

Country Notes for April 2017

I have just come in from my garden on a day when there were distinct signs of spring in the air. There were four buzzards wheeling overhead and a peacock butterfly (the first butterfly of the year) was checking the early flowers for some nectar to build it up for the weeks to come. The temperature was in the high teens and the sun felt really warm. In the borders and tubs of my garden there were primroses and polyanthus in full flower. Some of the primroses are the true wild variety and others sport the various garish colours of cultivated ones.

However there were some primulas keeping their heads down and waiting for their moment a little later on. Smaller than their braver relatives, they are waiting a little before showing themselves in their true glory. These are the cowslips, which happily have established a good colony in my garden. This, of course, is not their native habitat, which is the fields and downs of our village. At one time they could be seen everywhere but they are another casualty of intensive use of the land and now the very best places to see them are on the downs in those little pockets of land unsuitable for the plough.

Cowslips are at their very best at the end of the month and into May, when their tall stems display their small yellow flowers. They almost seem to be celebrating the arrival of true spring weather. In the past their flowers were used for garlands on May Day, and church paths were decorated with them for weddings. They were also used to make a heady and wonderful country wine. However this is discouraged these days as they need to be left where they are to flower, seed and increase.

If you go for a walk on the downs over the next few weeks have a look for them and you will see a sight to put a spring in your step - whatever the weather holds for us!

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