen them in our villages. They are often found on bushy growth such as gorse and, although I was not on the downs when I saw them, it may be that they are there and I've never seen them before!

I went home with a real spring in my step having enjoyed, albeit briefly, the company of these two beautiful birds!

Andrew G Snowdon