

## Country Notes for April 2015

For a countryman, April is a month to look forward to; a month when we really seem to have said goodbye to winter, when there are days when we can truly feel the strength of the sun and when the winds seem to have lost their icy chill.

This is the month when the majority of our winter migrants return from their winter sojourn in Africa and southern Europe. Within a few days there will be the welcome sight of swallows in the skies above us, joined in the middle of the month by the house martins. In our wayside trees and bushes and there will be chiffchaffs and blackcaps adding to the spring chorus. It is the month when, towards the end, our woods come alive with the vibrant blue of bluebells. In sunny spots the first flush of butterflies will appear – small tortoiseshells, peacocks and red admirals from hibernation, and orange tips and holly blues newly emerged from their pupae.

As a countryman and a gardener it is at this point in the year that preparations begin in the garden in earnest. Last autumn's dead stems are, hopefully, all gone and seeds and young plants can be started off. Those that are not hardy will need to be started away from the last frosts in the greenhouse, although most of the hardy ones may be started straight outside. Carrots, peas and broad beans may all be started outside and towards the end of the month runner beans and courgettes can all be started off away from any chance of frost. An old country saying says that potatoes should be planted on Good Friday. This year that is 3rd April – although of course this date can be very varied.

In April so much is happening. Who can fail to be excited about all that is in store for us this month and in the light, and hopefully, sun filled days to follow.

Andrew Snowdon