

Country Notes for May 2026

As I write this in the second week of April the weather has been very much as usual for this time of year. Some periods have been warm with temperatures in the low 20s and other days have looked back towards winter with cold winds and chilly temperatures. However, nature expects this and is very much on form. Chiffchaffs, as ever, arrived very early from Africa and the first swallows are flying around. Nightingales are back in our villages and are singing their hearts out night and day and the bluebells are clothing our woodlands with their usual glorious blue and intoxicating scent. On warm, sunny days there are plenty of butterflies to see including peacocks, small tortoiseshells, commas, brimstones and orange tips. I have even seen some early speckled wood butterflies.

All is as it should be and there is so much more to look forward to in May. Swifts should be back in Hollingbourne church tower and with luck there will be some house martins starting to build their mud nests under the eaves of our houses. The dawn chorus will be stupendous for the early risers amongst us and our fields, woodlands and gardens will be in full leaf and full colour.

However all is not well for many of our birds. In addition to avian flu, which has caused the death of so many over the last few years, there is also the warning that trichomonosis has had a devastating effect on some of our song birds and especially greenfinches and chaffinches. This disease is spread wherever birds gather communally to feed and once birds contract it they are unable to swallow food and die of starvation. This is particularly so at bird feeders in our gardens and, in addition to regular cleaning, the RSPB is asking us not to feed birds at bird feeders between May and October.

Let's hope that these restrictions are carried out by everyone who feeds the birds in their gardens, as it would be terrible to lose these birds for ever.

Andrew G Snowdon