

Country Notes for June 2018

As June arrives, drifting gently from spring into summer, it seems a good moment to reflect on the unusual spring we have just experienced and the effect it has had on the natural world around us.

The last few weeks of winter saw heavy snowfall which lasted for days, followed by cold, wet and often windy weather, with occasional snow showers, as we moved into spring. Then, beginning on 18th April, we enjoyed five days of summer like weather with temperatures in the high twenties, followed by a return to cold, wet weather. In early May the hot weather returned with temperatures again in the high twenties for several days. The countryside can fail to be affected by such variation in our weather.

Certainly the trees came into leaf very early, as did much of the blossom. Butterflies were out in good numbers in April when the weather was so good, but must have wondered what had hit them when the cold weather returned. There were small tortoiseshells, peacocks, red admirals, whites, orange tips and an unusually high number of the wonderful yellow brimstones.

Birds were definitely affected by the erratic weather. Swallows, which often appear in the last few days of March, didn't appear until mid April, and then only in small numbers. House martins which normally appear in mid April, left it until early May to appear - the sole exception being one I saw in the northern Cairngorms on 11th April! On the plus side there have been several nightingales calling in Hollingbourne and Hucking, whitethroats have returned in good numbers to the Meadows Trust and Willow Warblers, which in recent years have become quite a rarity in Kent, have been singing in both Hollingbourne Meadows Trust and the Hucking Woodland Trust.

And finally - just days after the last edition went to print I saw two red kites in our villages!

I wonder if June will be able to beat the excitement of April and May as we wander the paths, fields and woodland of our parishes!

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