

Country Notes for March 2016

There cannot be many people who do not heave a sigh of relief as we move into March, for although this winter has been one of the mildest on record, it is good to leave it behind and slip into Spring, which this year begins on 20th March.

This year there have been signs of spring from the turn of the year, with so many plants flowering and growing out of season, owing to the very mild weather. However it is still a fairly safe bet that March will see a real change in the countryside as it always does. One signal of spring that is always worth looking out for is the appearance of catkins. These always appeal to everyone, young and old, with their soft, downy texture.

Catkins are in fact clusters of very small flowers and can be found on a number of trees and shrubs, but most noticeably on hazels and willows. The flowers on a catkin are all male. The female flowers are single and fairly inconspicuous. Most have no scent, although there are a few that do. The reason for this is that the majority are wind pollinated rather than insect pollinated, although willows may also be pollinated by early bees on the move on warmer March days. Some catkins such as those on the common hazel have a purplish tinge at first which soon fades to yellow as the catkin matures.

They are certainly a heart-warming and encouraging sight in in our March hedgerows and gardens.

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